



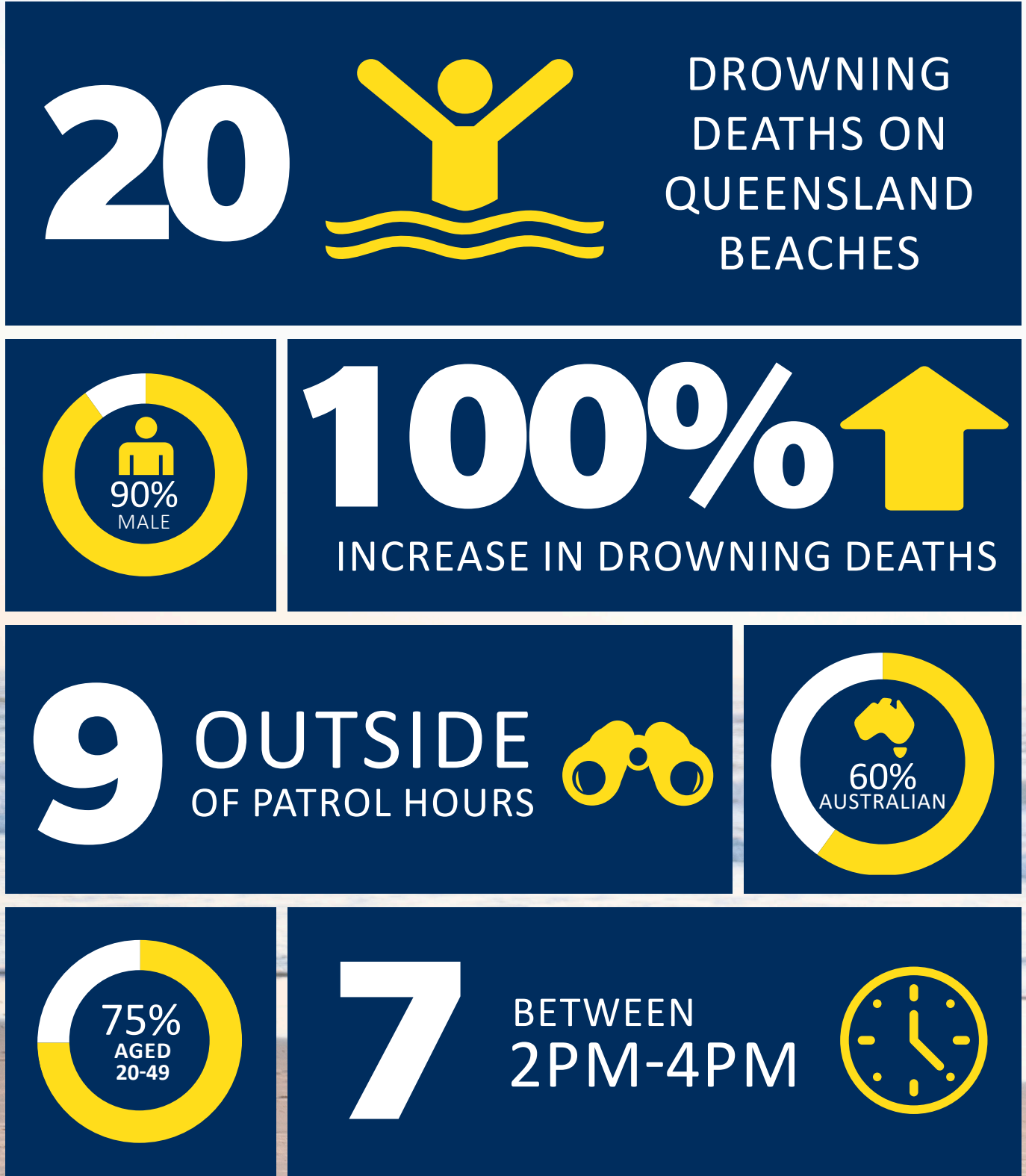
QUEENSLAND

# COAST SAFE REPORT 2021



# 2020/21 DROWNING SNAPSHOT

QUEENSLAND BEACHES



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All care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of statistical information included within this report, which has been measured between 1 July 2020 – 30 June 2021. However, it is important to note that data may be amended over time as new information comes to light and/or following the outcome of Coronial investigations that are ongoing at the time of publication.





# SURF LIFE SAVING QUEENSLAND'S

## STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-2025

### Who we are, what we do

We are 34,000+ volunteers in 57 clubs across six regions that save lives with vigilance and service.

We strive for zero preventable drowning deaths on Queensland public beaches. We have returned 149,650 loved ones to their families.

Across our 540 staff, we are; pilots and crew, administrators, lifeguards, trainers and educators, brand custodians and community advocates.

Surf Life Saving Queensland is built on tradition, forged out of passion and focused on the future.

### 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 surf lifesaving service provision, education, sport, beach safety advocacy and community leadership.

### Our Purpose

We aim to equip, develop, empower and support our people to deliver vital aquatic rescue and safety services to save lives across Queensland.

### Our Motto

Vigilance and Service

### 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 Queensland Fire and Emergency Service (QFES), grants, subsidies and service agreements.

### Our Primary Target

Domestic and international visitors to Queensland's beaches and waterways.





# 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 THE FUTURE

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

# OUR VALUES



## SAFETY

We will prioritise, and take responsibility for safety at all levels across the organisation, both on and off the beach.



## TRUST

We will work to ensure that trust and accountability are the cornerstones of our organisation; through open and honest communication, and by always delivering on our commitments.



## COMMUNITY

We will work to build safer, healthier, and stronger communities, underpinned by a commitment to continuous improvement in education and advocacy in relation to water safety.



## LEADERSHIP

As the peak body in coastal and aquatic safety, we will lead by example and foster a culture of empowerment, accountability, inclusivity and exceptional standards.



## RESPECT

We will treat each other with respect, value each other's contributions, and celebrate our people who strive for excellence.



## TEAMWORK

We will work collaboratively; combining our strengths, knowledge and beliefs in the best interests of the communities we serve.





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With domestic visitors flocking to Queensland beaches due to COVID-19 travel and border restrictions, Surf Life Saving Queensland's volunteer surf lifesavers and professional lifeguards had one of their most challenging seasons to date.

Over the 2020/21 season SLSQ services recorded an estimated 20.2 million visitors to Queensland beaches and performed 2,704 rescues, 717,431 preventative actions and 30,281 first aid treatments.

It is important to note 2020/21 saw multiple periods of hazardous surf conditions particularly during peak visitation periods, compared to the relatively calm surf conditions the year prior.

SLSQ patrols were stretched as beachgoers spread out across the coastline to avoid large crowds and practice social distancing during the pandemic. This resulted in services from patrolled areas having to respond to swimmers in difficulty in unpatrolled and isolated areas.

Sadly, there were 20 beach-related drowning deaths in 2020/21 in Queensland. This reflects a 100% increase when compared to 2019/20, making it the second worst year on record since SLSQ began tracking coastal data.

Majority of these drowning deaths were at unpatrolled locations and/or outside designated patrol hours.

