

Surf Life Saving Queensland Magazine

ISSUE SEVENTEEN



Queensland

SHORELINE

THANK YOU
GERARD O'BRIEN



Thank you Gerard O'Brien

Surf Life Saving Queensland extends its heartfelt thanks to Gerard O'Brien as he steps down as President. Gerard's leadership, dedication and unwavering commitment to SLSQ, our clubs and our members have made a lasting contribution to the lifesaving movement in Queensland.

As a lifesaver himself, Gerard has always brought a genuine understanding of our movement, our people and the important role our clubs play in communities across the state. Throughout his time as President, he has given generously of his time, experience and passion, always with the best interests of SLSQ and its members at heart.

We are incredibly grateful for Gerard's service, guidance and support, and sincerely thank him for everything he has contributed to SLSQ. We wish him all the very best for the future.

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SLSQ
acknowledges the
Traditional Owners of
Country throughout our
State and recognises the
continuing connection
to lands, waters and
communities. We pay
our respect to Aboriginal
and Torres Strait
Islander cultures; and to
Elders past and present.



FROM THE SURF CLUB TO THE POLICING FRONTLINE: CONSTABLE SOPHIE CHRISTIE'S JOURNEY

For current Surf Life Saving Queensland volunteer, Constable Sophie Christie, becoming a police officer wasn't a sudden career change. It was the realisation of a dream that had been with her since childhood.

"Ever since I was a little girl, I wanted to be a police officer," Constable Christie recalls. "I have a core memory of a female police officer coming to my primary school and talking about her job. Ever since then, I wanted to become an officer."

Today, Constable Sophie Christie has turned that childhood ambition into reality as a Queensland Police Service (QPS) officer. Along the way, she has discovered that many of the skills she developed through Surf Life Saving have proven invaluable in her policing journey.

BUILDING A FOUNDATION THROUGH SURF LIFE SAVING

Constable Christie has been involved in Surf Life Saving Queensland for the past five years, a commitment that has shaped both her personal and professional development.

"Surf Life Saving has helped me enormously coming into the QPS because it has made me interact with all walks of life," she says.

From communicating with beachgoers to working alongside fellow volunteers in challenging environments, Constable Christie credits lifesaving with helping her develop strong communication skills, confidence, teamwork and the ability to make quick decisions under pressure.

"I want to give back to the community and help wherever I can," she says. "Working with people in Surf Life Saving definitely motivated me to join the QPS."

For Constable Christie, many of the qualities

developed through Surf Life Saving have translated naturally into policing, including teamwork, communication, quick decision-making and a strong commitment to helping others.

LESSONS FROM THE IRB

In recent years, Constable Christie has competed in Inflatable Rescue Boat (IRB) racing, an experience she believes has prepared her particularly well for policing.

"Racing has taught me the importance of teamwork," she explains. "It makes you realise that you are a core part of a team and without teamwork it won't work."

An IRB crew relies on drivers, crewpersons and patients all working together in high-pressure scenarios where timing, communication and trust are critical.

"We have to trust that each person will do their job to complete the race," says Constable Christie. "Each person plays a vital role."

"I believe this has helped me coming into the QPS because you are part of a team here. We all need to work together but also have the ability to step up individually to make it work."

LIFE AT THE ACADEMY

For Constable Christie, academy life has been an opportunity to build on the skills she developed through Surf Life Saving while learning the practical and theoretical foundations of policing.

Throughout recruit training, she enjoyed working alongside a diverse cohort of recruits, drawing on the same teamwork and support that are central to both lifesaving and policing.

"We have formed lifelong friendships at the



academy. We all have different strengths, and we have worked together to help each other through everything," she says.

A self-confessed sports enthusiast, Constable Christie especially enjoyed the practical components of training, including time spent at the Bob Atkinson Operational Capabilities Centre (BAOCC).

"I loved going out to BAOCC and running the obstacle course," she says. "We got to get hands-on and put everything we learnt in the theory phase into practice. It was great to learn new skills."

For Constable Christie, the combination of classroom learning, practical training and working closely with fellow recruits has made academy life a rewarding introduction to a policing career.

ADVICE FOR FUTURE RECRUITS

For Surf Life Saving members considering their next career move, Constable Christie is proof that the skills developed between the flags can provide a strong foundation for a career in the Queensland Police Service.

