DROWNING DEATHS ON QUEENSLAND BEACHES

50% MALE / 50% FEMALE

37.7 AVG AGE

25% INTERNATIONAL NATIONALITY

ZERO BETWEEN SLSQ’S FLAGS

25% OCCURRED <50M FROM FLAGS

50% FEBRUARY

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INTRODUCTION

OUR VISION

ZERO PREVENTABLE DEATHS IN QUEENSLAND PUBLIC WATERS.
ABOUT SLSQ

INTRODUCTION

WHO WE ARE

Surf Life Saving Queensland (SLSQ) is the state’s leading authority on aquatic safety and surf rescue, and one of the largest volunteer-based community service organisations in Australia.

From humble beginnings, when the first official rescue was recorded on a Queensland beach in 1909, SLSQ has developed into a ground-breaking and highly innovative organisation encompassing 58 clubs and more than 31,000 members across the state.

SLSQ’s volunteer surf lifesavers and lifeguards have directly saved the lives of more than 135,000 people through in-water rescues, and educated in excess of 10 million people about surf and aquatic safety through targeted and grassroots community awareness programs.

As a not-for-profit organisation, SLSQ relies heavily on community support and donations to continue our vital work both on and off Queensland’s beaches. It is the generous support of Queenslanders that enables us to help keep beachgoers safe.

SLSQ is directly affiliated with, and is part of, Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) and the International Life Saving Federation (ILS).

OUR VISION

Zero preventable deaths in Queensland public waters.

Note: Public waters is defined by SLSQ as any freely-accessible waterway including, but not limited to, beaches, rivers, creeks, dams, lakes, lagoons, and streams; this excludes commercial and private swimming pools, as well as household waters such as bath tubs, sinks and backyard containers.

OUR MISSION

SLSQ will operate as a proactive and effective peak body, leading the way in lifesaving service provision, education, sport, beach safety advocacy, and community leadership.

OUR STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

Committed To Our Community
To advocate water safety management and continue to enhance the reputation of SLSQ as the peak body.

Connected To Our People
To recruit and retain the best people through support and development of their skills and knowledge.

Effective In Our Business
To plan and execute our day-to-day operations to an outstanding level of efficiency, with continuous improvement always in mind.

Sustainable For Our Future
To ensure SLSQ is equipped for the future through continuous growth, strong financial management and sound governance.

OUR FUNDING

SLSQ is a not-for-profit community service organisation that relies heavily on public and corporate support to fund our operations along Queensland’s coastline. In addition to public donations and sponsorship, SLSQ also receives financial support from the Queensland Government via grants, subsidies and service agreements.

OUR PRIMARY TARGET

International and domestic visitors to Queensland’s beaches and waterways.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Every year millions of people flock to one of Queensland’s beaches and entrust the ‘red and yellow army’ of surf lifesavers and lifeguards to keep them safe in the water. On top of this, there are countless others who enter the surf at remote and unpatrolled locations, or who opt to swim instead at lakes, rivers, dams, or creeks with no lifesaving service present.

The challenge for Surf Life Saving Queensland (SLSQ) is to develop and implement proactive strategies to educate, protect, and keep all of these swimmers safe in the water.

As the state’s peak authority on coastal and aquatic safety, SLSQ remains more committed than ever to increasing and enhancing protection for all swimmers, both on and off the beach, as part of our overarching vision of “Zero preventable deaths in Queensland public waters.”

This sees us work closely with key stakeholders at all levels to analyse and assess aquatic risks, deliver educational programs, and implement proactive services to extend our reach across all beaches and waterways.

Tragically, despite these efforts, we are continuing to see people lose their lives along our state’s coastline and in public and inland waters.

In 2016/17 there were four drowning deaths recorded on Queensland beaches. Importantly, this represents a substantial decrease when compared with 11 the year before. It is also the equal-lowest number of annual drownings recorded on Queensland beaches since SLSQ began tracking coastal data. While these are significant achievements, the fact remains there were four drowning deaths on Queensland beaches last season and, as far as SLSQ is concerned, that is four too many.

In addition, a further 22 people drowned at inland aquatic locations in 2016/17, reinforcing the need for a sustained and continued focus on safety across all public waterways in Queensland.

The 2017 Coast Safe Report provides a snapshot of coastal and aquatic incidents, drowning deaths, and other fatalities across Queensland in the past 12 months and 10 years. Additionally, it also outlines some of the key programs and initiatives being rolled out by SLSQ in a bid to increase protection on the beach and within inland waterways.

Importantly, the data presented within this report will help SLSQ identify and analyse long-term drowning trends, highlight particularly high-risk blackspot locations, and lay the foundations for the introduction of proactive water safety strategies moving forward.

Now, more than ever, SLSQ is committed to building upon our services and strategies in a bid to boost protection for all communities and, ultimately, eliminate drowning deaths in the state of Queensland.

John Brennan OAM
Chief Executive Officer
Surf Life Saving Queensland

George Hill ESM
Chief Operating Officer
Surf Life Saving Queensland
STRATEGIC DIRECTION TO MINIMISE DROWNING DEATHS

The International Life Saving Federation (ILS) has identified four key factors that may lead to drowning. These are:

1. Lack of knowledge, disregard or misjudgement of the hazard
2. Uninformed, unprotected or unrestricted access to the hazard
3. Lack of supervision or surveillance
4. An inability to cope once in difficulty

Any of these factors, or a combination, could lead to death by drowning. An understanding of these factors, and how they contribute to drowning or coastal fatalities, helps in the design of drowning prevention strategies.

Having a strong understanding and appreciation about which factors are the greatest contributors will play a key role in eliminating drowning deaths within a particular region. Some regions may require a wider approach to coastal safety, encompassing multiple elements while, in other regions, a strategic focus on one core element could be the most effective use of resources.

Importantly, SLSQ continues to address and focus on programs, education, information, skills, supervision and recommendations to land managers and key stakeholders to minimise risk within coastal and aquatic environments.
SLSQ continues to embrace, and have direct input into, the Australian Water Safety Strategy for 2016-2020, in relation to reducing drowning deaths. As part of this, a number of key objectives have been identified to reduce drowning deaths across the country. These have been outlined below, alongside pertinent strategies and initiatives implemented by SLSQ across the past 12 months.

### Objective: Reduce Drowning Deaths in Children Aged 0-14
- **Key SLSQ Strategies**
  - Build on Surf Life Saving’s iconic Nippers program across Queensland.
  - Continue to roll out SLSQ’s award-winning Little Lifesavers program, and build on the Little Lifesavers Legends initiative.
  - Increase surf safety talks, targeting children.
  - Roll out pop-up clinics at high-risk locations, designed to engage with young beachgoers.
  - Continue to build on the success of the Breaka Beach to Bush school program.
  - Continue development of the Learn to Swim program targeting young children.
  - Build upon SLSQ’s school program including helicopter landings and lifesaver visits at primary and secondary schools.
  - Build upon SLSQ’s airport welcoming service to engage with international and domestic travellers.
  - Increase surf safety talks and presentations to key demographics.

### Objective: Reduce Drowning Deaths in Young People Aged 15-24
- **Key SLSQ Strategies**
  - Engage with, and educate, Schools through presentations and targeted initiatives.
  - Increase dusk patrols at Surfers Paradise on the Gold Coast.
  - Roll out national surf safety campaigns and community service announcements.
  - Engage with multicultural beachgoers via SLSQ’s On The Same Wave program.
  - Continue to build upon SLSQ’s Don’t Drink and Swim campaigns.

### Objective: Reduce Drowning Deaths in Males Aged 25-64
- **Key SLSQ Strategies**
  - Continue to build on SLSQ’s presence at Seqwater’s Play It Safe initiative.
  - Promote safe swimming and water practices through SLSQ’s annual Breaka Beach to Bush program.
  - Build upon SLSQ’s presence at Surfer’s Paradise on the Gold Coast.
  - Increase dusk patrols at Surfers Paradise on the Gold Coast.
  - Engage with potential beachgoers through university initiatives, presentations, and open days.
  - Continue to engage with multicultural beachgoers via SLSQ’s On The Same Wave program.

### Objective: Reduce Drowning Deaths in People Aged 65+
- **Key SLSQ Strategies**
  - Work closely with Seaport to conduct aquatic audits at dams and waterways.
  - Continue to educate dam users about aquatic safety in cooperation with Seaport.
  - Promote safe swimming and water practices through SLSQ’s annual Breaka Beach to Bush program.
  - Build upon SLSQ’s presence at Seaport’s Play It Safe initiative.