The continued international border closures have resulted in Australian residents being the key demographic across beach-related drowning deaths and rescue statistics.

In addition, a further 24 people drowned at inland aquatic locations and other public waterways in 2020/21, a 14% decrease on last year's numbers.

As far as SLSQ is concerned, even one drowning death is one too many.

As we move forward into 2021/22, we remain committed to delivering a range of services, strategies and programs to increase aquatic safety for all.

The following 2021 Coast Safe Report provides a detailed overview of beach-related incidents, drowning deaths, and other coastal fatalities recorded over the past 12 months and 10 years.

Importantly, the data contained within this report will help SLSQ analyse long-term trends, identify high-risk beaches and demographic groups, and develop key surf safety initiatives to underpin our vision of 'Zero preventable deaths in Queensland public waters.'





# AUSTRALIAN WATER SAFETY STRATEGY

2030

SLSQ has embraced the Australian Water Safety Strategy for 2030 in relation to reducing drowning deaths. Over the coming years SLSQ will work to align key objectives with the priority and focus areas identified in the strategy.



## PEOPLE

Focusing on the issue of drowning in:

- ▶ Children (0- 4 years)
- ▶ Young males (15 – 29 years)
- ▶ Older people (65+ years)



## PLACES

Focusing on the issue of drowning at:

- ▶ Beaches, ocean and rocks
- ▶ Rivers and lakes
- ▶ Aquatic facilities



## ACTIVITIES

Focusing on the issue of drowning during:

- ▶ Boating and watercraft
- ▶ Fishing and rock fishing
- ▶ Diving and snorkelling



## RISK FACTORS

Focusing on the issue of drowning related to:

- ▶ Swimming and water safety skills
- ▶ Alcohol and drugs
- ▶ Risk taking



## POPULATIONS

Focusing on the issue of drowning in:

- ▶ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- ▶ Multicultural communities
- ▶ Regional and remote communities





# 1 COASTAL AND AQUATIC SAFETY SNAPSHOT

## RESCUES

### YEAR IN REVIEW

Surf Life Saving Queensland surf lifesavers and paid lifeguards were busy throughout 2020/21 with approximately 20.2 million people visiting Queensland beaches during this time.

During this period SLSQ services directly rescued 2,704 people in distress, performed 717,431 preventative actions and 30,281 first aid treatments. This reflects a 6% increase in rescues and a 9% increase in preventative actions compared to 2019/20.

It is important to note 2020/21 saw multiple periods of hazardous surf conditions particularly during peak visitation periods, compared to relatively calm surf conditions the year prior.

**The most concerning aspect of the 2020/21 research data is the high number of people (88%) being rescued outside of the flags. Of those people, 83% were Australian.**

A breakdown of rescue data from the past 12 months has been provided below:

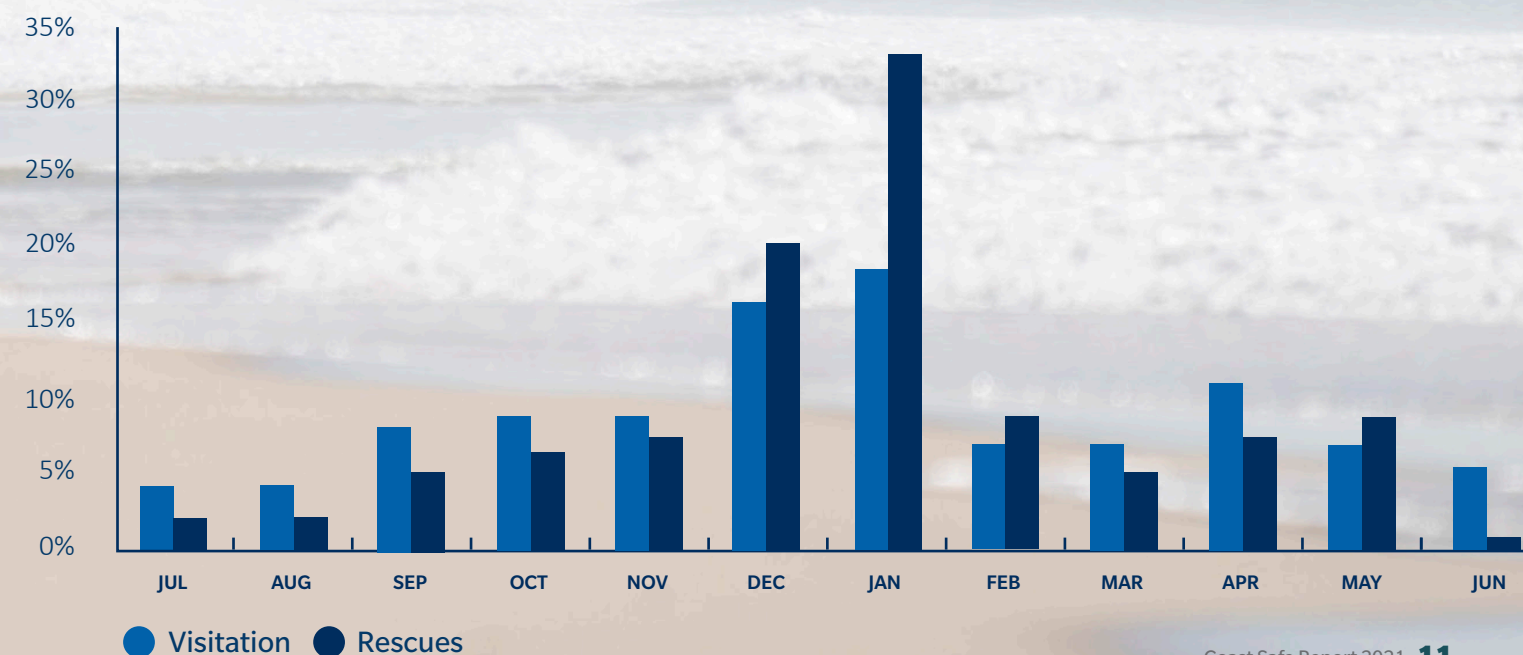
- 88% of all rescues were performed outside of the red and yellow flags, a decrease of 1% from the previous year.
- The average age of people rescued was 24 years.
- 83% of the people rescued in 2020/21 were Australian residents.
- 57% of all patients rescued were male, 43% female.
- 53% of the year's rescues were performed in December and January.
- Rescue Water Craft (jet skis) were used for 38% of rescues, followed by rescue board (37%), rescue tube (14%) and IRB (5%).

Location of Rescues 2020/21



● Outside Flags ● Inside Flags

Visitations vs Rescues (% DIST) 2020/21





# BEACH-RELATED DROWNING DEATHS

## 12 MONTH REVIEW

During the 2020/21 season there were 20 drowning deaths recorded on Queensland beaches, a 100% increase on the 2019/20 numbers, making it the second worst year on record since SLSQ began tracking coastal and drowning data.

Throughout the past two seasons we have seen males over the age of 50 highly represented in drowning figures. However, in the 2020/21 season there was a shift in the age demographic trend to younger males, with 75% of victims being aged between 20 to 49.