Importantly, pursuing a career in policing does not mean stepping away from Surf Life Saving. Constable Sophie Christie says the flexibility that comes with shift work can create opportunities to continue volunteering and staying connected to your local club. Whether it's patrolling the beach, mentoring younger members or supporting club

activities, many of the values that underpin Surf Life Saving, including service, teamwork and community involvement, can continue alongside a policing career.

From patrolling Queensland's beaches to protecting Queensland communities, her journey demonstrates how a commitment to service, teamwork and helping others can create opportunities far beyond the surf.

THINKING OF A CAREER WITH THE QUEENSLAND POLICE SERVICE?

For Surf Life Saving volunteers looking for their next challenge, a career with the Queensland Police Service could be a natural progression. The skills developed through lifesaving, including teamwork, communication, leadership, decision-making under pressure and a commitment to serving the community, are highly valued in policing.

A career with the Queensland Police Service is more than just a job. It is an opportunity to work in diverse roles, communities and locations across Queensland, enjoy the stability of a single employer and make a real difference in people's lives every day.

If you're ready to build on the experiences you've gained through Surf Life Saving and explore a rewarding career dedicated to helping others, visit www.policerecruit.qld.gov.au to learn more.





THREE GENERATIONS, ONE RED AND YELLOW

For this family, patrolling at Kawana Waters isn't just a commitment — it's a family tradition unfolding in real time, with grandad Chris, daughter Holly, and granddaughter Addien all wearing the same red and yellow.

It started, as these things often do, with a nipper. When Addien joined Nippers at Kawana in Under 7s, her family quickly realised they'd need to lift their own beach skills to keep up with her. Holly and her father Chris went on to complete their Bronze Medallion together, and from there, three generations found themselves patrolling side by side.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

For Chris, seeing two generations of his family patrol alongside him is something he doesn't take lightly.

"It's incredibly special," Chris says. "Seeing three generations of our family wearing the red and yellow, serving the community together, is something I'm very proud of."

He says Surf Life Saving has given the family far more than qualifications and skills. "It has given us shared experiences, values, friendships and a commitment to helping others. To stand on patrol and watch my daughter Holly and granddaughter Addien carrying on that tradition is both rewarding and humbling."

That sense of legacy runs deep. Chris says it's reassuring to know the knowledge, culture and passion for lifesaving are being passed down through the family, and that there aren't many opportunities in life where three generations can work side by side, contribute to their community, and learn from one another. Every patrol adds another memory to a growing family archive — and the next generation isn't far behind, with Addien's brother Albey set to join the patrol in a couple of years.

Both Chris and Holly have also taken on additional roles at Kawana Waters SLSC, allowing them to

contribute even further to a club they consider a second home.

THE BEST (AND WORST) PART OF PATROLLING TOGETHER

Ask the family what it's like patrolling as a trio, and the answer comes with a laugh. The best part of being in the same club, they say, is celebrating together — and the "worst" part is simply that there are no secrets. Whatever happens on the beach, everyone hears about it.

Disagreements are rare, but if it ever comes down to who wins an argument on the sand, the family is fairly confident it'll be Addien, the youngest of the trio, coming out on top.

Board paddling has already produced its fair share of family folklore, with Mum and Grandad "learning the boards" while Addien flies past — and admits she rather enjoys watching the wipeouts that follow.

THROUGH ADDIEN'S EYES

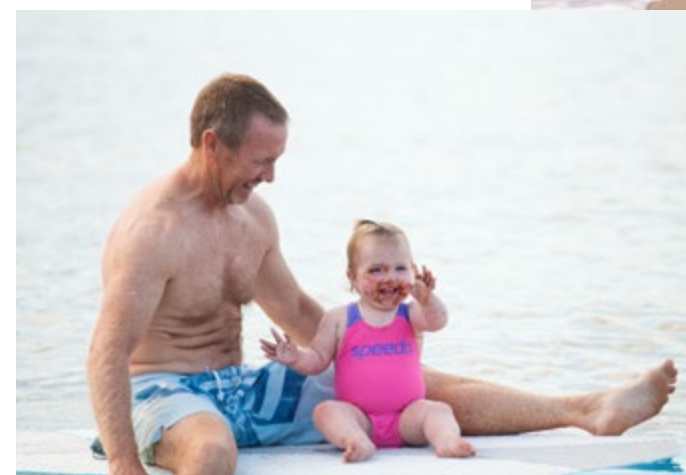
For Addien, the club has turned out to be much bigger than she expected. "When I first started I thought Nippers was only until a certain age," she says. "I now realise this was just the beginning, and I can't wait to keep trying new things." Next on her list: racing IRBs and trying surf boats.