### Objective: Reduce Drowning Deaths in Inland Waterways
- **Key SLSQ Strategies**
  - Develop and roll out water safety collateral, promoting safe swimming practices at dams, creeks, rivers, lagoons, and other waterways.
  - Conduct increased aquatic audits at key locations.
  - Work with councils, government, and land managers to review and assess safety signage at aquatic locations.
  - Build upon SLSQ’s airport welcoming services.
  - Continue to roll out SLSQ’s surf talks and beach safety clinics.
  - Increase community awareness presence at schools, universities, and community events.
  - Revise and build upon front-line lifesaving services (e.g. surf lifesaving patrols, operations support, lifeguard services).
  - Produce and distribute surf safety Maps for all regions across the state.
  - Continue to work with councils and land managers to review and implement surf safety signage.
  - Build on SLSQ’s Don’t Drink and Swim campaigns.
  - Continue to engage with multicultural beachgoers via SLSQ’s On The Same Wave program.
  - Increase community awareness presence at schools, universities, and community events.
  - Continue to build upon SLSQ’s existing relationship with Maritime Safety Queensland.
  - Implementation of lifejackets into surf lifesaving IRB operations.
  - Continue to engage with multicultural beachgoers via SLSQ’s On The Same Wave program.
  - Build upon SLSQ’s airport welcoming services.
  - Increase SLSQ’s focus on blackspot services.
  - Build upon SLSQ’s dusk patrol service at Surfers Paradise on the Gold Coast.
  - Continue to make use of SLSQ’s Surf Speak booklet to engage with multicultural beachgoers.
  - Provide surf safety information to new Australian citizens.
  - Work with councils, government, and land managers to review and assess safety signage at aquatic locations.
  - Conduct increased aquatic audits at key locations.
  - Build upon SLSQ’s dusk patrol service at Surfers Paradise on the Gold Coast.
  - Continue to make use of SLSQ’s Surf Speak booklet to engage with multicultural beachgoers.
  - Provide surf safety information to new Australian citizens.
  - Work with councils, government, and land managers to review and assess safety signage at aquatic locations.
  - Conduct increased aquatic audits at key locations.
  - Build upon SLSQ’s dusk patrol service at Surfers Paradise on the Gold Coast.
  - Continue to make use of SLSQ’s Surf Speak booklet to engage with multicultural beachgoers.
  - Provide surf safety information to new Australian citizens.
  - Work with councils, government, and land managers to review and assess safety signage at aquatic locations.
  - Conduct increased aquatic audits at key locations.
  - Build upon SLSQ’s dusk patrol service at Surfers Paradise on the Gold Coast.
  - Continue to make use of SLSQ’s Surf Speak booklet to engage with multicultural beachgoers.
  - Provide surf safety information to new Australian citizens.
  - Work with councils, government, and land managers to review and assess safety signage at aquatic locations.
  - Conduct increased aquatic audits at key locations.
  - Build upon SLSQ’s dusk patrol service at Surfers Paradise on the Gold Coast.
  - Continue to make use of SLSQ’s Surf Speak booklet to engage with multicultural beachgoers.
  - Provide surf safety information to new Australian citizens.
  - Work with councils, government, and land managers to review and assess safety signage at aquatic locations.
  - Conduct increased aquatic audits at key locations.
  - Build upon SLSQ’s dusk patrol service at Surfers Paradise on the Gold Coast.
  - Continue to make use of SLSQ’s Surf Speak booklet to engage with multicultural beachgoers.
  - Provide surf safety information to new Australian citizens.
INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS VISITED QUEENSLAND

2.6M

DOMESTIC VISITORS INTO QUEENSLAND

20M

POPULATION INCREASE

11.3%

GROWTH IN INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS TO QUEENSLAND

INCREASE IN NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS ARRIVING

↑ 19.5% GOLD COAST
↑ 15.2% CAIRNS
↑ 5.0% BRISBANE

TOP 3 INTERNATIONAL MARKETS

1. CHINA
2. NEW ZEALAND
3. JAPAN

BEACH AND TOURISM TRENDS

COASTAL BLACKSPOTS

Each year SLSQ reviews data related to coastal drowning deaths, rescues, and key incidents along Queensland’s coastline to identify particular ‘high-risk’ coastal blackspots.

2016/17 BLACKSPOTS

In September 2016, SLSQ identified six locations as coastal blackspots for 2016/17. These have been listed below and include two on the Gold Coast, two on the Sunshine Coast, one in North Queensland, and one in Wide Bay Capricorn.

- Gold Coast – Surfers Paradise (Tower 33-35)
- North Queensland – Green Island
- Gold Coast – Marina Mirage to Southport Spit
- Sunshine Coast – Discovery Beach to Point Arkwright
- Wide Bay Capricorn – Fraser Island (ocean side)
- Sunshine Coast – Noosa River to Rainbow Beach Tower

2017/18 BLACKSPOTS

In August 2017, five locations were identified by SLSQ as coastal blackspots for 2017/18. These have been listed below in order of priority.

- North Queensland – Green Island
- Gold Coast – Surfers Paradise (Tower 33-35)
- Sunshine Coast – Noosa River to Double Island Point Headland
- Sunshine Coast – Peregian to Sunshine Beach
- Gold Coast – Marina Mirage to South Stradbroke Island (1000m north of the southern end)

For further information on blackspot initiatives, please see next page.

CASE STUDY: AFTER-HOURS DUSK PATROLS

A Christmas Eve tragedy was narrowly averted last year thanks to the bravery, training, and quick response of two surf lifesavers on the Gold Coast.

Matthew Crooks and Jack McNeill were stationed at Surfers Paradise on 24 December 2016 as part of SLSQ’s dusk patrol service, which sees lifesavers monitor the high-risk beach from 6:30pm to 10:30pm during peak periods in a bid to proactively prevent drowning deaths and other incidents from occurring.

While not a patrol in the traditional sense, lifesavers are responsible for proactively engaging with beachgoers, warning them about the dangers of swimming at night, and discouraging people from entering the water.

Within minutes of commencing their shift, Matthew and Jack were contacted by the Queensland Police Service and alerted to public reports of a man struggling to keep his head above water almost 100 metres out to sea.

Approximately 10 minutes earlier, a 30-year-old Indian national had ignored the advice of locals and entered the water in fading light. Just moments later he found himself caught in a strong rip, out of his depth, and battling to stay afloat in the choppy conditions.

Without hesitation, the two lifesavers sprang into action, with Jack heading out into the water on a rescue board and Matthew preparing oxygen and first aid equipment for immediate treatment on the beach.

Jack navigated the tricky conditions to successfully reach the man and assist him back to shore. Bordering on the point of exhaustion, the patient had swallowed a significant amount of water and was having difficulty breathing. He was provided with immediate first aid treatment, placed on oxygen, and stabilised on the beach before being transported to hospital in a critical condition.

Seven people have drowned at Surfers Paradise on the Gold Coast in the past 10 years, all at night or outside of patrol times, prompting SLSQ to introduce a raft of after-hours services and initiatives at the blackspot location. Were it not for the presence and subsequent actions of Jack and Matthew that evening, there almost certainly would have been another drowning added to that list.

In addition to its dusk patrols, 2016 also saw SLSQ roll out low-light camera technology at Surfers Paradise to review beach usage and activity after dark. When coupled with SLSQ’s dawn patrol service, it provided the blackspot location with unprecedented coverage.
In 2016/17, SLSQ introduced the following initiatives designed to reduce drowning deaths at identified blackspot locations:

**BLACKSPOT INITIATIVES 2016/17**

| BLACKSPOT initiatives |ゴールドコースト
Surfers Paradise（Tower 33-35） |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Night vision camera technology was installed and rolled out at Surfers Paradise.</td>
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| BLACKSPOT initiatives |ゴールドコースト
WIDE BAY CAPRICORN
Fraser Island (ocean side) |
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<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated surf safety collateral was developed and, moving forward, will be included with vehicle and camping permits.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLQ’s Westpac Helicopter conducted a number of surveillance patrols during the peak holiday periods to gather further information on visitation and beach usage.</td>
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| BLACKSPOT initiatives |ゴールドコースト
GREEN ISLAND |
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jet ski patrol hours were extended during peak periods.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lifeguards continued to trial the use of the multilingual Surf Speak booklet to help communicate with international tourists.</td>
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| BLACKSPOT initiatives |ゴールドコースト
SUNSHINE COAST
Beach Tower |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated surf safety collateral was developed and distributed to educate beachgoers and warn them about the dangers of rips.</td>
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| BLACKSPOT initiatives |ゴールドコースト
NOOSA |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased roving patrols were conducted by Waverunners 5 and 6 to monitor beach usage and protect swimmers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLQ provided key tourism operators with surf safety information and collateral to help educate and protect potential beachgoers.</td>
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| BLACKSPOT initiatives |ゴールドコースト
NORTH QUEENSLAND
Point Headland |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The lifeguard service at Discovery Beach was increased to 365 days a year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>There was an increased focus on remote and proactive surveillance via SLQ’s coastal cameras.</td>
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| BLACKSPOT initiatives |ゴールドコースト
GOLD COAST
Surfers Paradise (Tower 33-35) |
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<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Following an aquatic safety audit of Green Island, Australian Standard safety signage was implemented at 23 sites to help beachgoers identify potential hazards.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLQ met biannually with key stakeholders regarding incidents and regulations on Green Island.</td>
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| BLACKSPOT initiatives |ゴールドコースト
SUNSHINE COAST
River to Rainbow |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pop-up surf safety clinics were rolled out during peak periods.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLQ conducted a signage audit on the western side of Fraser Island and at the Rainbow Beach camping site.</td>
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</table>

In 2017/18, SLSQ will seek to introduce the following initiatives to reduce drowning deaths at identified blackspot locations.