The average age of drowning victims in 2020/21 was 40 years, down from 50 years in 2019/20.

There was a significant shift in the residency of victims, with 18 victims an Australian resident and two unknown.

Alarmingly, nine drowning deaths occurred outside designated patrol hours. This is the highest number of drowning deaths outside of patrol hours (normally 8am – 5pm) on record.

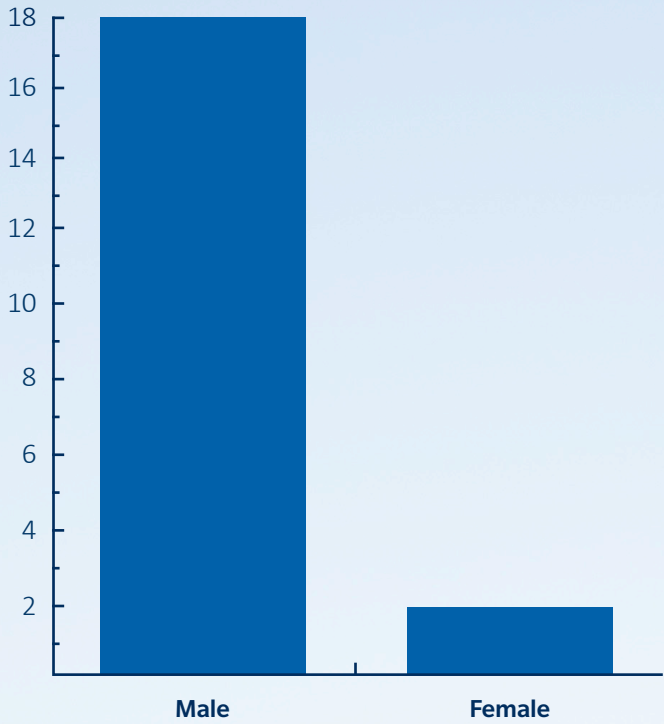
There was at least one drowning death recorded in each month of the year, with the most common period being the summer months which recorded seven drowning deaths.

In terms of regions across Queensland, the Gold Coast recorded the highest number of drowning deaths and quadrupled last year’s numbers with eight victims during the 2020/21 season. They were closely followed by the Sunshine Coast with seven victims, which is the highest number of drowning deaths recorded for the region in the past 10 years. This was followed by North Queensland (2), Wide Bay (2) and Brisbane region (1).

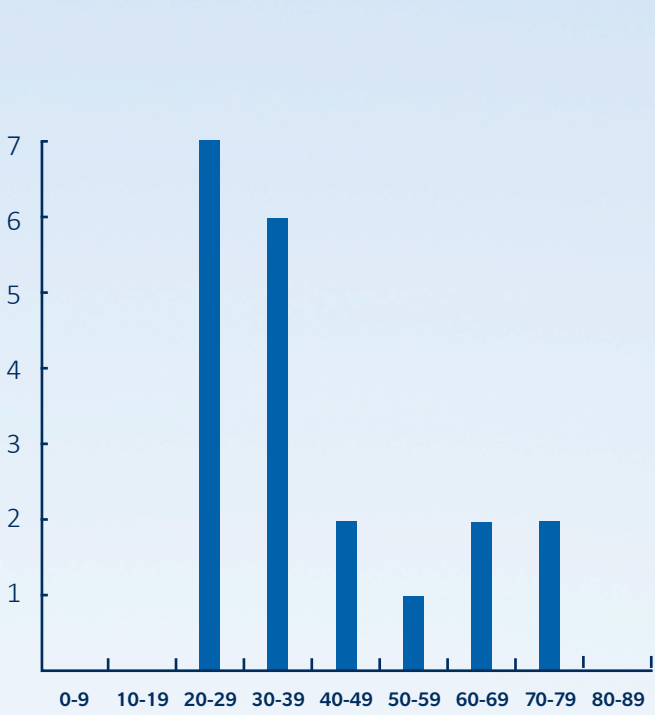
Eight councils across Queensland recorded a drowning death at a beach in 2020/21. There were eight recorded in the Gold Coast City Council, while Sunshine Coast Council and Great Sandy National Park each recorded three drowning deaths. Cairns Regional Council recorded two drowning deaths. Noosa Shire Council, Redland City Council, Bundaberg Regional Council and Gladstone Regional Council all recorded one drowning death each.

- A further breakdown of the 2020/21 data has been provided below:
- Males accounted for 90% of drowning deaths, reaffirming their position as a ‘high-risk’ demographic.
  - Australian residents accounted for 18 of the 20 drowning deaths.
  - The average age of victims was 40 years, with 75% of victims aged between 20 to 49.
  - 45% of drowning deaths occurred outside patrol hours, a 6% increase on 2019/20.
  - Thirteen victims (65%) were swimming; two were riding a craft and two were attempting to perform a rescue. Craft includes, but is not limited to, surf boards, boogie boards, and stand-up paddle boards.
  - Seven drowning deaths were recorded across the summer months of December, January and February. There were five recorded in both Autumn and Spring. Three were recorded during the winter months.
  - The most common day of the week for a drowning death to occur was Saturday with six deaths in 2020/21. This was followed by Sunday (5), Monday (3), Wednesday (2), Thursday (2) and Friday (2).

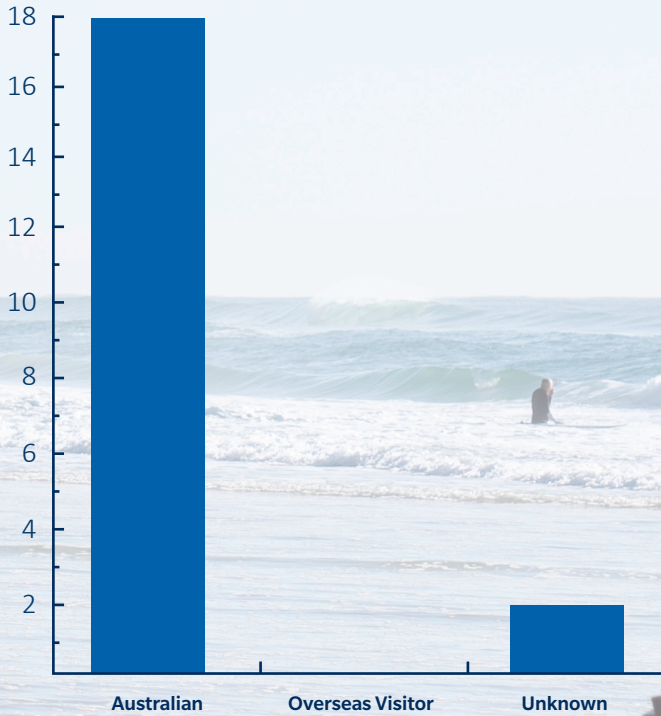
Gender 2020/21



Age 2020/21



Nationality 2020/21





# BEACH-RELATED DROWNING DEATHS

## TEN YEAR REVIEW

This part of the report draws on data recorded from 1 July 2011 through to 30 June 2021 and will provide a 10-year snapshot of beach-related drowning deaths.