WHAT KAWANA MEANS

Ask the family about Kawana Waters itself, and the answer isn't about medals or milestones — it's about people. The club has become a second home, a place where at any given time, they can turn up and find a friendly face. It has expanded their community and friendships, connecting them with people who share the same values in life, and there's something special, they say, about watching your children train and learn alongside people of every age and skill level at the club.

ADVICE FOR FAMILIES CONSIDERING JOINING TOGETHER

Their advice for families weighing up whether to join Surf Life Saving together is simple, echoing advice Holly once received from a friend: get involved, and get amongst it. There aren't many activities, they say, where parents and kids get to train, learn and grow alongside each other, regardless of age. It's a cliché, but the club has grown their community and connections — and any time they head down to Kawana, they're sure to run into a friend.





A PASSION FOR GIVING BACK: MATTIAS STELJIC NAMED FINALIST FOR YOUTH VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

From finding his feet as a new student on the Gold Coast to mentoring the next generation of lifesavers, Mattias Steljic is discovering just how far volunteering can take you.

When Mattias Steljic first joined his school's surf lifesaving program, he never imagined how much it would become part of his life. What began as an opportunity to meet new people and gain a few qualifications has grown into a passion for volunteering, leadership and helping others find their place in the surf lifesaving community.

Now a patrolling member of Mermaid Beach AEME SLSC and captain of his school's surf lifesaving program, Mattias is making his mark both on and off the beach.

His dedication recently earned him recognition as a finalist for Youth Volunteer of the Year at the 2026 Queensland Volunteering Awards, celebrating his contribution to the community and his commitment to encouraging more young people to get involved.

But for Mattias, the recognition is about much more than his own achievements. It is a reflection of the countless volunteers who turn up, give their time and work together to keep Queensland's beaches safe.

FINDING HIS PLACE IN LIFESAVING

Mattias's journey began a few years ago when he moved to the Gold Coast and joined his school's surf lifesaving program.

Through the program, former students and teachers help students in Years 10 to 12 gain their lifesaving qualifications and become involved in the movement.

For someone new to the area, it offered Mattias something beyond the opportunity to learn new skills. It gave him a community.

That connection was what first drew him to surf lifesaving, and it continues to be one of the reasons he keeps coming back.

"I think what I enjoy most about being involved with surf lifesaving is probably the fact that it's always something new, something different," he explains.

Whether he is patrolling alongside his friends, attending community events or representing his school, Mattias says the experience has encouraged him to challenge himself in ways he never expected.

"The lifesaving community for me has been a massive support in kind of stretching myself beyond what I thought I could do."

What started as a new activity has become an opportunity to develop his confidence, build friendships and discover what he is capable of.

COMING FULL CIRCLE

One of the most rewarding parts of Mattias's journey has been the opportunity to help other young people follow in his footsteps.

As captain of his school's surf lifesaving program, he now supports students as they work towards their qualifications, including their Bronze Medallion.

It is a role that has brought his own experience full circle, from being the student learning from others to becoming someone who can pass that knowledge on.

"When I think of the future of surf lifesaving, you always have to think of whoever comes after you," he says.



For Mattias, mentoring is about more than helping students gain their qualifications; it's about the same sense of connection and belonging that encouraged him to get involved in the first place.

He hopes to continue growing his school's program, making volunteering more accessible and creating opportunities for students to build friendships and become part of the wider lifesaving community.

It is a commitment that also extends to his involvement in the membership committee at Mermaid Beach AEME SLSC, where he is keen to explore ways to strengthen engagement and welcome new members.

RECOGNITION BEYOND THE RED AND YELLOW

Being named a finalist for Youth Volunteer of the Year at the Queensland Volunteering Awards came as a surprise to Mattias.

Like many volunteers, he had never given much thought to the possibility of being recognised for something that had simply become part of his everyday life.