**BLACKSPOT INITIATIVES 2017/18**

| BLACKSPOT initiatives |ゴールドコースト
Surfers Paradise (Tower 33-35) |
<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Installation of a permanent lifeguard tower at Green Island.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase media coverage to promote safe swimming practices.</td>
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| BLACKSPOT initiatives |ゴールドコースト
GREEN ISLAND |
<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work in consultation with tourism industry operators to increase both supervision and protection of recreational snorkellers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Continue to advocate for industry-wide, mandatory, use of lifejackets for all recreational snorkellers on Green Island.</td>
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| BLACKSPOT initiatives |ゴールドコースト
SUNSHINE COAST
Nossa River to Double Island Point Headland |
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<tr>
<td>Continue to build upon SLSQ’s dusk service, with increased patrol days across the peak Christmas holiday period.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Green Island to promote surf safety.</td>
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| BLACKSPOT initiatives |ゴールドコースト
Peregian to Sunshine Beach |
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<tr>
<td>Increase roving jet ski patrols within the area.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase aerial surveillance from Nossa to Double Island Point via SLQ’s Westpac Lifesaver Rescue Helicopter Service.</td>
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| BLACKSPOT initiatives |ゴールドコースト
Noosa River to South Stradbroke Island (500m north of the southern end) |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boost volunteer patrols at Surfers Paradise with additional manpower, when needed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investigate the feasibility and practicality of remotely-piloted aircraft (drones) for patrols.</td>
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| BLACKSPOT initiatives |ゴールドコースト
SUNSHINE COAST
Perenjon to Sunshine Beach |
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<thead>
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<tr>
<td>Increase community awareness and educational efforts to promote safe swimming practices, including SLSQ’s Don’t Drink and Swim campaign.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upgrade signage on the emergency response beacon at Nossa North Shore Beachfront Campground.</td>
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| BLACKSPOT initiatives |ゴールドコースト
NORTH QUEENSLAND
Green Island |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invest in a third lifeguard on weekends and public holidays from September to May to support and boost existing services.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Equip all Waverunners operating within the area with first aid kits.</td>
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| BLACKSPOT initiatives |ゴールドコースト
SUNSHINE COAST
River to Double Island Point Headland |
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduce a third lifeguard on weekends and public holidays from September to May to support and boost existing services.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintain duty officer and SurfCom surveillance via roving patrols and SLQ’s surf safety camera.</td>
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16
SECTION 1
YEAR IN REVIEW

4 DROWNING DEATHS
As the state’s peak authority on coastal and aquatic safety, SLSQ remains committed to building upon services at all levels in a bid to increase protection and eliminate drowning deaths. This sees SLSQ monitor, track, and analyse all coastal fatalities and drowning deaths across Queensland each year. This extensive process helps SLSQ identify aquatic trends and review the need for additional programs, services, and/or technology to support surf lifesavers and lifeguards on the frontline.

In review, the past 12 months proved to be one of extremes for Queensland’s surf lifesavers and lifeguards, with sustained and unseasonably warm temperatures attracting record crowds of beachgoers. In fact, in the 12 months from 1 July 2016 through to 30 June 2017, more than 20.7 million people visited Queensland’s beaches. This represents a sizeable increase of more than 11.6% when compared with the 18.68 million beachgoers recorded during the corresponding period of time the year before.

In 2016/17, Queensland’s coastline experienced sustained periods of heavy swell, king tides, tropical cyclones, and other challenging coastal conditions. This led to numerous instances where surf lifesavers and lifeguards combined to rescue more than 50 people in a day.

There were four drowning deaths recorded on Queensland beaches in 2016/17, a significant drop when compared with 11 the year before. Importantly, this makes it the equal-most successful year on record since SLSQ began tracking coastal data in 1999. For the purpose of this report, SLSQ defines a beach-related coastal drowning death as any death caused directly by immersion or submersion that has occurred in a surf or beach environment within two nautical miles of shore.

The average age of victims in 2016/17 was 37.7 years, down from 44.5 years in 2015/16. There were two victims aged in the 0-19 years category, and one each in the 50-69 and 70+ years categories. Historically speaking, young adults under 40 years of age have been heavily represented within Queensland’s drowning figures; however, recent statistics continue to show that people of all ages are susceptible to coastal drowning, depending on the circumstances.

In addition to age, gender, and location, SLSQ also collects data on the nationality of drowning victims across Queensland’s coastline where available. Two victims were born overseas, while two were born in Australia.

Migrants, tourists, and other people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have traditionally been over-represented in Queensland’s drowning figures and continue to remain a high-risk group.
WHEN DID THEY DROWN?

YEAR IN REVIEW

Historically, the summer season is generally regarded as the busiest period of time for Queensland’s surf lifesavers and lifeguards, with favourable weather and longer days attracting large crowds of beachgoers across the state. This year, more than 8.6 million people flocked to one of SLSQ’s patrolled locations during the months of December, January, and February. This represents a 14.6% increase when compared with the previous year, making it one of the busiest seasons on record. Importantly, despite this increase, there were no drowning deaths recorded on Queensland beaches during the peak holiday months of December and January.

A review of coastal data shows that people are continuing to get into trouble, and drown, along Queensland’s coastline almost all year round. There were two drowning deaths recorded in summer, with one each in both winter and spring. There were no drowning deaths recorded in autumn. In terms of individual months, there were two drowning deaths recorded in February and one each in August and October.

It is interesting to note there were no beach-related drowning deaths recorded on Saturday or Sunday in 2016/17. This represents a significant drop from 2015/16, during which, there were six drowning deaths recorded on a weekend.

CASE STUDY: DON’T DRINK AND SWIM CAMPAIGN

Each year, countless beachgoers across the state unnecessarily enter the surf under the influence of alcohol. Many of these people subsequently require the urgent assistance of SLSQ’s surf lifesavers or lifeguards to make it safely back to shore.

Alcohol not only impairs a person’s judgement, it also significantly slows down their reflexes and can lead to unnecessary risk-taking – a dangerous and potentially lethal combination when it comes to the surf.

In the past few years SLSQ has made a concerted effort to engage with, and educate, beachgoers about the dangers associated with drinking and swimming. This has been underpinned by the launch of SLSQ’s ‘Don’t Drink and Swim’ campaign in a bid to encourage positive and potentially lifesaving behaviour in and around the water.

The campaign sees SLSQ directly engage with a wide range of pubs, clubs, restaurants, and bars along Queensland’s coastline and provide them with educational coasters and posters to help promote safe swimming practices. In total, more than 500 establishments were directly engaged with across 2016/17.
WHERE AND HOW DID THEY DROWN?

YEAR IN REVIEW

As part of SLSQ’s ongoing vision and strategic plan, it records and analyses the locations of all beach-related coastal drowning deaths across Queensland to assist with the provision and deployment of services.

In 2016/17 there were two drowning deaths recorded across the North Queensland region and two on South East Queensland beaches.

It is worth noting that the past season was the first year since SLSQ began tracking coastal safety data in 1999 that there were no beach-related drowning deaths recorded on the Gold Coast. Prior to this, there had been a total of 69 drowning deaths recorded on Gold Coast beaches across a period of 17 years through to 2015/16, at an average of approximately four per year.

Unfortunately, despite significant investments made by SLSQ to promote and encourage safe swimming practices, it is clear that beachgoers are still risking their lives by swimming at unpatrolled locations and/or outside of the red and yellow flags. In fact, all four drownings this season were recorded outside of the flags.

One drowning was recorded less than 200 metres from a patrol location while, in comparison, two occurred more than three kilometres from a lifesaving service.

The type of activity the victim was participating in prior to their death has also been recorded and reviewed by SLSQ, where known. There was one case of accidental entry into water and one instance where the victim was snorkelling prior to their death.

Improving and increasing safety within the snorkelling industry remains a key focus area for SLSQ and, in 2017, the organisation formally contacted the Queensland Government to request a more collaborative approach to safety strategies moving forward.

Information logged via LIMSOC has been actively monitored at SLSQ’s new State Operations Communications Centre (SOCC) on the Gold Coast, which officially opened its doors in 2017. Importantly, LIMSOC allows SLSQ to proactively monitor beach usage across the state, while tracking rescue numbers, first aid treatments, and any other incidents as they unfold in real-time. When monitored by the SOCC and operated alongside SLSQ’s network of coastal cameras, it provides surf lifesavers and lifeguards with unprecedented access to coastal data and information from all patrolled beaches in Queensland.

Importantly, the introduction of LIMSOC technology and the SOCC has reinforced SLSQ’s operations and communications across the state. It has also ensured the organisation is in a strong position to make quick and educated decisions about how best to manage beachgoers and maximise resources during incidents or peak periods. For example, if SOCC operators identify particularly dangerous conditions, or are alerted to an unusually high number of rescues within a particular region, they can use that information to:

• proactively task the Westpac Helicopter to perform additional patrols in and around the area;
• alert lifesavers or lifeguards at neighbouring beaches about the dangerous conditions and advise them to remain on heightened alert;
• issue public safety warnings to protect beachgoers and advise them of the dangerous conditions; and/or
• deploy Duty Officers, additional manpower, or other resources to assist surf lifesavers or lifeguards on the ground.

CASE STUDY: LIMSOC

New technology and reporting processes introduced by SLSQ in the past 12 months, coupled with the recent opening of a centralised and state-wide operations hub, have helped minimise incidents and save lives along Queensland’s coastline.

Last season, for the first time in history, all patrol services across the state were equipped with smart device technology to log incidents and coastal conditions in real time into a central database. The new reporting system, officially named the Life-saving Incident Management System Operational Console (LIMSOC), has delivered numerous benefits for surf lifesavers, lifeguards, and beachgoers alike.

SLSQ COO George Hill ESM and Gold Coast Mayor Tom Tate review night-vision camera technology at Surfers Paradise.
SECTION 2
TEN YEARS IN REVIEW

DROWNING DEATHS BY GENDER
65
12
TEN YEARS IN REVIEW

2007−2017 OVERVIEW

THIS SECTION OF THE REPORT DRAWS ON DATA RECORDED FROM 1 JULY 2007 THROUGH TO 30 JUNE 2017, AND IS INTENDED TO PROVIDE A 10 YEAR SNAPSHOT OF COASTAL DROWNING DEATHS DURING THAT PERIOD OF TIME.

WHO DROWNED?

A review of data shows that 39% of victims were international tourists, migrants, or other overseas visitors. The most common foreign nationalities of drowning victims across the past 10 years were Japanese and Chinese (six each). This is followed by English (four), Korean (three), and Malaysian (two). Importantly, SLSQ continues to strategically target people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, including international travellers, through a raft of community awareness and educational programs.