Since 1 July 2011 there have been 116 drowning deaths recorded on Queensland beaches. The 2018/19 season recorded more drowning deaths than any other year in the past decade, with 21 lives lost.

There was another spike in drowning deaths during 2020/21 with 20 drowning deaths recorded, making it the second highest yearly total on record.

Males continue to be overrepresented in drowning statistics for the past 10 years, with 83% of all victim's male.

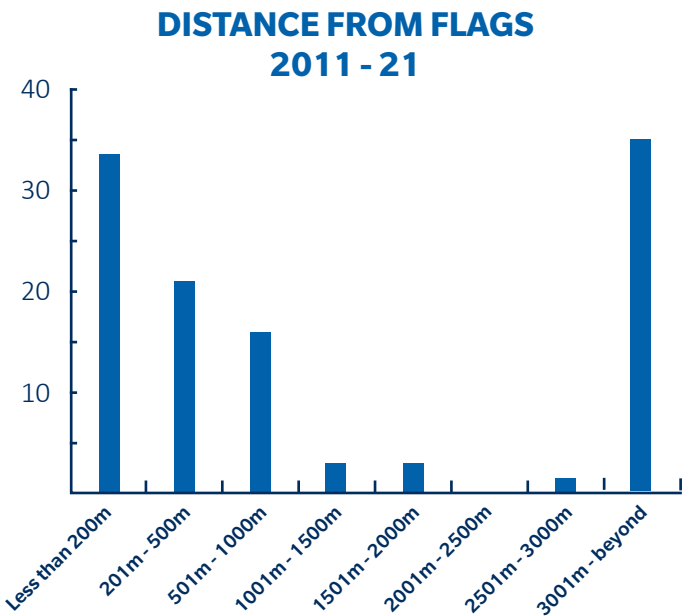
The 50 – 59 age demographic had the highest number of drowning deaths recording 22 deaths in the past 10 years. This was followed by people between 30 – 39 (21), 20-29 years (19) and 60 – 69 years (16).

Australian residents represent 66% of the drowning deaths over the past ten years, with 28% overseas visitors and 5% unknown.

The Sunshine Coast was the most common region for drowning deaths over the past 10 years, recording 37. This is followed by the Gold Coast (35), North Queensland (20), Wide Bay (13), greater Brisbane (9) and North Barrier (2).

A further breakdown of beach-related drowning deaths data from past ten years has been provided below:

- Approximately 47% drowning victims were aged between 20 – 49 years; 33% between 50 – 69 years; 13% between 70 – 89 years and 8% between 0 – 19 years.
- A total of 62 victims were actively swimming just prior to drowning. Meanwhile, 18% were engaged in riding a craft (including surf boards, paddleboards or body boards) and a further 11% were snorkelling.
- 30% of all drowning deaths occurred more than three kilometres away from the nearest patrol service. A further 29% of all drowning deaths occurred within 200 metres of a patrol service or where one would have been during patrol hours.
- Approximately 56% of all drowning deaths occurred within standard patrol times (8am – 5pm). By comparison, 37% occurred after hours, while the exact time of eight drowning deaths remains unknown.
- Over the past 10 years, 36% of drowning deaths occurred in the peak summer season, followed by autumn with 30%, then spring with 22% and winter with 12%.
- March was the deadliest month over the past 10 years recording 16% of deaths.
- Saturday was the most common day of the week for a drowning to be recorded with 23 taking place over the past 10 years. This was closely followed by Sunday (20), Wednesday (18), Tuesday (15), Thursday (15), Monday (13) and Friday (12).
- In total, 44 (38%) drowning deaths occurred on a weekend
- Outside of Australian residents, the most common nationalities of drowning victims were Chinese (6), American (4), Japanese (3), British (3), New Zealander (3), Indian (3), Filipino (3) and Ukrainian (3).



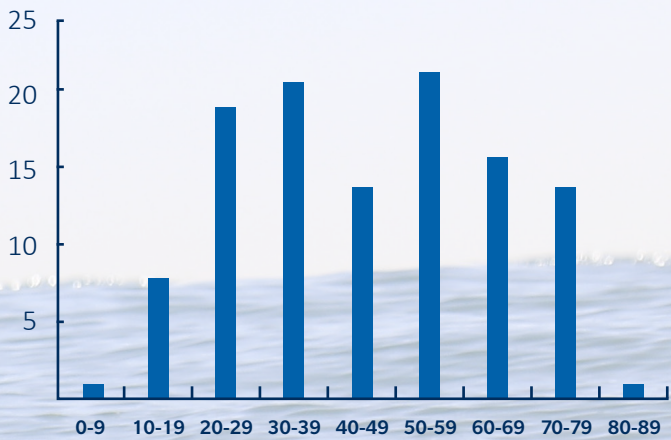
Total Beach-Related Drowning Deaths By Year 2011 - 2021



Councils 2011 - 2021

COUNCIL	10 YEAR TOTAL
City of Gold Coast	35
Sunshine Coast Council	18
Cairns Regional Council	16
Noosa Shire Council	12
Redland City Council	7
Great Sandy National Park	6
Bundaberg Regional Council	3
Gladstone Regional Council	
Moreton Bay Regional Council	
Fraser Coast Regional Council	2
Livingstone Shire Council	
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park	1
Whitsunday Regional Council	
Sarina Regional Council	
Shire of Douglas	
Townsville City Council	
Department of National Parks	
Shire of Torres	
Mornington Shire Council	

Age 2011 - 2021



Locations 2011-2021 (Top 4)

LOCATION		DROWNING DEATHS
Cairns	Green Island	6
Gold Coast	Surfers Paradise	6
	Southport Spit	5
Great Sandy National Park	Teewah Beach	5



# INLAND DROWNING DEATHS

## FIVE-YEAR REVIEW

In addition to beaches, Surf Life Saving Queensland analyses drowning deaths at inland waterways, including but not limited to, rivers, dams, lakes, creeks, bays and swimming holes.

This section of the report draws on data recorded from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2021. Please note the following data does not include public and private pools or beach drowning deaths. \*

Over the past five years there have been 126 drowning deaths at inland waterways across Queensland, at an average of 25 per year. The highest annual total over the past five years was the 2018/19 season with 33 drowning deaths.

Rivers were the most common aquatic environment with 32% of inland drowning deaths taking place there. This was followed by falls/gorges (17%), creeks (14%) and lakes (8%).