"Being recognised as a finalist for the Queensland Youth Volunteering Award was a bit of a shock because you have your day-to-day volunteering, and you don't think it can be recognised as something more," he reflects.

For Mattias, the nomination highlights the value of the time and effort volunteers contribute, often without expecting anything in return.

"There's so many surf lifesavers that put their time in, put the hours in to make Gold Coast safer."

While the recognition is a significant milestone in his own journey, he sees it as an opportunity to acknowledge the broader lifesaving community and the collective effort that goes into keeping people safe.

It is also a reminder of why he continues to volunteer.

For Mattias, giving back is not just about the difference he can make to others. It is also about the personal growth that comes from being involved, the relationships he builds and the opportunity to contribute to something bigger than himself.

A COMMUNITY THAT GOES BEYOND THE BEACH

Ask Mattias about his favourite lifesaving experience, and one event stands out: volunteering at the Australian Surf Life Saving Championships.

The experience gave him the opportunity to see the many different parts of the movement come together, from young Nippers to experienced competitors, all sharing a common passion.

"I think for me, my favourite experience in surf lifesaving would probably be when I got to volunteer at the Aussies, which was an amazing chance to kind of see all the different aspects of surf lifesaving merge together."

Seeing people of different ages and backgrounds working alongside one another reinforced what Mattias values most about the movement.

It is not simply about the individual roles people play, but the connections between them and the shared commitment that brings everyone together.

"That's what surf lifesaving is. It's that community all interconnected and working together."

THE OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

With his sights set on continuing to grow membership and youth engagement, Mattias is eager to see where his lifesaving journey takes him next.

He hopes to build on his work at both his school and Mermaid Beach AEME SLSC, strengthening the connection between young people and their local club while helping more students discover the opportunities available to them.

And for anyone considering joining a surf lifesaving club, his advice is simple.

"You never know how good something is until you've tried it."

Mattias admits that when he first joined, he expected surf lifesaving to be something he would only be involved in briefly.

Instead, it has opened the door to new experiences, friendships and opportunities he never anticipated.

His journey is a reminder that volunteering can begin with something as simple as giving a new activity a go. For Mattias, that first step has led to a place in a community he now helps others become part of.

And with a passion for giving back and a growing commitment to the next generation, his contribution to surf lifesaving is only just beginning.

MERMAID BEACH AEME SLSC AUSTRALIAN SURF CLUB OF THE YEAR 2022 & 2023



THE TEAM BEHIND THE TITLES: INSIDE KIRRA'S IRB SUCCESS

Winning an Australian title once is an achievement. Defending it is another challenge entirely. Doing it three years in a row takes something more.

For Kirra Surf Life Saving Club's IRB team, three consecutive Australian Open IRB Championship titles have cemented an extraordinary period of success, built not only on results, but on the culture, trust and depth behind them.

The team capped off another impressive season at the 2026 Australian IRB Championships, claiming both the Open and Under 23 Championships and securing a third consecutive Open national title.

For Kirra IRB Team Coach Andrew McAuliffe, the three-peat is difficult to separate from the people who have contributed along the way.

"It's a testament to every member of those teams from each year that have secured each of those titles," Andrew said.

"Winning individual medals is great, but nothing beats winning as a team. It takes an entire team to secure a national title and we can't do what we do without each and every member playing their part."

MORE THAN THREE TITLES

While three consecutive championships now sit beside Kirra's name, maintaining that level of success has required the team to reset each year.

Training begins early, with the team returning to the boats every weekend from February, while athletes complete their individual fitness programs throughout the season.

Kirra's tube teams also train weekly at Miami pool, with that preparation contributing to victories in both the male and female Under 23 and Open Tube events this year.

But Andrew believes the motivation required to maintain those standards doesn't need to come from the coaching staff.

"It's the team that keeps us coaches motivated," he said.

"The culture within the team drives itself and we very rarely have to push or motivate anyone. The motivation is to keep getting better and keep being successful both on and off the beach."

That desire to improve has helped Kirra avoid becoming defined by previous results. Each season brings a new challenge, and with it, another opportunity for the team to evolve.

CULTURE BEHIND THE COMPETITION

For Kirra coach and athlete Te'a Domeracki, the team's success starts long before they line up on the beach.

"I think what makes our team so successful is the culture we've built over a number of years," Te'a said.