WHY MALES?

In the past 10 years, males have been overrepresented in Queensland’s beach-related drowning figures. It is believed that males are more likely to engage in riskier beach and aquatic behaviour than females as a result of:

- increased bravado and complacency about their personal safety in the water;
- alcohol consumption;
- overconfidence in their swimming ability and physical fitness; and/or
- increased peer pressure.

Across the past 10 years, there have been 77 beach-related coastal drowning deaths recorded across Queensland. A review of this data shows that 41 of these occurred in the past five years (53.2%), compared with 36 drowning deaths in the first half of the decade (46.8%).

In the past 10 years, 2014/15 and 2015/16 recorded the highest annual number of drowning deaths, with 11 each. By comparison, the fewest drowning deaths were recorded in 2016/17 and 2008/09, with both years recording four.

The 10 year data suggests that males are significantly more at risk of beach-related drowning deaths than females. In total, 84.4% of all drowning victims along Queensland’s coastline since 2007/08 were males, with females accounting for just 15.6% of victims.

The ages of all drowning victims across the past 10 years have also been tracked by SLSQ. In total, there were 17 drowning deaths recorded in the 30–39 years category, making it the most common age group. A further 13 victims fell within the 10–19 years age category, with 11 drowning deaths each recorded in the 20–29 and 40–49 years categories. There was one drowning in the 0–9 years age category and one drowning recorded in the 80–89 years age category.

In 2016/17, they combined to directly save the lives of 2,561 people across the state, with their efforts ensuring that Queensland recorded its equal-lowest number of beach-related drowning deaths in a single reporting year since SLSQ began tracking coastal data.

However, a closer review of these statistics highlights a disturbing trend. In particular, it is disappointing to note that 1,799 of these rescues – or roughly 70.2% – were conducted outside of designated patrol areas. This includes 150 rescues that occurred more than 1km away from the nearest lifesaving service.

As far as SLSQ is concerned, entering the water at an unpatrolled location is a recipe for disaster, regardless of the beachgoer’s age, swimming ability, or experience in the surf. With that in mind, it is important for all beachgoers to recognise and understand that the ocean is an unpredictable environment, capable of housing strong rips and gutters, dangerous conditions, and a raft of marine creatures which can all pose a significant threat to swimmers.

Additionally, each time a surf lifesaver or lifeguard attends to, or rescues, a patient from an unpatrolled location, they are placed at considerable personal risk. It also increases the strain on resources within the patrol areas, and takes vital manpower away from protecting beachgoers who have actively chosen to swim between the flags.

CASE STUDY: RESCUES OUTSIDE OF THE FLAGS

The ‘red and yellow army’ of surf lifesavers and lifeguards continues to play a key role along Queensland’s coastline, watching over and protecting millions of beachgoers each and every year.

In 2016/17, they combined to directly save the lives of 2,561 people across the state, with their efforts ensuring that Queensland recorded its equal-lowest number of beach-related drowning deaths in a single reporting year since SLSQ began tracking coastal data.

However, a closer review of these statistics highlights a disturbing trend. In particular, it is disappointing to note that 1,799 of these rescues – or roughly 70.2% – were conducted outside of designated patrol areas. This includes 150 rescues that occurred more than 1km away from the nearest lifesaving service.

As far as SLSQ is concerned, entering the water at an unpatrolled location is a recipe for disaster, regardless of the beachgoer’s age, swimming ability, or experience in the surf. With that in mind, it is important for all beachgoers to recognise and understand that the ocean is an unpredictable environment, capable of housing strong rips and gutters, dangerous conditions, and a raft of marine creatures which can all pose a significant threat to swimmers.

Additionally, each time a surf lifesaver or lifeguard attends to, or rescues, a patient from an unpatrolled location, they are placed at considerable personal risk. It also increases the strain on resources within the patrol areas, and takes vital manpower away from protecting beachgoers who have actively chosen to swim between the flags.
WHEN DID THEY DROWN?
TEN YEARS IN REVIEW

Not surprisingly, summer recorded more beach-related drowning deaths than any other season over the past 10 years. In total the peak season recorded 26 drowning deaths (33.8%). This was followed by autumn, with 25 drowning deaths (32.4%) and spring with 17 drowning deaths (22.1%). There were nine drowning deaths (11.7%) recorded in winter.

It is interesting to note that more drowning deaths have actually occurred in March (15) over the past decade than any other month of the year. This is followed by February (11), January (9), and November (8).

There were 16 drowning deaths (20.8%) recorded on Saturdays during the past 10 years, making it the most common day of the year. This was closely followed by Tuesdays, which recorded 15 drowning deaths (19.5%). There were a further 10 drowning deaths (13%) recorded each on Fridays and Sundays. In total, 33.8% of drowning deaths occurred on a weekend, compared with 66.2% between Monday and Friday.

In addition to the months and days of drowning deaths, SLSQ also records the approximate time of every beach-related coastal drowning death, where known. This assists significantly with strategic planning and resource allocation across the state. The majority of drowning deaths in the past 10 years (57.4%) occurred in the afternoon and early evening, between the hours of 12:01pm and 6:00pm. This is significantly higher than the 12 drowning deaths (15.6%) recorded in the morning between the hours of 8:01am and 12:00pm. It is worth noting that a further 17 drowning deaths (22.1%) occurred between the hours of 6:01pm and 8:00am, either before or after a patrol service was present. The exact time of drowning death is unknown in four cases.

WHY MARCH?

More beach-related drowning deaths have occurred in March than any other month over the past 10 years. While the exact reason for this is unknown, it is likely to be the result of numerous factors, including:

• sustained periods of unseasonably warm weather, resulting in large crowds of beachgoers;
• large beach crowds over the Easter school holidays, including international and domestic visitors to Queensland; and/or
• a return to standard patrol hours and capacities following a roll out of extended services over the peak summer holiday period.

Queensland Minister Grace Grace MP, Senator Murray Watt and Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk MP meet SLSQ volunteers.
Of the 77 drowning deaths on Queensland beaches across the past 10 years, 29 (37.6%) have occurred on Gold Coast beaches, making it the most common region for drowning deaths over this period of time. By comparison, there were 20 drowning deaths (26%) recorded across the wider Sunshine Coast region (including Noosa), and a further 11 drowning deaths (14.3%) in North Queensland.

In terms of individual councils, the City of Gold Coast has recorded 29 drowning deaths (37.6%), followed by the Sunshine Coast Council with 12 drowning deaths (15.6%) and Cairns Regional Council with 10 drowning deaths (13%).

A review of specific beaches and locations reveals that Surfers Paradise on the Gold Coast has recorded the highest number of drowning deaths in the past 10 years, with seven (9.1%). This is closely followed by Green Island in North Queensland with six drowning deaths (7.8%). Surfers Paradise and Green Island have again been identified by SLSQ as coastal blackspots and particularly high-risk locations for beachgoers in 2017/18.

The distance of the drowning site from an active patrol area and/or lifesaving service has also been recorded by SLSQ. Tragically, 72.7% of all drowning deaths in the past 10 years occurred less than one kilometre from a patrolled beach or patrol service. This includes 22 drowning deaths within 200m of a flagged patrol area. This continues to highlight a general lack of knowledge and/or appreciation of the significant dangers posed by entering the surf at an unpatrolled location. On the other end of the scale, there have been 21 drowning deaths (27.3%) in the past decade which have occurred more than two-and-a-half kilometres from a patrol service. It is important to note there has never been a confirmed beach-related drowning death recorded between SLSQ’s red and yellow flags.

The type of activity the victim was engaged in at the time of drowning has also been recorded by SLSQ. Not surprisingly, the most common activity was swimming, which accounted for 51.9% of all drowning deaths. This was followed by riding craft (11.7%) and snorkelling (10.4%).

More beach-related drowning deaths over the past 10 years have occurred on the Gold Coast than any other region. This is likely to be a result of:

- a higher number of people visiting Gold Coast beaches when compared with other regions across Queensland;
- a significant number of international tourists and travellers, with minimal experience in the water, visiting popular Gold Coast beaches all year round;
- challenging surf conditions and open stretches of coastline; and/or
- the proximity of popular beaches in relation to nightclubs, pubs, and clubs which have, historically, resulted in an influx of intoxicated swimmers.
## TOP TEN DROWNING DEATHS BY COUNCILS AND BY BEACHES

### TEN YEARS IN REVIEW

#### FIGURE 21
**TOP TEN COUNCILS 2007–17**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNCILS (TOP 10)</th>
<th>DROWNING DEATHS 2007–17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gold Coast City Council</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunshine Coast Council</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cairns Regional Council</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noosa Shire Council</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraser Coast Regional Council</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gympie Regional Council</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redland City Council</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moreton Bay Regional Council</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bundaberg Regional Council</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gladstone Regional Council</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### FIGURE 22
**TOP TEN BEACHES 2007–17**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BEACHES (TOP 10)</th>
<th>DROWNING DEATHS 2007–17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surfers Paradise, Gold Coast</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Island, Cairns</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunshine Beach, Noosa Shire</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northcliffe, Gold Coast</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narromine, Gold Coast</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy Valley, Fraser Island</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kings Beach, Sunshine Coast</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teewah Beach, Noosa Shire</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitzroy Island, Cairns</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southport, Gold Coast</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This overwhelming success and positive track record has recently seen SLSQ broaden its focus, transferring its extensive lifesaving experience and expertise to inland waterways and various other aquatic locations.