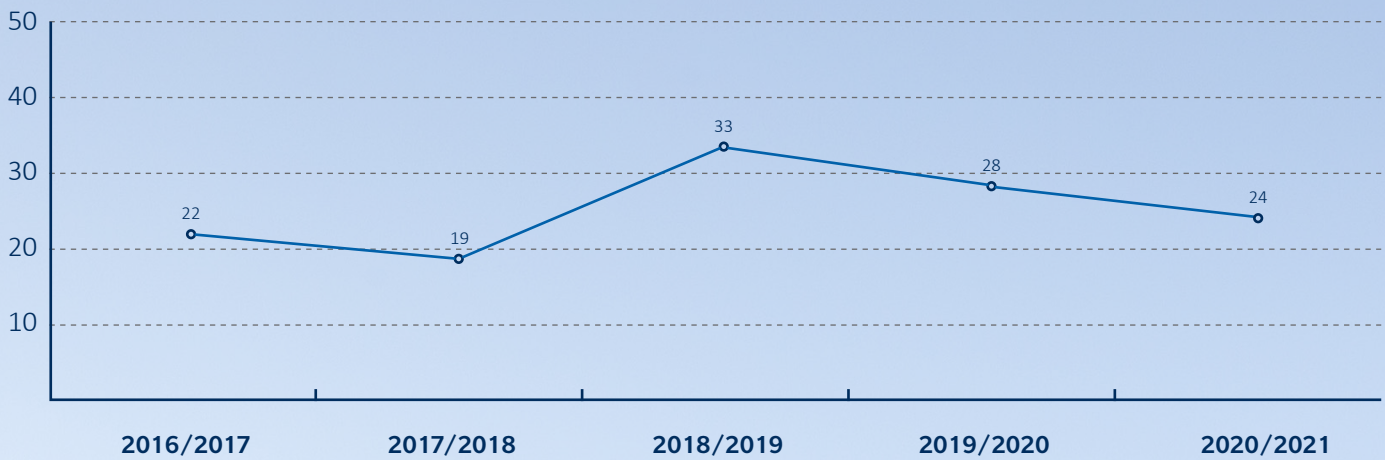
In terms of council locations, City of Gold Coast recorded the highest amount of inland drowning deaths with 22 over the past five years. This is followed by Cairns Regional Council (19), Townsville City Council (13) and Brisbane City Council (11).

Similarly, to beach-related drowning deaths, males were highly represented with 86% of victim's male, while only 14% were female. The most common age group was 60 – 69 years with 17%, followed by 20 – 29 years (15%) and 30 – 39 years (13%).

A further breakdown of inland drowning data over the past five years has been provided below:

- 45% of the victims were Australian, 13% were international and 42% are unknown.
- The type of activity being undertaken prior to their death was also recorded, where known. In total, 25 people were swimming or wading, while 17 drowning deaths were due to unintentional entry (falls) into the water.
- In total, 56% of victims were aged under 50, while 37% were aged 50 or older. The victim's age was unconfirmed in nine cases.
- 38% of all inland drowning deaths over the past five years have taken place during the summer months.
- The most common days for inland drowning deaths over the past five years were Sunday (25), Tuesday (19) and Saturday (18) in total 34% of drowning deaths occurred on a weekend.

Drowning Deaths By Year 2016 - 2021



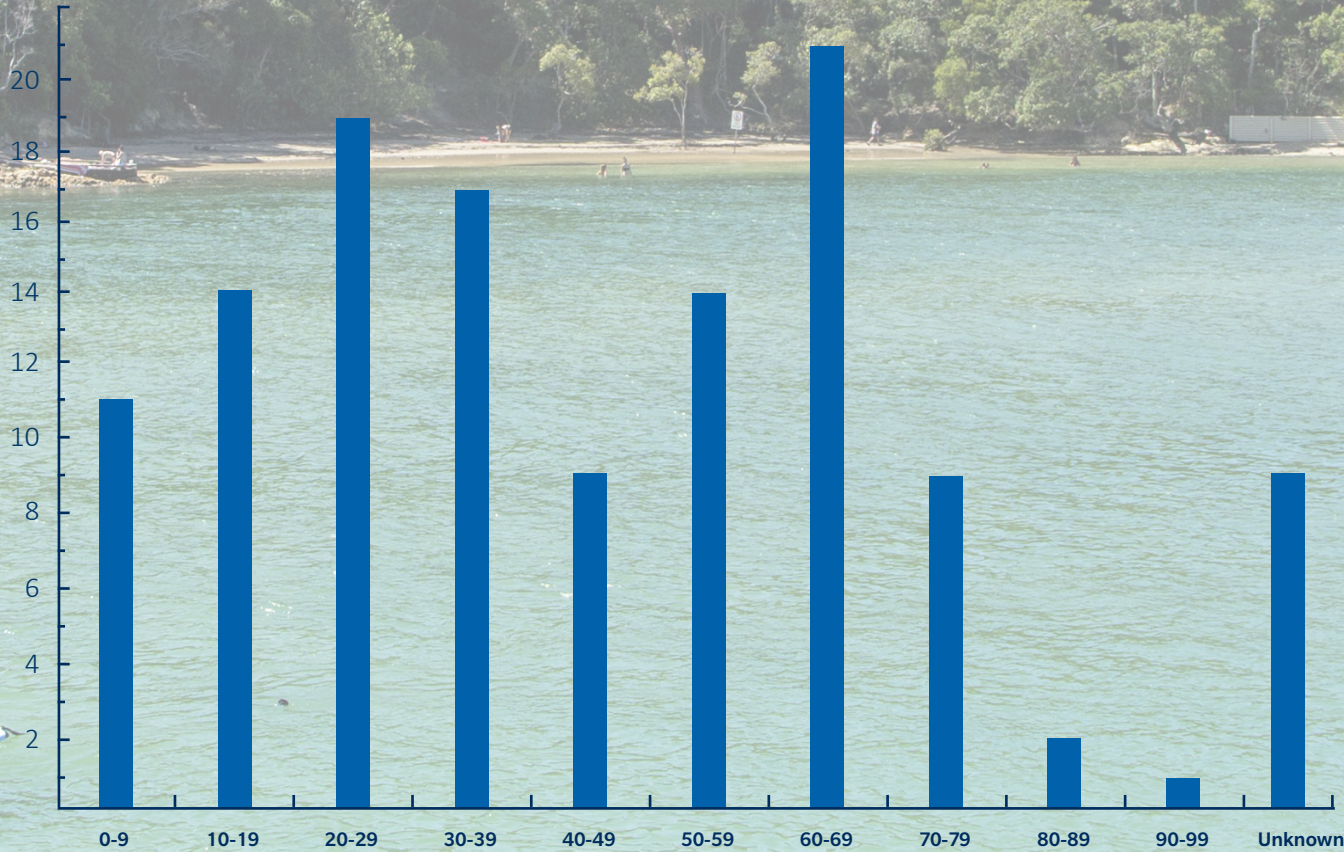
Councils 2016 - 2021 (Top 5)

Council	5 Year Total
City of Gold Coast	22
Cairns Regional Council	19
Townsville City Council	13
Brisbane City Council	11
Scenic Rim Council	6

Locations 2016 - 2021 (Top 4)

Location / Beach	5 Year Total
Brisbane River Sector 2	7
Ross River (Townsville)	5
Nerang River	4
Tully River	4

Age 2016 - 2021



\*It is important to note this data excludes drowning deaths at beaches and in public or private pools, but includes all other confirmed cases of drowning deaths which have occurred in Queensland waterways as determined by the Coroner's Office at the time of print.



# DANGEROUS MARINE CREATURES

In addition to tracking coastal and inland drowning deaths, SLSQ also monitors and analyses other key incidents along Queensland’s coastline, including crocodile and shark bites, and incidents involving marine stingers.