"We genuinely enjoy being around each other, and there's a huge amount of trust between our athletes, drivers, patients, coaches and support crew. Everyone understands their role, but more importantly, everyone is willing to step up and help wherever they're needed."

It is an approach particularly suited to IRB racing, where communication and trust between each member of a crew can be just as important as speed.

"We train hard and have very high expectations of ourselves, but we've always tried to make sure that success doesn't come at the expense of enjoying it," Te'a said.

"There's a really strong sense of mateship within the team, and I think that translates directly into how we race. IRB racing relies so heavily on trust, communication and teamwork, and those things are difficult to manufacture if they don't exist away from competition."





Andrew sees the same connection as fundamental to Kirra's sustained success.

"Our success is built on our team environment and family culture," he said.

"On the beach we are great, but off the beach we are even better. We have each other's backs and strive to make each other better people."

BUILDING CAMP KIRRA

This season, the team took another step towards strengthening that culture with the introduction of its first Camp Kirra.

Rather than focusing solely on racing and technical development, the camp gave athletes and team members an opportunity to help shape what they wanted Kirra's IRB program to be.

Open forums encouraged the team to ask questions, share ideas and have honest conversations about expectations, while external experts were invited to bring different perspectives and challenge the group.

For Te'a, giving everyone a voice created greater ownership of the team and its direction.

"Something we really focused on this season was making sure the whole team had a voice in shaping that culture," she said.

"It gave everyone an opportunity to contribute and helped create a real sense of ownership over the direction of the team."

That collective approach is also reflected in the depth Kirra has developed across its squad.

"Our success isn't built around one or two people. It comes from a whole group who continually push each other to improve and genuinely want to see their teammates succeed," Te'a said.

"Winning three consecutive Australian Open IRB Championships has been an incredible achievement, but I think the culture and friendships behind those results are what we're most proud of."

THE NEXT GENERATION

Three consecutive titles could provide a tempting opportunity to sit back and admire the trophy cabinet. Kirra, however, is already looking ahead.

Rather than simply chasing a fourth title, the team's focus is on continuing to develop its depth and

creating opportunities for its newer and younger competitors to learn alongside experienced athletes.

"After achieving the three-peat this year, our goal is to keep evolving rather than becoming comfortable with what we've already achieved," Te'a said.

"Every season brings different challenges, and we know that previous results don't guarantee anything when you get back on the start line."

Continuing the work started through Camp Kirra will also be a priority, ensuring athletes remain involved in shaping the team as it moves into its next chapter.

For Te'a, seeing what that next generation can bring is one of the most exciting prospects.

"We've achieved some pretty special things together, but there's still a lot of motivation within the group," she said.

"Seeing people improve, watching new combinations come together and getting back on the beach competing alongside some of our closest friends is what keeps us coming back each season."

SUCCESS BUILT TOGETHER

Three Australian Open IRB Championship titles in three years is an impressive measure of Kirra's success. But speak to those within the team, and medals and trophies only tell part of the story.

Behind each result are months of training, countless weekends on the water and a group of athletes, coaches and support crew who have built an environment where everyone has a role to play.

As Kirra turns its attention to another season, the challenge will be to keep improving without losing the culture that got them there in the first place.

As Te'a puts it, the goal is simple: "We want Kirra to remain competitive at the highest level while continuing to build something that people genuinely want to be part of."



A CENTURY OF COMMUNITY: YEPPOON SLSC CELEBRATES 100 YEARS

For 100 years, Yeppoon Surf Life Saving Club has stood as a constant on the Capricorn Coast - protecting its beaches, building its people, and shaping a community that extends far beyond the shoreline.

Reaching this milestone is more than just a celebration of longevity. It's a recognition of generations of volunteers, families and members who have given their time to create something lasting.

"Reaching 100 years is an incredible achievement and something our entire community should be proud of," says Amanda Galdal, Club President of Yeppoon SLSC.

"For a century, Yeppoon Surf Life Saving Club has been much more than a surf club. We've protected our beaches, taught generations of children valuable life skills, developed leaders, and created lifelong friendships."

BUILT BY VOLUNTEERS

While equipment, training and operations have evolved over the decades, one thing has remained constant - the people.

From the club's early days with basic rescue gear to today's modern operations, the defining thread has always been volunteers stepping up to keep others safe.