A recent change to SLSQ’s overarching vision now sees the organisation working towards the wider goal of ‘Zero preventable drownings and other incidents at inland aquatic locations, SLSQ has identified a number of locations as particular ‘high-risk’ blackspots. These have been listed below in order of priority.

### INLAND BLACKSPOTS

Following an extensive review of data related to drowning deaths and other incidents at inland aquatic locations, SLSQ has identified a number of locations as particular ‘high-risk’ blackspots. These have been listed below in order of priority.

#### INLAND DROWNING DEATHS BY YEAR 2012−17 (N=135)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Drowning Deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012−13</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013−14</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014−15</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015−16</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016−17</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### INLAND BLACKSPOTS (TOP 10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blackspot</th>
<th>Drowning Deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane River (Sector 2)*</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logan River</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tallebudgera Creek</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane River (Sector 1)*</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King John Creek</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane River (Sector 3)*</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset Dam</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadbeach Waters</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnett River</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadwater Parklands</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*For the purposes of this report, the Brisbane River has been broken down into three (3) sections:
Sector 1 – Port of Brisbane to Story Bridge (M7)
Sector 2 – Story Bridge (M7) to Centenary Highway (M5)
Sector 3 – Centenary Highway (M5) and inland

With more than a century of coastal and aquatic experience to its name, SLSQ and its members have been directly responsible for saving the lives of thousands of people along Queensland’s coastline since its inception. In addition, countless tragedies and incidents have been prevented over the years through a wide range of proactive strategies, services, and programs along with the on-beach actions of surf lifesavers and lifeguards. This frontline approach, coupled with a raft of awareness and educational initiatives, has helped minimise drowning deaths and protect hundreds of millions of beachgoers across the state.

In the past five years there have been 135 drowning deaths at inland aquatic locations across Queensland, at an average of 27 per year. Of the past five years, 2015/16 recorded the largest number of inland aquatic drowning deaths, with 38. By comparison, there were 22 drowning deaths at inland locations last year.

Much like beach-related drowning deaths, the vast majority of inland drowning victims over the past five years were male. In total, there were 110 male victims (81.5%), compared with just 25 females (18.5%).

The age of all victims, where known, has been recorded by SLSQ and grouped into one of 10 categories. The data indicates that people of all ages are susceptible to inland aquatic drowning deaths, with each age category represented to some degree. There were 24 victims (17.8%) within the 20-29 years category, making it the most common age group of inland drowning victims across the past five years. Interestingly, this was followed by the 60-69 years category, which accounted for 22 inland drowning deaths (16.3%). The 90-99 years category was the least represented age bracket, with only three drowning victims (2.2%).

In addition, SLSQ also tracks the nationality of inland drowning victims across Queensland where possible. This data significantly helps with the development of community awareness and other drowning prevention strategies. In total, 34 inland drowning victims (25.1%) were born overseas, compared with 67 Australian-born victims (49.6%). The exact nationality of the victim was unknown in 34 cases.

### NATIONALITY 2012−17 (N=135)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### AGE 2012−17 (N=135)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Drowning Deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-9</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-89</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-99</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### GENDER 2012−17 (N=135)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Drowning Deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHEN DID THEY DROWN?
FIVE YEARS IN REVIEW

Not surprisingly, the majority of inland aquatic drowning deaths over the past five years occurred in summer. In total, there were 54 drowning deaths (40%) recorded during the months of December, January, and February. By comparison, there were 33 drowning deaths (24.4%) recorded in spring, 28 drowning deaths (21.5%) in autumn, and 19 drowning deaths (14.1%) in the winter season.

Each month of the year recorded at least two inland drowning deaths. The most common month for inland drowning deaths over the past five years was January, with 21 (15.5%). This was followed by February (18), May (16), November (16), and December (15). There have only been two inland drowning deaths recorded in June over the past five years, making it the least common month of the year.

In the past five years, some 52 inland drowning deaths (38.5%) were recorded on a weekend, compared with 67 (49.6%) on a weekday. The exact day of death was unconfirmed in 16 cases. Individually, Sunday recorded 28 drowning deaths (20.7%), Saturday (24) and Friday (21). There were multiple drowning deaths recorded by Saturday (24) and Friday (21). These were 54 drowning deaths (40%) recorded during the months of January, April, May, June, and August.

The time of all inland aquatic drowning deaths, where known, has also been recorded by SLSQ and grouped into one of 12 categories. The data indicates that 23 drowning deaths (17.8%) were either swimming or wading immediately prior to their death. There were also 17 drowning deaths (12.6%) related to accidental entry into water.

In the past five years drowning deaths have been recorded at a variety of inland locations across Queensland. The three most common aquatic environments for inland drowning deaths during this time have been rivers (29.6%), creeks (20.7%), and lagoons, amongst others.

In terms of location, there have been 23 inland drowning deaths (17%) recorded at waterways within the Brisbane City Council boundaries. There were a further 22 drowning deaths (16.3%) recorded within the City of Gold Coast.

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WHERE AND HOW DID THEY DROWN?
FIVE YEARS IN review

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SECTION 4
SCUBA DIVING AND SNORKELLING

DEATHS

13 DEATHS
31 DEATHS
2012–2017 OVERVIEW
FIVE YEARS IN REVIEW

This section of the report draws on data recorded from 1 July 2012 through to 30 June 2017, providing a snapshot of snorkelling and diving fatalities recorded across Queensland during that period of time.

In the past five years there have been 44 confirmed fatalities involving snorkellers and divers across Queensland. This includes 31 deaths involving snorkellers (70.5%) and 13 deaths involving divers (29.5%). It is important to note this figure encompasses confirmed cases of drowning in addition to other causes of death including, but not limited to, those related to underlying medical conditions and/or other incidents.

The data shows a recent and significant increase in the number of fatalities within the snorkel and dive industries. In the two years from July 2012 through to June 2014, there were eight fatalities recorded at an average of four per year. By comparison, in the past three years, there have been 36 fatalities recorded, with the annual average jumping to 12. This culminated in 13 fatalities during 2016/17 (11 snorkellers and two divers), making it the deadliest season in the past five years.

Generally speaking, the data suggests that older males are most at risk of losing their lives while snorkelling or diving in Queensland.

WHO?
FIVE YEARS IN REVIEW

Of the 44 people who lost their lives while snorkelling or diving in the past five years, 32 were male (72.7%) compared with just 12 females (27.3%). Interestingly, this gender breakdown is relatively consistent with Queensland’s beach-related drowning deaths across the same period of time, reinforcing the theory that males are more at risk of coastal fatalities than females.

It is also worth noting that fatalities were far more common amongst older age groups. In fact, 63.6% of all victims were aged above 50, with 22.7% of all victims aged 70 or higher. By comparison, just 11.4% of victims were younger than 30.

A review of data shows the majority of victims (68.2%) were international tourists, travellers, or other foreign nationals. Generally speaking, international migrants and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have been overrepresented within Queensland’s beach-related drowning figures, and it is not surprising to see this replicated within the snorkelling industry. History shows that many international travellers who visit Queensland each year arrive with minimal ocean experience and a limited knowledge of Australia’s coastal conditions. The most common overseas nationalities of victims were American (7), Chinese (6), Japanese (4), and English (4). By comparison, just 22.7% of victims in the past five years were Australian-born.

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WHO?
FIVE YEARS IN REVIEW

Of the 44 people who lost their lives while snorkelling or diving in the past five years, 32 were male (72.7%) compared with just 12 females (27.3%). Interestingly, this gender breakdown is relatively consistent with Queensland’s beach-related drowning deaths across the same period of time, reinforcing the theory that males are more at risk of coastal fatalities than females.

It is also worth noting that fatalities were far more common amongst older age groups. In fact, 63.6% of all victims were aged above 50, with 22.7% of all victims aged 70 or higher. By comparison, just 11.4% of victims were younger than 30.

A review of data shows the majority of victims (68.2%) were international tourists, travellers, or other foreign nationals. Generally speaking, international migrants and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have been overrepresented within Queensland’s beach-related drowning figures, and it is not surprising to see this replicated within the snorkelling industry. History shows that many international travellers who visit Queensland each year arrive with minimal ocean experience and a limited knowledge of Australia’s coastal conditions. The most common overseas nationalities of victims were American (7), Chinese (6), Japanese (4), and English (4). By comparison, just 22.7% of victims in the past five years were Australian-born.

In the past five years there have been 44 confirmed fatalities involving snorkellers and divers across Queensland. This includes 31 deaths involving snorkellers (70.5%) and 13 deaths involving divers (29.5%). It is important to note this figure encompasses confirmed cases of drowning in addition to other causes of death including, but not limited to, those related to underlying medical conditions and/or other incidents.

The data shows a recent and significant increase in the number of fatalities within the snorkel and dive industries. In the two years from July 2012 through to June 2014, there were eight fatalities recorded at an average of four per year. By comparison, in the past three years, there have been 36 fatalities recorded, with the annual average jumping to 12. This culminated in 13 fatalities during 2016/17 (11 snorkellers and two divers), making it the deadliest season in the past five years.

Generally speaking, the data suggests that older males are most at risk of losing their lives while snorkelling or diving in Queensland.

WHO?
FIVE YEARS IN REVIEW

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CASE STUDY: GREEN ISLAND

The seemingly calm and idyllic waters off Green Island make it a popular destination of choice for snorkellers, divers, and tourists from across the world. However, despite its flat conditions, the relatively small island has been consistently identified by SLSQ as a high risk location following six confirmed drowning deaths in the past 10 years. Importantly, this figure could have been significantly higher, with SLSQ lifeguards successfully resuscitating two beachgoers pulled from the water during the same period of time, while also rescuing an additional 700 patients.