## Irukandji

There were at least six Irukandji stings across North Queensland in 2020/21, a decrease of 17 from the year before.

### Irukandji Stings Five Year Overview 2016-2021\*

YEAR	STINGS
2016/17	10
2017/18	9
2018/19	6
2019/20	23
2020/21	6

\*This data relates to stings recorded within SLSQ’s North Queensland and North Barrier Branches, spanning an area from Sarina through to Far North Queensland.

## Bluebottles

There was a significant decrease in the number of bluebottle stings recorded this season.

In total, 9,470 beachgoers were treated for bluebottle stings in 2020/21, representing a 55% decrease when compared to 21,237 stings the year before.

This decrease is most likely due to the weather conditions.

## Crocodiles

In 2020/21 there were three confirmed crocodile attacks in North Queensland, including one fatality at Hinchinbrook Island. This is the first fatality due to a crocodile bite since 2017.

During the 2020/21 season there were 15 confirmed crocodile sightings.

### Crocodile Bites Five Year Overview 2016-2021

YEAR	LOCATION	FATAL/NON FATAL
2017	Johnston River Innisfail	Non-fatal
2017	Palmer Point Innisfail	Fatal
2017	Cape Tribulation Beach	Non-fatal
2017	Craiglie Creek in Craiglie	Fatal
2018	Nagir Island (Torres Strait)	Non-fatal
2019	Captain Billys Landing, Cape York Peninsula	Non-fatal
2020	Lizard Island	Non-fatal
2021	Lake Placid, Cairns Regional Council	Non-fatal
2021	Vyces swimming hole	Non-fatal
2021	Hinchinbrook Island	Fatal

## Sharks

There were six confirmed shark bites recorded across Queensland in 2020/21, up from five the season before.

This included one fatality recorded at Indian Head, Fraser Island. A second fatality was recorded at Greenmount Beach, Gold Coast. Prior to this, the most recent shark-related fatality in Gold Coast waters occurred in 1958.

Overall throughout the season there were 165 confirmed sightings, a significant increase of 146% compared to the season prior. However, this was due to the introduction of drone aerial surveillance patrols which aimed to detect sharks. Majority of sightings did not pose a threat to swimmers, however there were seven beach closures due to shark sightings.

### Shark Bites Five Year Overview 2016 - 2021

YEAR	LOCATION	FATAL/ NON FATAL
2016/17	Whitehaven Beach, Whitsunday Island	Injured
	Kings Beach, Sunshine Coast	Injured
	Lockhart River	Uninjured
	Northern Tip Of Cape York (Unknown Location)	Uninjured
	Flaggy Rock	Injured
	Murry Island, Torres Strait, (80km East)	Injured
	Hinchinbrook Island	Injured
	North Qld Coast- Weipa	Uninjured
	Moreton Bay Off Redcliffe	Uninjured
	Hinchinbrook Island	Injured
2017/18	Alma Bay	Injured
	Lizard Island	Injured
	Cid Harbour, Whitsunday Islands	Injured
2018/19	Cid Harbour, Whitsunday Islands	Injured
	Swains Reef, Yeppoon Coast	Injured
	Cid Harbour, Whitsunday Islands	Fatal
	1km off shore, East of Moffat Beach	Uninjured
	Block Reef (Near Hardy Reef), Whitsunday Islands	Injured
	Catseye Beach	Injured
	Catseye Beach	Unknown
	Yandaran (North Of Bundaberg)	Injured
	Bells Esplanade, Pelican Waters, Sunshine Coast	Injured
	Magra Inlet (Cape Granville)	Injured
2019/20	Reef Near Hook Passage, Whitsunday Island	Injured
	Reef Near Hook Passage, Whitsunday Island	Injured
	North West Island, Gladstone	Fatal
	Indian Head, Fraser Island	Fatal
2020/21	Fitzroy Island	Injured
	Wutulla, Sunshine Coast	Injured
	Grrenmount Beach, Coolangatta	Fatal
	Fraser Island	Injured
	Britomart Reef, Townsville	Injured

Disclaimer: It is important to note this publication only reports on marine stings and shark/crocodile incidents that were treated by SLSQ’s surf lifesavers or lifeguards, reported to SLSQ, or otherwise confirmed by SLSQ in consultation with external agencies.



# 2 DROWNING PREVENTION STRATEGIES

## KEY INITIATIVES

2020/21

Each year SLSQ collates and analyses data related to drowning deaths, rescues, and other key incidents along Queensland's coastline. This helps the organisation identify any emerging trends, along with any particular 'high-risk' locations and/or demographics which may need a more targeted approach to surf safety.

Following an extensive review of coastal and aquatic safety data from the 2019/20 season, SLSQ identified the following areas of concern:

- A continued over-representation of men aged over 50 in beach-related drowning deaths;
- A concerning number of people being rescued swimming outside the flags;
- A concerning number of Australians being rescued;
- International tourists, migrants and refugees accounting for almost half of all drowning deaths in 2019/20; and
- Nearly 50% of beach coastal drowning deaths taking place on islands.



In 2020/21, SLSQ introduced the following initiatives in a bid to address these areas of concern.

OBJECTIVE	STRATEGIES
Reduce beach-related drowning deaths amongst males aged 50+.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Develop and deliver a state-wide campaign that speaks directly to men over the age of 50. SLSQ will seek to engage a high-profile person in this age demographic who will encourage men to put their safety first and swim between the flags during patrol hours.</li><li>The campaign will directly target men who become complacent and think “she’ll be right” when swimming alone, outside of flagged areas or before and after patrol hours.</li><li>Work closely with key stakeholders, industry groups and relevant health organisations to encourage men over the age of 50 to have regular medical check-ups.</li><li>Increase surf safety awareness for older demographics by conducting educational sessions at caravan and camping shows, gyms and retirement villages.</li><li>Conduct a water safety seniors’ program at retirement villages across Queensland.</li><li>Continue to roll-out key surf lifesaving initiatives including dawn and dusk patrols at key beaches, extended patrol services during peak periods, roving patrols and SLSQ after-hours emergency response groups.</li></ul>
Increase surf safety and beach awareness for Australians.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Develop and deliver a state-wide campaign with general messaging that speaks directly to Australians. The campaign will encourage Australians not to be complacent when swimming.</li><li>Water safety education for children and people in rural areas through SLSQ’s Beach to Bush Program.</li><li>Conduct a signage audit on ‘at risk’ islands.</li><li>Ensure existing infrastructure and facilities, including lifeguard towers and flag stands, communicate key beach safety messaging.</li><li>Continue to roll out key surf lifesaving initiatives including dawn and dusk patrols at key beaches, extended patrol services during peak periods, roving patrols and SLSQ after-hours emergency response groups.</li><li>Continue to build upon key community awareness programs, including but not limited to, On The Same Wave, Surf Crew, Beach Safe Schools and Inland Waterways Programs.</li></ul>
Support the Tourism Queensland’s “Good to go” campaign by providing beach safety awareness to visitors and people from diverse backgrounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Work with Tourism Queensland, Queensland Tourism Industry Council, accommodation providers and travel networks in delivering key beach and waterway safety messages to visitors.</li><li>Provide updated video safety messaging to popular tourist destinations, in particular islands.</li><li>Provide updated signage and beach safety information at all Queensland airports.</li><li>Continue the International Water Skills Assessment within Queensland schools, equipping students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds with the skillset and knowledge to protect themselves within aquatic environments.</li></ul>

# CASE STUDY

## SURF LIFE SAVING QUEENSLAND'S SUMMER SAFETY CAMPAIGN



During the 2019/20 season, 10 people lost their lives on Queensland beaches, of those who drowned 70% were males over 50 and half were Australians.