"Through changing times, new equipment, evolving rescue techniques and growing membership, the one constant has been people giving their time," Amanda said.

"Every generation has left the club stronger than they found it."

MORE THAN A SURF CLUB

In recent years, Constable Christie has competed in Inflatable Rescue Boat (IRB) racing. Today, Yeppoon SLSC is a hub of activity - delivering patrols, first aid, education, nippers, competition pathways, emergency response and leadership development.

But beyond the programs, it's the culture that defines the club.

"What makes Yeppoon unique is our people. We genuinely feel like a family," the President said.

That sense of belonging is strengthened by generations of families who continue to be part of the club. Grandparents, parents and children all contribute, creating a culture where knowledge and traditions are passed down year after year.

"It reminds us that we're not just building members for today - we're building the future of the club."

MOMENTS THAT MATTER

While rescues are an important part of surf lifesaving, the club's impact is often seen in quieter, everyday moments.

"The biggest moments aren't always dramatic rescues," Amanda said.

"Sometimes it's watching a nervous five-year-old nipper grow into a confident patrol member and leader, or seeing volunteers give up weekends year after year simply because they care about their community."

These moments reflect the broader impact of surf lifesaving - shaping not only safer beaches, but stronger people.



A MILESTONE WORTH CELEBRATING

To mark 100 years, the club brought together current members, life members, past members and families for a centenary celebration weekend.

It was an opportunity to reflect on the club's history, reconnect with those who helped shape it, and share the stories that have been passed down through generations.

"For me, it was hearing the stories," Amanda said.

"Listening to members who were involved decades ago and seeing generations come together reminds us just how important this club has been to so many people."

LOOKING AHEAD

While the centenary is a moment to reflect, the focus is firmly on the future.

Like many volunteer organisations, Yeppoon SLSC faces challenges - but also significant opportunity.

The club is focused on strengthening its volunteer base, developing future leaders, improving facilities

and ensuring it remains sustainable for the next 100 years.

"My biggest priority is creating an environment where everyone feels they can contribute," Amanda said.

"You don't have to be a champion athlete or even hold a Bronze Medallion to get involved. There's a place for everyone."

100 YEARS, ONE PURPOSE

After a century, the essence of Yeppoon SLSC remains unchanged.

It is a club built on people, driven by community, and united by a shared purpose.

As Amanda summed it up:

"For 100 years, Yeppoon Surf Life Saving Club has been built by volunteers, strengthened by community and united by a shared commitment to saving lives, developing people and serving others."



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QUEENSLAND MAKES ITS MARK ON THE AUSTRALIAN TEAM

Queensland will be strongly represented on the international stage later this year, with 17 Queensland athletes selected among the 24 members of the Australian Life Saving Team set to compete at the 2026 Lifesaving World Championships in South Africa.

Following the Australian Pool Rescue Championships in Adelaide, Surf Life Saving Australia and Royal Life Saving Society Australia announced the 12-person Open and 12-person Youth teams that will pull on the green and gold at the pinnacle event of international lifesaving sport.

With Queensland athletes making up 75 per cent of the Australian team, the selection is an incredible reflection of the strength and depth of lifesaving sport across the state.

TAKING ON THE WORLD

Hosted in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, the 2026 Lifesaving World Championships will bring together the world's best lifesavers for competition across the pool, ocean and beach.

More than 50 countries are expected to be represented across the Championships, with Australia heading into the competition as the defending overall champion in both the Open and Youth divisions following its success on the Gold Coast in 2024.

The Australian Open and Youth teams feature a strong mix of returning representatives and athletes preparing to make their debut on the world stage, bringing together experience and emerging talent from across the country.

For returning athletes, the Championships present another opportunity to pull on the green and gold and build on Australia's success in 2024, while those making their debut will experience the honour of representing Australia at a Lifesaving World Championships for the first time.

Together, the 24 athletes will now turn their attention to preparations for South Africa as Australia looks to defend its Open and Youth World Championship titles.

VERSATILITY KEY TO AUSTRALIAN SUCCESS

With the Lifesaving World Championships spanning a diverse program of pool, ocean and beach events, selecting athletes capable of contributing across multiple disciplines is an important part of building a successful Australian team.

Australian Life Saving Team National Open Coach Zayne Hamill said the depth of talent available to selectors had been particularly strong.