Green Island has been ranked by SLSQ as the state’s top blackspot for 2017/18 following the death of two snorkellers last year and six drowning deaths in the past decade. It is pertinent to note the majority of drowning deaths and serious incidents logged on Green Island have involved international tourists, many of whom arrive with minimal experience in the ocean and a limited appreciation of the potential dangers they could face in the water. When coupled with a thirst for aquatic activities such as snorkelling, diving and swimming, it has the potential to create a recipe for disaster.

In December 2014, SLSQ boosted its services and patrol capacity on the island, introducing a third, full-time permanent lifeguard to patrol 365 days of the year. Unfortunately, this was not sustainable and was scaled back two years later.

In recent years, SLSQ has continued to work with council and key stakeholders to implement a number of key safety initiatives in a bid to increase protection for all beachgoers. These include:

- A portable and multilingual ‘No Swimming Area’ hazard sign was implemented at Beach 1 to proactively engage with, and warn, beachgoers;
- Following an aquatic safety audit of the island, standardised safety signage with emergency marker locations were introduced at key locations to help beachgoers identify potential hazards;
- Lifeguards trialled the use of ‘Surf Speak’ – a multilingual safety booklet to help them communicate with international tourists in their primary languages; and
- Seabob technology was introduced to assist lifeguards with search, rescue, and patrol activities.

The diving and snorkelling industries in Queensland, and particularly Far North Queensland, operate all year round, with fatalities recorded in all four seasons. The most common season for snorkelling and diving fatalities in the past five years was spring (14), followed by autumn (13) and winter (10). Surprisingly, there were only eight fatalities recorded across the summer months. A review of individual months shows that August recorded the highest number of fatalities, with seven, followed by February and November with six each.

In total, 18.2% of fatalities were recorded on a weekend, compared with 81.8% on weekdays. There were 10 snorkelling and diving deaths recorded on Tuesday, making it the most common day of the week for fatalities of this nature. This is followed by Wednesday with nine fatalities, and Thursday and Saturday with seven each. There was only one fatality recorded on Sunday.

The approximate time of death has also been recorded by SLSQ and grouped into one of eight categories to assist with developing and implementing safety strategies moving forward. A review of data shows the majority of fatalities (54.5%) occurred between the hours of 10:01am and 2:00pm. Interestingly, there were only three fatalities recorded before 10:00am, and only four recorded after 4:00pm.

WHEN?
FIVE YEARS IN REVIEW

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WHEN?
FIVE YEARS IN REVIEW
SLSQ has also recorded and tracked the locations of all snorkelling and diving fatalities in the past five years. A review of data shows that more snorkellers and divers have died in North Queensland than any other region across the state.

Of the 44 confirmed fatalities, 70.5% involved snorkellers with 29.5% involving divers.

In terms of individual sites, Green Island in North Queensland has recorded a total of seven fatalities across the past five years, making it the most common location for diving and snorkelling deaths during this period of time. This is closely followed by Moore Reef, also in North Queensland, which has recorded six fatalities.

In total, 29 victims (65.9%) launched their diving or snorkelling trip from a boat, in comparison to 15 (34.1%) who launched from the beach. With that in mind, it is not surprising that the vast majority of fatalities have occurred offshore and a significant distance away from the nearest beach patrol. Of the 44 fatalities since 2012, 34 of them have occurred more than three kilometres away from the nearest patrol service.

As the state’s peak authority on aquatic safety, SLSQ remains more committed than ever to improving and increasing protection for all swimmers, beachgoers, and coastal users across Queensland. In 2016, following an unprecedented spike in the number of deaths involving recreational snorkellers off the coast of North Queensland, SLSQ directly contacted the Queensland Government to request a more comprehensive and collaborative approach to safety strategies moving forward.

At the time, SLSQ identified a number of factors it believed were contributing to the high number of fatalities within the snorkelling industry. This included an inconsistent approach to safety among tourism operators, and an inconsistent interpretation of standard guidelines and codes of practice. In particular, it was thought the existing code of conduct was open to varying interpretation across the industry. This was compounded by the fact that a significant number of tourists who visit Queensland and participate in adventurous water activities have minimal experience in and around the water, lack basic aquatic safety skills, and have limited physical fitness.

Historically, there has been no requirement for snorkellers to wear lifejackets or flotation devices. Mandating the standard issue of lifejackets within the snorkelling industry was a key recommendation put forward by SLSQ, ensuring an extra layer of protection for all participants, regardless of their swimming ability and/or experience.

Additionally, in the past, there has been no requirement for any health check/s or disclosures prior to snorkellers entering the water. Many popular snorkelling sites are located in remote areas off the coast which, in turn, means access to advanced lifesaving support can be more than an hour away. It is SLSQ’s belief that stricter and standardised health screenings could eliminate potentially-fatal incidents from occurring.

In 2017 SLSQ was invited to participate in a round-table discussion with the Queensland Government and other key stakeholder groups, where it flagged these concerns and proposed a number of changes to industry standards moving forward. It was SLSQ’s belief that further fatalities and drowning deaths would continue to occur if changes were not made to existing safety standards.

In August 2017, following advice from SLSQ and other industry experts, the Queensland Government announced a number of reforms to strengthen the recreational snorkelling code of practice. These changes include:

- Operators will be allowed to request declarations from people identified as ‘at-risk’ snorkellers, such as older visitors and those with health or mobility issues, prior to them entering the water;
- Automatic external defibrillators will be required on all reef tourist vessels to improve emergency response capabilities;
- Flotation devices will be mandated for at-risk snorkellers; and
- Identified ‘at-risk’ snorkellers must wear a different coloured vest or snorkel for easy visual identification.

These changes are an important step towards increasing protection for snorkellers within Queensland waters. Moving forward, SLSQ will continue to work closely with industry stakeholders to review and increase safety standards as part of our ongoing commitment to saving lives in all public waters.
SECTION 5

MARINE CREATURES

BLUEBOTTLE STINGS RECORDED BY SLSQ

57,769  396%

INCREASE FROM 2015/16 SEASON
**MARINE CREATURES**

In addition to its work monitoring beach-related drowning deaths, SLSQ also tracks and analyses other key incidents along Queensland’s coastline involving sharks, crocodiles, and marine stingers. This helps SLSQ identify any particular high-risk locations across Queensland and introduce proactive measures to protect communities and minimise risk. Importantly, SLSQ continues to work closely with a range of key stakeholders including local governments and councils, tourism operators, and the general public to educate and protect Queensland beachgoers.

**CROCODILES AND SHARKS**

In 2017 there were two confirmed shark attacks in North Queensland, including one fatality at Palmer Point in Innisfail. Like all marine creatures, crocodiles are a natural part of North Queensland’s aquatic environment and, while attacks on humans are rare, they can and do occur. In the past 10 years there have been nine non-fatal crocodile attacks and a further five fatal attacks. Importantly, SLSQ continues to take a hands-on and proactive approach to better protect and educate beachgoers with the aim of significantly reducing the risks of further attacks.

In 2016/17 there were five confirmed shark attacks in Queensland resulting in non-fatal injuries, up from four the previous year. These occurred at Whitehaven Beach, Kings Beach, Flagggy Rock, Murray Island, and Hinchinbrook Island. The last confirmed shark attack in Queensland resulting in a fatality was recorded in 2014 at Ruddler Reef in Port Douglas.

SLSQ also plays a key role when it comes to shark management and prevention. This sees the organisation work in partnership with key stakeholders at all levels to deliver safer beaches, while educating swimmers about how to increase protection and minimise the risk of an attack. On the ground, SLSQ’s lifeguards and surf lifesavers play an active and key role in shark safety, particularly as a front-line defence when it comes to monitoring Queensland’s coastline and responding accordingly in the event of a sighting.

**CROCODILE ATTACKS (10 YEARS IN REVIEW)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>ATTACK LOCATION</th>
<th>FATAL / NON-FATAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr Adolphus Island</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>False Pera Heads near Weipa</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Wanguma Bay on Lizard Island</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dunkley River</td>
<td>Fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Buskie Inlet, Cairns Crossing Island</td>
<td>Fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beering Creek, Weipa</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trundling Creek, Weipa</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Port Douglas Golf Club</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lizard Island</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Thornton Beach</td>
<td>Fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Johnstone River, Innesfail</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Palmer Point, Innesfail</td>
<td>Fatal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SHARK ATTACKS (10 YEARS IN REVIEW)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>ATTACK LOCATION</th>
<th>FATAL / NON-FATAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Cairns, Holmes Reef north of Cairns</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Broadwater, Gold Coast</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Greenmount Beach, Coolangatta</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Ompsey Reef</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heron Island, Lamil Reef</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Thursday Island, Torres Strait</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dent Island, Whitsunday Islands</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Chafferger Bay, Palm Island</td>
<td>Fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perengen Beach</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Nobby's Beach, Gold Coast</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Noonua Heads</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gold Coast</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Chevron Island, Nirang River</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rudder Reef, Port Douglas</td>
<td>Fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Russell Island, Frankland Islands</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mool Island, Yeppoon</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Heron Island</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caloundra</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whitehaven Beach, Whitsunday Islands</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kings Beach, Sunrise Coast</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Flagggy Rock</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Murray Island, Torres Strait, (85km East)</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hinchinbrook Island</td>
<td>Non-fatal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**MARINE STINGERS**

**IRUKANDJI**

In 2016/17 there were at least 10 suspected Irukandji stings across Queensland reported to SLSQ, representing a significant decrease from 35 the year before. The earliest sting of the season was recorded on 25 November 2016 at Fitzroy Island, with the most recent sting occurring at Trinity Beach on 16 March 2017.