The Summer Safety Campaign was designed to address two key initiatives. Firstly, to reduce beach-related drowning deaths amongst males aged 50+ and secondly to increase general beach safety and awareness to Australians.

Australians have a reputation for having an easy-going, relaxed attitude to life. Surf Life Saving Queensland wanted to change the attitude around swimming between the flags for this demographic. Given the target audience was older Australian males SLSQ changed from directional to more conversational language – talking to them, not at them.

This is where the campaign tag line “She’ll be right, won’t save your life” came from. “She’ll be right” is a common saying in Australian culture when we’re not 100% sure on something but back ourselves anyway. SLSQ’s message emphasises that this is the wrong attitude to have, especially when it comes to keeping ourselves safe at the beach.

Wally Lewis, one of Queensland and Australia’s most respected television personalities, became the face of the campaign. In addition to Wally, SLSQ partnered with Queensland Rugby League, with Maroon Legends Trevor Gillmeister, Gorden Tallis and Kevin Walters joining Wally in all campaign collateral.

Advertising occurred through television, radio, print, digital media and outdoor advertising. There was a second layer to the digital campaign where the audience who had seen the initial safety video were retargeted with a digital competition. The entry form was hosted on SLSQ’s campaign website.

Entrants needed to answer safety questions in order to be in the running to win. This meant they were more likely to retain the safety information by engaging with the competition. Additionally, we received their data, which meant we are able to communicate vital safety messaging to them in the future. Furthermore, the questions focused on the audience’s behaviours when visiting the beach which will assist us in future campaigns.

The timing was perfect for this campaign, as SLSQ was able to leverage State of Origin momentum over the summer months, as the State of Origin season was postponed to November 2020 due to COVID-19.

Overall, the campaign had 110 million impressions.



# CASE STUDY

## SWIMMING AT REMOTE AND ISOLATED BEACHES

Throughout the 2020/21 season there have been multiple incidents at remote and isolated beaches on the Queensland coastline.

Sadly, despite the best efforts of volunteer surf lifesavers and paid lifeguards to respond to emergencies in unpatrolled areas there were five drowning deaths more than 3km from the nearest patrol.

Throughout the Easter school holiday period, in partnership with the Department of Environment and Science, Surf Life Saving Queensland were able to educate campers visiting coastal recreational areas on the dangers of entering the water in remote and unpatrolled locations.

Key safety messaging was communicated to campers through text messages, emails and flyers. Additionally, SLSQ were able to issue dangerous surf condition warnings to campers as required.

Furthermore, we continued to conduct roving patrols in known 'at risk' locations including from Noosa North Shore to Double Island Point.

The SLSQ Surf Crew Promotional Vehicle also continued to engage with visitors at unpatrolled beaches and warn them of the dangers. Moving forward SLSQ will continue to roll-out educational initiatives to raise awareness about the dangers of entering the water at unpatrolled locations.

# CASE STUDY

## WATER SAFE SENIORS PROGRAM

In the 2020/21 season Surf Life Saving Queensland's Community Awareness team implemented a new Water Safe Seniors program for those aged over 50. This was a direct result of the high drowning statistics seen in the 50+ demographic in the 2020 Coast Safe Report.

The program is designed to increase knowledge of local beaches while also greatly improving confidence in managing beach conditions and emergency situations.

Participants are trained by qualified surf lifesavers to identify rips and read the surf conditions, they also participate in a range of rescue scenarios including

an introduction to CPR. The program is concluded with a social morning tea to allow the participants to ask questions and connect with other community members.

After a successful trial on the Sunshine Coast, the program will now be expanded across Queensland.

*"Thank you to Surf Life Saving for this inaugural safety-on-the-beach workshop at Noosa Main Beach. The workshop presented a great opportunity to participate in practical lifesaving activities in and out of the water." – Frank*



# CASE STUDY

## CHILDREN SUPERVISION

A total of 508 children aged 12 and under were rescued by Surf Life Saving Queensland services during the 2020/21 season.

The most common activities being undertaken were swimming (409) and bodyboarding (51).

Concerningly, 75% were rescued while outside the flagged area.

In the lead up to the Christmas school holidays SLSQ identified this demographic as a concern given the large number of families who were expected to visit

beaches throughout December and January.

As a result of this identification a strong focus was placed on promoting the importance of direct supervision of children near all waterways.

The key message was communicated across social media and through a joint media opportunity with the Queensland Family and Child Commission.

Moving forward, SLSQ continues to place a strong emphasis on this messaging leading into and during all school holidays to reduce incidents involving young children.

508 CHILDREN AGED 12 AND UNDER  
RESCUED





# KEY INITIATIVES

2021/22

Following an extensive review of coastal and aquatic safety data from across the past 12 months, SLSQ has identified the following areas of concern:

- A continued over-representation of men in beach-related drowning deaths, particularly those aged between 20- 49;
- A concerning number of people being rescued swimming outside of the flags
- A concerning number of Australians being rescued
- Australian residents accounting for almost all drowning victims in 2020/21

In 2021/22, SLSQ will seek to introduce the following initiatives to help reduce drowning deaths at identified blackspot locations

OBJECTIVE	STRATEGIES
Continue to reduce beach-related drowning deaths amongst males aged over 50, with an additional key focus on younger males aged between 20 – 49.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop and deliver a state-wide campaign that speaks directly to men. SLSQ will seek to engage a high-profile person who will encourage men to put their safety first and swim between the flags during patrol hours. The campaign will directly target men who think “she’ll be right” when swimming alone, outside of flagged areas or before and after patrol hours.</li><li>• Work closely with key stakeholders, industry and tourist groups, local government and relevant organisations.</li><li>• Continue to deliver our Water Safe Seniors (over 50’s) program which is designed to increase the knowledge of local beaches while improving confidence in managing beach conditions and emergency situations.</li><li>• Continue to roll out key services including dawn and dusk patrols on the Gold coast and roving patrols between Noosa North Shore and Double Island Point during peak periods, with the potential capability to extend patrol times.</li><li>• Engage with Year 12 school leavers to educate them on the statistics relating to their age demographic and the risks of swimming under the influence of alcohol.</li></ul>
Continue to increase surf safety and beach awareness for Australians.  60% of those who drowned at a coastal beach location in 2020/21 were Australian.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop and deliver a state-wide campaign with general messaging that speaks directly to Australians. The campaign will encourage Australians not to be complacent when swimming.</li><li>• Monitor isolated and long stretches of beaches, islands and access points to gain a greater coverage of roving and surveillance patrols.</li><li>• Conduct signage audits at key and ‘at risk’ locations, working closely with stakeholders to implement audit recommendations to ensure Australian Standard Signage is utilised.</li><li>• Increase our Community Awareness programs to ‘at risk’ locations where people may choose to holiday.</li><li>• Deliver a Coast to Cape program encompassing practical skills and accredited training to remote and regional North Queensland Indigenous and Torres Strait Island communities to leave a lasting impact in the region.</li><li>• Continue to utilise the SLSQ Surf Crew Promotional Car to build awareness at Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast beaches throughout summer. This initiative is tailored towards beachgoers who may not be familiar with Queensland costal conditions and are more at risk of drowning or sustaining an injury at the beach.</li></ul>
Establish foundations to conduct long term research to understand public knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours towards visiting a Queensland beach or waterway.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify and engage a partner research company. In consultation with the partner agency identify research objectives and methodologies.</li><li>• Conduct a detailed analysis of the initial results.</li><li>• Utilise analysis to support the development of future messaging campaigns targeted towards increasing safety as a factor in decision making around beach visitation and behaviours.</li><li>• Utilise findings to review the future service plan priorities to ensure effective implementation of services/response strategies in blackspot areas.</li><li>• Embed research as regular process to gauge the effectiveness of various strategies in impacting behaviour at beaches.</li></ul>