"The depth across all of the disciplines is really strong. We've had a great pool of athletes to choose from, and they've put their best foot forward the last two years in the ocean, on the sand and in the pool," Hamill said.

"We're looking for great athletes, but also great people – people that fit in well with a team environment, and can contribute and uphold the values, as well as putting their best efforts in as far as performance goes."

With only a limited number of athletes able to be selected across such a broad competition program, Hamill said versatility would be crucial to Australia's success.

"World's is its own unique competition. It covers a lot of different disciplines, and you only have a certain number of athletes that you can pick to make sure you do well across all of those different events, so getting the balance right is probably one of the biggest challenges."

That versatility will see athletes challenged to step outside their usual events and contribute across disciplines as Australia takes on the world's best.



MORE THAN PERFORMANCE

While results are an important part of selection, representing Australia also comes with the responsibility of representing the values and culture of lifesaving.

Australian Life Saving Team Chair of Selectors Shayne Baker OAM said selectors were looking for athletes who could contribute across multiple disciplines while representing Australian lifesaving at the highest level.

"We really want to have Australian representatives that do represent the best of our community and the best of our culture, so we want to encourage people in terms of their behaviour and their respect, ensuring that it is at the highest level."

For the athletes selected, pulling on the green and gold represents the culmination of years of training, competition and commitment to the sport.

Hamill said representing Australia was an honour neither athletes nor coaches took for granted.

"I think representing your country – in whatever field that may be – is the ultimate honour, and certainly to do so with Australian Lifesaving is a real privilege."

"Wearing the green and gold is something that is really special."

CONGRATULATIONS, QUEENSLAND

For Queensland, having 17 athletes selected across the 24-person Open and Youth teams is an outstanding achievement and a testament to the strength of the state's lifesaving community.

Behind every selection are countless hours of training and competition, along with the support of coaches, clubs, families, teammates and the wider lifesaving community.

Surf Life Saving Queensland congratulates all Queensland athletes selected to represent Australia, as well as the entire Australian Life Saving Team, as they prepare to take on the world in South Africa.

From Queensland beaches and pools to the international stage, we look forward to seeing our athletes proudly represent their clubs, state and country in the green and gold.

Click [here](#) to view the whole team.

Source: Surf Life Saving Australia



HOW QUEENSLAND'S VETERANS ARE FINDING THEIR NEXT MISSION IN SURF LIFESAVING

When Shane Leahy pulls on the red and yellow at Coolum SLSC, it isn't the first uniform he's worn. Shane joined the Navy as a medic in 1994, discharged in 2002, and spent the years after that feeling, in his own words, lost. It took a DVA support officer to point him toward his local surf club. Fifteen months on, he's a peer support officer, a trainer and an active patrol member, and he says joining is the best thing he's done since coming home.

Matt Neale's story runs a similar course. Fifteen years in the Army, multiple deployments, an injury on operations that ended his career in 2004. When he moved to the Sunshine Coast, the mental health team supporting him suggested he join a surf club. He chose Maroolia SLSC.

"The volunteering aspect really grabbed me," he says. "And the fact we still got to wear a uniform was really good."

Stories like Shane's and Matt's aren't the exception in Surf Life Saving Queensland. They're closer to the rule, and they always have been.

A MOVEMENT BUILT BY SERVICE

Long before "veteran-friendly" was a phrase anyone used, surf lifesaving in Queensland was already full of returned servicemen finding their footing again. After the First World War, Maroochydore Swimming and Life Saving Club member Tom Prentis came home and set about rebuilding his club from the ground up, walking the district from Rosemount to Bli Bli to recruit new members and restore the ranks the war had thinned.

By the Second World War, that thread had only grown stronger. Nearly the entire active membership of Coolum SLSC, 32 members, served in the armed forces, and the club lost three of them. At Alexandra Headland, seven members fought at the Battle of Milne Bay, the first Allied victory over Japan, and four never came home. Jack Kuskopf,

an Alex Headland member who survived Japanese captivity as a prisoner of war, returned to the club he'd left and went on to become one of its most respected instructors.

These weren't separate chapters in two different stories. For generations of Queenslanders, military service and surf lifesaving have drawn on the same instinct: the willingness to put yourself between other people and danger, and to do it as part of a team you'd trust with your life.

That's exactly what today's veterans are finding when they walk through the clubhouse door.