In addition, there were a further 10 beachgoers at Fraser Island who developed Irukandji syndrome after receiving stings in the water. The exact type of marine stinger involved in these incidents remains unconfirmed.

**BLUEBOTTLES**

A number of factors including, but not limited to, sustained northerly winds and warmer water temperatures led to a significant influx in the number of bluebottle stings recorded across the state in 2016/17. In total, SLSQ’s surf lifesavers and lifeguards treated 57,769 minor bluebottle stings across Queensland this season, representing a substantial increase of almost 400% when compared with 11,645 stings recorded in 2015/16. It is important to note these figures only include bluebottle stings that were physically treated by or, otherwise reported to, SLSQ’s surf lifesavers and lifeguards.

**CASE STUDY: FRASER ISLAND**

During the two month period from December 2016 through to January 2017, at least 10 visitors to Fraser Island developed Irukandji syndrome after receiving stings in the water. It remains unconfirmed exactly what type of marine stinger was involved in these incidents.

It is important to note the stings were localised to the western side of the island, which is largely sheltered from any strong northerly and southerly winds. In early January, SLSQ conducted a series of marine stinger drags on Fraser Island, focusing on an area stretching approximately five kilometres from Moon Point through to Woralie Creek. In addition, drags were also conducted in a number of inland creeks and various other sections of coastline. While these drags did not capture any specimens, SLSQ was made aware of a suspected Irukandji captured by Jamie Seymour shortly after. Following this discovery, SLSQ immediately heightened its safety advice to swimmers, boaters, and beachgoers on Fraser Island, and worked with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to conduct a signage audit on the western side of the island. Moving forward, SLSQ will continue to work with key stakeholders and land managers to improve and increase safety for beachgoers on Fraser Island.
SECTION 6
OUR SERVICES
STAYING IN TOUCH WITH OUR SERVICES

As the state’s peak authority on coastal and aquatic safety, SLSQ remains committed to improving service delivery at all levels to increase our effectiveness and, ultimately, eliminate drowning deaths across Queensland. Recent initiatives include:

- In addition to extending front-line beach patrols, SLSQ continues to build upon its disaster management and response capabilities, with 24/7 emergency response groups now active and operational in all regions across the state;
- Night operations training is regularly conducted on both the Gold and Sunshine Coasts in conjunction with the Westpac Lifesaver Rescue Helicopter Service and the Queensland Water Police;
- SLSQ continues to operate its network of coastal surveillance cameras at selected high-risk locations across the state, allowing lifesavers and lifeguards to monitor beach usage and conditions around the clock;
- SLSQ’s dusk patrol service at Surfers Paradise was significantly expanded through to 10.30pm during peak periods, directly saving the lives of two beachgoers via rescues after dark; and
- Operations were boosted across the state with the introduction of the State Operations Communications Centre, and the Lifesaving Incident Management System Operational Console.

ENGAGING WITH OUR COMMUNITY

Outside of its front-line patrols, SLSQ continues to advocate the importance of surf safety education and community awareness as a crucial part of breaking the drowning cycle. Last year, SLSQ engaged with 464,124 people to spread the surf safety message. Key initiatives from the past 12 months have been outlined below:

- SLSQ’s award-winning Little Lifesavers program has been running since 1993, educating more than 500 young children about water safety each year;
- Last year alone, the Queensland Health Beach Safe Schools Program visited 137 schools across the state and taught almost 40,000 students about how to stay safe in the surf;
- In 2016/17 SLSQ’s On The Same Wave program educated and engaged with 41,019 beachgoers from multicultural backgrounds, significantly boosting safety across this high-risk group of beachgoers;
- Airport welcoming services at the Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, and Cairns saw surf lifesavers directly engage with 277,475 passengers and provide them with vital safety information upon touchdown;
- An extensive ‘Don’t Drink and Swim’ campaign was rolled out at key locations, with educational posters and coasters distributed to almost 500 pubs and nightclubs;
- A rip safety campaign, ‘Don’t Risk the Rip’, was launched and rolled out in consultation with Surf Life Saving Australia; and
- SLSQ’s community awareness team attended a number of key events including the Gold Coast 600, various NRL matches, community festivals, and school fetes to educate potential beachgoers.

WESTPAC LIFESAVER RESCUE HELICOPTER SERVICE

Our ‘eye in the sky’, the Westpac Lifesaver Rescue Helicopter Service (WLRHS) boasts a highly-trained team of skilled men and women, encompassing full-time professionals and volunteer surf lifesavers. Formed in 1976, the service assists for one reason and one reason only: to save lives. Recent initiatives include:

- In 2016/17, the WLRHS flew 447 aerial surf patrols, performed 88 preventative actions to proactively protect beachgoers, and directly saved the lives of 14 people through winch-rescues;
- The WLRHS continues to work closely with the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, the Queensland Police Service, and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority to provide search and rescue services during times of need; and
- In 2017, Lifesaver 45 was placed on standby to assist in the lead up to, and immediately after, Tropical Cyclone Debbie with crews tasked to assist a male in his 50s who was stranded in floodwater near Laravale; and
- Additional patrols were scheduled during extended periods of rough and potentially dangerous surf.

AUSTRALIAN LIFEGUARD SERVICE QUEENSLAND

The Australian Lifeguard Service Queensland (ALSQ) is the professional lifeguard arm of SLSQ and provides vital aquatic safety support to governments, councils, and land managers across the state. Key statistics from 2016/17 include:

- In 2016/17, ALSQ lifeguards combined to perform a remarkable 572,296 preventative actions, while treating 49,619 injured patients with first aid and directly saving the lives of 1,436 beachgoers; and
- The service is currently comprised of 72 permanent lifeguards, supported by an additional 338 casuals.

Collectively, their experience is invaluable in Queensland, with the team boasting a 1,518 years of lifeguarding experience and more than 1.5 million career patrol hours between them.

CASE STUDY: TROPICAL CYCLONE DEBBIE – SAVING LIVES, ON AND OFF THE BEACH

For almost a century, surf lifesavers have stood guard along Queensland’s coastline, watching over and protecting millions of beachgoers in the process. In March 2017, this extensive lifesaving experience was transferred to an urban setting when SLSQ was tasked to assist communities in the wake of Tropical Cyclone Debbie. With the state’s south east reeling from some of the worst flooding seen in years, ALSQ deployed assets and personnel to assist residents in some of the hardest-hit regions. Working directly with QPS and other emergency agencies, lifesavers navigated the challenging floodwater using inflatable boats to assist with search and rescue missions and welfare checks.

Meanwhile, as the cyclone bore down on north and central Queensland, SLSQ’s emergency response groups from Townsville through to Mackay were placed on standby with rescue equipment, first aid kits, and volunteers ready to respond if and when required. The Westpac Helicopter was also tasked to assist a male in his 50s who was stranded on the roof of his car in rising floodwaters near Laravale.

SLSQ also had significant engagement with emergency service agencies and Local Disaster Management Groups from Cairns through to the Gold Coast in the lead up to, during, and after Tropical Cyclone Debbie. On the front-line, lifesavers and lifeguards worked with councils to close affected beaches and keep swimmers out of the dangerous conditions. Importantly, this operation is further proof of SLSQ’s ability to provide a wider service to the community outside of our traditional role of keeping Queensland beachgoers safe. Through its 24/7 emergency response groups, which are now active and operating in all regions across the state, SLSQ remains on-call to assist communities with a range of incidents and disasters, both on and off the beach.
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Moving forward into 2017/18 and beyond, SLSQ has identified a number of key challenges and opportunities when it comes to reducing, and ultimately eliminating, drowning deaths and other fatalities at coastal and inland aquatic locations.

CHALLENGES

SLSQ has identified the following challenges when it comes to eliminating drowning deaths in all public waters across Queensland:

- An increased rate of low to poor swimming ability amongst school students aged five to 17 years old.
- An inconsistent and scattered approach to aquatic safety signage across Queensland, with some local governments and land managers opting to use internal style guides rather than nationally recognised standardised signage.
- A significant increase in the number of international migrants permanently relocating to Queensland, many of whom have limited experience in and around the ocean and other waterways.
- High visitation rates amongst Asian and other international tourists, many of whom have limited swimming ability and/or surf safety awareness.
- An increase in the number of rescues occurring outside of the flags, placing a strain on SLSQ’s existing resources at patrolled beaches.
- A lack of top-level consultation between SLSQ and other key agencies when it comes to collecting and monitoring aquatic safety data and key statistics.
- An inconsistent approach to aquatic safety amongst some tourism operators.
- A finite and limited pool of allocated funding to effectively advocate and manage drowning prevention strategies in Queensland.

OPPORTUNITIES

In addition, SLSQ has also identified the following opportunities to help protect residents and tourists across Queensland’s coastline and at inland aquatic locations:

- Work directly with key stakeholders to develop and implement mandatory school-based programs to help improve the swimming ability of Queensland residents.
- Continue to work closely with land managers to increase the use of appropriate and consistent aquatic safety signage at high-risk locations across Queensland.
- Build on SLSQ’s century of experience saving lives along Queensland’s coastline, and transfer this expertise to protecting swimmers at inland aquatic locations across the state. Further develop SLSQ’s suite of educational programs, designed to improve public knowledge and understanding of coastal and aquatic dangers.
- Build upon SLSQ’s 24/7 emergency response capacity in all key locations across the state.
- Increase communication, collaboration, and integration with key health agencies across Queensland in a bid to improve the accuracy of marine stinger and coastal safety data.
- Seek additional Government funding and support to ensure that SLSQ has the capacity and resources to continue saving lives and eliminating drowning deaths in all public waters in Queensland.

METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH, AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

METHODOLOGY

Contained within SLSQ’s 2017 Coast Safe Report is information and data obtained by SLSQ major incident notification forms, witness reports, media analysis, and Surf Life Saving Australia. Where possible, this information has been verified with National Coronial Information System (NCIS) data for coastal drowning deaths for the period 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017. While all care has been taken to ensure that statistical information included within this report is accurate as of the date of publication, it is important to note that data may be amended over time following the outcome of coronial investigations that are ongoing at the time of print.

CAPABILITY AND RESCUE ANALYSIS

SurfGuard, LIMSOC, the Incident Report Database (IRD), and SurfCom management system are web-based applications making up part of a suite of applications that enables members, clubs, branches and states to enter and access Surf Life Saving data. This data includes operational (including rescues, preventative actions and first aid treatments), capability (including assets and services), educational and administrative. Information extracted from SurfGuard can be used to identify how many rescues were performed by volunteers, Lifeguards and support services during the 2016/17 patrol season.

DROWNING DATA ANALYSIS

SLSQ collects data and information on key coastal incidents and fatalities from SurfGuard’s IRD, SurfCom, SLSA, the NCIS, and media reports. This information is verified and compiled for analysis by SLSQ’s Lifesaving Operations Department.

For the purpose of this report, SLSQ defines a beach-related coastal drowning death as any death caused directly by immersion or submersion that has occurred in a surf or beach environment within two nautical miles of shore.

DROWNING DATA LIMITATIONS

As part of the NCIS process, some cases are amended prior to their closure, resulting in changes to the classification of cases in our datasets. Therefore, the number of coastal drowning deaths published in this report may differ slightly from annual totals previously reported. It is noted that our current year’s data may change with closure of investigations. Once a closure occurs to NCIS cases, SLSQ can modify undetermined cases, those with unknown intent, and those where the cause of death is not drowning.

All deaths known to have occurred in coastal waters have been included as coastal drowning deaths, unless otherwise stated.

INDUSTRY EXPERTS

SLSQ continues to work with industry experts and external agencies when it comes to the collection and analysis of drowning and coastal data. SLSQ acknowledges the support of the following people and organisations:

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- The National Coronial Information System; and
- Coroners’ Court of Queensland.

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Advanced Reassurance Techniques - A certification providing the skills and knowledge required to use specialized equipment in the provision of reassurance, in line with the Australian Reassurance Council (ARC) guidelines.

ALSOQ - Australian Lifeguard Service Queensland.

Acoustic environment - Areas such as coastal and inland beaches and waterways, swimming pools and their facilities, and other bodies of water, slurry and other agricultural and industrial liquids storage.

Atmospheric avoidance - An effort to retrieve a person in distress and deliver them to a place of safety.


Bay - A body of water partially enclosed by land but with a wide mouth, affording access to the sea.

Beach - A beach is a wave-deposited accumulation of sediment – usually sand, but ranging in size up to boulders – deposited between the upper limit of wave action and the lower limit of wave base.

Beach-related coastal drowning death - A death by immersion or submersion that has occurred in a beach environment.

Blackspot - An area with a high concentration of coastal/ocean incidents and a high probability/risk of ongoing recurrence.

Boating - Individuals using either a powered vessel or sailing boat for pleasure and/ or fishing.

Coastal drowning death - Where the location of the drowning is on the coast, in the ocean further than 2NM offshore, but no further than 12NM (the Australian territorial waters limit) offshore.

Creek - A small or narrow inland opening to the coastline.

Crude drowning rate - Includes deaths which have not been categorised as a result of unreported drownings.

Creek - An inland body of water surrounded by land.

Day - A 24-hour period.

Drowning - The process of experiencing respiratory impairment from submersion/immersion in liquid; outcomes are classified as death, morbidity and/or near drowning.

Drowning death - A case where the body of the deceased is recovered.

Emergency response plan - A plan outlining the specific actions to be taken, as well as how, when, by whom and why during an emergency/ incident.

Falls - A large volume or small natural stream of flowing water into a creek or river.

Falls (trips/slip) - An event which results in a person coming to rest inadvertently on the ground or other lower level.

First aid - Assessments and interventions that can be performed by a bystander (or by the victim) with minimal or no medical equipment.

First aider - A person with formal training in first aid, emergency care, or medicine who provides first aid.

Foreign ethnicity - Individuals who identify with a cultural group other than Australian based on heritage, language or shared customs. This identification is extrapolated from reported data such as the individuals’ country of birth and the main language spoken at home.

Glossary - A list of terms and definitions used in a specific context.

Hazard - The source of potential harm.

Incident - Any unplanned event requiring lifesaving services intervention.

ILS - International Life-Saving Federation.

Inland - An area that is beyond the high waterline or within a landward distance of 5 times the width of the coastal inlet/river mouth and is an aquatic influenced environment located within land boundaries.

Inlet - A small or narrow inland opening to the coastline.

International - An individual who is confirmed to reside overseas and/or is a temporary visitor to Australia.

IRR - Inflatable rescue boat.

Irshore - A shoreline in the fringe of land at the edge of a large body of water.

Lake - An inland body of water surrounded round by land.

Leisure activity - An activity commenced on land such as play, walking, jogging or cycling.

Lifeguard - An individual that undertakes patrols at a beach or another aquatic environment. This is typically a salaried member, qualified in public safety and aquatic rescue.

Lifesaver - An individual who undertakes patrols at a beach or another aquatic environment. This is typically a non-salaried member, qualified in public safety and aquatic rescue.

Lifesaving - A coordinated group that exists to provide aquatic safety services to the public. This includes surf and life saving clubs, lifeguards, SurfCom, rescue water craft, rigid hull inflatable boats, jet rescue boats, offshore rescue boats, and helicopter and 4WD units.

LIMSOC - Lifesaving Incident Management System and Operations Centre.

Local Government Area (LGA) - Also known as local councils, LGAs include cities, towns, shires, municipalities or boroughs.

Marina - A basin/harbor for docking and other service for small craft.

NCIS - National Coronial Information System.

NM - Nautical miles.

Ocean drowning death - Where the location of the drowning is in the ocean further than 2NM offshore, but no further than 12NM.

Overflow - Beyond the surf zone.

Open ocean - The seaward, water and air space above the water between 2NM and 12NM (the Australian territorial waters limit) of shore.

Operations support - Rapid response rescue units, not affiliated to any specific surf life saving club.

ORB - Offshore rescue boat.

Other - An uncommon known activity not otherwise listed (e.g. paragliding, aircraft crash, fell from pier).

Patrol - Service undertaken to monitor activities in/around an aquatic environment and respond accordingly through either preventative actions or rescue operations.

Patrolled location - A location supervised by a lifesaving service.

Preventative action - Direct action taken to reduce or eliminate the probability of a specific rescue, first aid or other reportable incident from happening in the future. Note: A preventative action will be recorded as the singular action taken (i.e. clearing the water for lightning will be one action). The number of people warned/altered as a result of this action will be recorded separately as an awareness.

Prevention - Where intervention by a lifesaving resource averts a person/s from getting into a potentially life-threatening situation.

Public awareness - The process of informing and engaging the community as to the nature of the potential hazards and actions required to mitigate associated risk.

Public waters - Any freely-accessible waterway including, but not limited to, beaches, rivers, creeks, dams, lakes, lagoons and streams, this excludes commercial and private swimming pools, as well as household waters such as baths, tubs, sinks and backyard containers.

Rescue - Retrieving a person in distress, delivering them to a place of safety and the application of first aid and basic life support as may be required.

Rescue boats, offshore rescue boats, and helicopter and 4WD units.

Rip current - A rapid response rescue units, not affiliated to any specific surf life saving club.

Rock/cliff - A shoreline in the fringe of land at the edge of a large body of water.

Service gap - An area identified as having an inadequate level of resources to meet public safety demands.

Service season and hours - Vary between states due to climatic factors, but in the context of this report, the season is for the period July 2015 to June 2016.

SLSA - Surf Life Saving Australia.

SLSQ - Surf Life Saving Queensland.

SPOS - State Operations and Communications Centre.

Standard operating procedure - A set of directions detailing what actions could be taken, as well as how, when, by whom and why and the procedures for conducting certain activities.

Stream - A continuous flow of water.

Surf Life Saving Club - An SLS affiliated not-for-profit organisation which has volunteers members who provide coastal safety services to the community.

SurfCom - SLS radio communications centre which assists in managing the communications of lifesaving operations and data collection.

Territorial sea - The seaward limits of Australia’s maritime zones, from the coastline to 12NM from the low tide line.

Total Service Plan - An assessment of current and future lifesaving resources, trends, national blackspots and coastal safety issues combined with evidenced-based mitigation strategies to address these issues.

Undetermined - Cases that are not associated with a closed Coroner’s report on NCIS are often left ‘undetermined’ until an official cause of death has been determined. Some examples are cases where bodies have been found washed-up on the beach; reports of individuals struggling in coastal environments are made and the bodies are not found/missing persons reports are not made, or a suspected heart attack in a coastal environment rather than death due to immersion. These deaths will all be followed up on and the incident category updated once Coroner determinations are made accessible.

Unintentional water entry - Accidental entry into the water and/or entry into an aquatic environment that was not intended.

Unpatrolled location - An area that has no service, is not monitored or not patrolled.

Unpowered craft - A piece of non-powered recreational land or sporting equipment used in the surf and other aquatic environments including surfboards and boogie boards.

Wading - To walk through water while partially immersed.

Watercraft - A piece of non-powered recreational equipment used in the water. Examples include surfboards, stand-up paddle boards, boogie boards, windsurfers or kayaks.

WLRHS - Westpac Lifesaver Rescue Helicopter Service.