# 3 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Ahead of the upcoming 2021/22 season, 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

- Increased costs of patrolling Queensland beaches;
- SLSQ and the 57 clubs, including their supporters' clubs, have experienced severe financial difficulties due to COVID-19. This could continue to impact the purchasing power of critical lifesaving equipment;
- Overconfidence and/ or complacency amongst Australians when it comes to beach safety, resulting in a high number of drowning deaths and rescues;
- Due to COVID-19 people are spreading themselves across the coastline to avoid crowds which results in more people swimming in isolated and unpatrolled areas;
- An ongoing concern regarding the high number of rescues being performed outside flagged areas which places a strain on SLSQ's resources at patrolled beaches;
- An alarming increase in the number of incidents and drowning deaths occurring outside patrol hours;
- A number of councils across Queensland opting not to endorse standard recommendations regarding safety signage, emergency beacons, cameras, and drone operations;
- An inconsistent approach to aquatic safety amongst some tourism operators; and
- Demands on SLSQ surf lifesavers and lifeguards.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Continue to work with the Government to ensure SLSQ has the capacity and resources to continue saving lives and eliminating drowning deaths in Queensland public waters;
- Reinforce key surf safety messaging, including swimming between the red and yellow flags, to Queenslanders;
- Educate beachgoers on the dangers of swimming in remote and unpatrolled areas by building relationships with Tourism Queensland, Queensland Parks and Wildlife and other industry bodies and operators;
- Expand SLSQ's reach at unpatrolled and high-risk beaches through roving services and the use of coastal cameras and emergency beacons;
- Continue to work closely with councils to increase the use of appropriate and consistent aquatic safety signage at high-risk locations across Queensland;
- Work directly with key stakeholders to develop and implement mandatory school-based programs, designed to help improve the swimming ability of Queensland residents;
- Further develop SLSQ's suite of educational programs, designed to improve public knowledge and understanding of coastal and aquatic dangers; and
- Work closely with key stakeholders and partners to promote safe swimming behaviours amongst identified high-risk groups and demographics.





# METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## Methodology

Contained within the Coast Safe Report 2021 is information and data obtained by SLSQ's major incident notification forms, as well as 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 2020 to 30 June 2021.

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.

SLSQ acknowledges the Department of Justice and Community Safety as the source organisation of the NCIS.

## Capability and Rescue Analysis

SurfGuard, the Lifesaving Incident Management System and Operational Console (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 LIMSOC can be used to identify how many rescues were performed by volunteers, lifeguards and support services during the 2020/21 patrol season.

## Drowning Data Analysis

SLSQ collects data and information on key coastal incidents and fatalities from LIMSOC IRDs, SOCC, 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 collation and analysis of drowning and coastal data. SLSQ acknowledges the support of the following people and organisations:

- Phoebe Meagher, Taronga Zoo, for assistance with the collation and analysis of data pertaining to sharks in Queensland waters;
- Jamie Seymour and James Cook University for expert advice and guidance regarding Irukandji and other marine stingers;
- The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for their assistance with the collation and analysis of data pertaining to sharks in Queensland waters;
- The Department of National Parks, Sport, and Racing and Queensland Parks and Wildlife for assistance with the collation and analysis of data pertaining to crocodiles in Queensland;
- Charlie Manolis, Wildlife Management International, for assistance with the collation and analysis of data pertaining to crocodiles in Queensland;
- Surf Life Saving Australia;
- National Coronial Information System; and
- Queensland Coroner's Office.

## Funding Support

SLSQ acknowledges and thanks the Queensland and Federal Governments for their continued support and funding of our organisation and its vision of saving lives.

# GLOSSARY

**ALSQ** - Australian Lifeguard Service Queensland.

**Aquatic 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.

**Beach-related 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.

**Coastal drowning death** - Where the location of the drowning is on the coast, in the ocean up to two nautical miles (2NM) offshore.

**Drowning** - The process of experiencing respiratory impairment from submersion/immersion in liquid; outcomes are classified as death, morbidity and no morbidity.

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

**Incident** - Any unplanned event requiring lifesaving services intervention.

**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.

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

**IRB** - Inflatable rescue boat.

**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.

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

**Lifesaving service** - A coordinated group that exists to provide aquatic safety services to the public. This includes surf life saving clubs, lifeguards, SOCC, drones, rescue water craft, inflatable rescue boats, helicopters, ATVs and 4WDs.

**LIMSOC** - Lifesaving Incident Management System and Operational Console.

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

**NCIS** - National Coronial Information System.

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

**Offshore** - Beyond the surf zone.

**Open ocean** - The seabed, water and air space above the water between 2NM and 12NM (the Australian territorial waters limit) offshore.

**Operations support** - Rapid response rescue units, not affiliated to any specific Surf Life Saving Club.

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

**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 activity 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 a warning).

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

**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 bath 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 water craft (RWC)** - A personal water craft (e.g. jet ski) used by lifesavers and lifeguards for performing rescues and preventative actions.

**Resuscitation** - Preservation or restoration of life by establishing and maintaining a person's airway, breathing and circulation.

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

**Rip current** - A seaward flowing current of water moving through a surf zone.

**Service season and hours** - Vary between regions due to climatic factors, but in the context of this report, the season is for the period July 2020 to June 2021.

**SLSA** - Surf Life Saving Australia.

**SLSQ** - Surf Life Saving Queensland.

**SOCC** - State Operations and Communications Centre.

**Surf Life Saving Club (SLSQ)** - An SLS-affiliated not-for-profit organisation which has volunteer 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.

**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.

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

**Unpowered craft** - A piece of non-powered recreational and/or sporting equipment used in the surf and other aquatic environments. Examples include kayaks and canoes.

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



# ZERO PREVENTABLE DEATHS IN QUEENSLAND PUBLIC WATERS

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