SAME CALLING, NEW UNIFORM

Ask Shane or Matt what surf lifesaving has in common with the forces they served in, and the answer comes quickly.

"Communications, radio, comms, very simple and easy transition," Shane says. "The camaraderie is a big one, and something that really stuck with me. You also find other veterans very quickly. We seem to suss each other out."

Matt agrees. "Radio operations, risk assessments, managing emergencies, we're already tuned into all of that. Surf lifesaving adds a few other bits and pieces, and we can implement them very easily with our existing skills."

Neither of them started out as strong swimmers, and both are quick to point out that you don't need to be. Matt failed his first attempt at the Bronze Medallion swim test, training on his own three days a week for eight weeks before passing "with flying colours."

Shane is just as direct about it: "It's not just about swimming. Lookouts, radio operators, these are perfect roles for defence members, especially those who've left due to injury. There is a role for everybody."



What both keep coming back to is what the uniform gives them beyond the skills. "It gives you a sense of identity again," Shane says. "That's the one thing we miss when we leave the forces, we lose who we are. Surf lifesaving bridges the gap from military service to community service. You feel part of something again, you get back into a uniform, and you're utilising your skills and experiences to do something good."

Matt, who has around a dozen fellow veterans at Marcoola ranging from age 27 to their seventies, puts it even more plainly: "We're all trying to get our fellow brothers and sisters into surf lifesaving, because it's medicine. When veterans get out they can become reclusive. For those of us already in it, we're big advocates for reaching out to our fellow servicemen and women."



INTRODUCING THE VETERANS IN SURF LIFE SAVING NETWORK

That advocacy is exactly what Surf Life Saving Queensland wants to formalise and grow. This year, SLSQ is launching the Veterans in Surf Life Saving Network, a dedicated special interest group giving veteran members across the state a way to find each other, support each other and build a genuine community within our wider community.

The Network will bring veteran members together through a calendar of events designed for connection as much as capability: joint patrols where veterans from different clubs work a shift side by side, social catch-ups and barbecues, and structured opportunities to mentor veterans who are still finding their feet in a new club. Shane and Matt have already had a taste of what this can look like. At the end of the 25/26 season, eight veterans from across the region piggybacked onto a patrol at Kawana Waters Beach, a day Matt still counts among his best on patrol, not for what happened in the water, but for "opening the eyes of members there who didn't even know veterans were involved in surf lifesaving."

The Network will also work alongside RSL Queensland, building on the relationships many veteran members already bring with them, and will

give clubs a clearer way to welcome veterans who might otherwise take eight months, like Shane did, to work up the courage to walk in the door.

Leading the charge is Alex Walker, SLSQ's Member Experience Manager. "Every veteran who's joined us so far has told us the same thing: the transition was smoother than they expected, and the camaraderie is what kept them there," Alex says. "The Veterans in Surf Life Saving Network is about making sure no veteran has to find that out on their own. We want to give them a network before they even get to the clubhouse door."

Zoe Bickerstaffe, SLSQ's General Manager, Membership, says the Network reflects something the organisation has always known about itself.

"Our clubs have been shaped by service for well over a century, whether that was returned servicemen rebuilding their clubs after the wars or the veterans patrolling our beaches today," she says. "This Network gives that connection a name and a home. We want it to grow into one of the strongest communities inside our movement, and we want every veteran in Queensland who's ever worn a uniform to know there's a place for them in this one too."

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Membership in the Veterans in Surf Life Saving Network is open to any current SLSQ member with a services background, and to veterans considering joining a club for the first time. New members who sign up will receive a limited-edition Veterans in Surf Life Saving Network goody bag and t-shirt as a welcome to the group.

Click here to join: [Veterans - Surf Life Saving Queensland](#) | [Surf Life Saving Queensland](#)

If you're a veteran, or you know one who might be looking for their next mission, this is the invitation.

As Shane puts it: "Just do it. It's the best thing I've done since I've been back."



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NEARLY THREE DECADES ON, **THE SHIMODA-MAROOCHYDORE FRIENDSHIP STILL RUNS DEEP**

Somewhere over the Pacific this month, two young Queensland lifesavers are swapping the Sunshine Coast for the shores of Shimoda, Japan. For Noah and Conner, it's the trip of a lifetime. For Surf Life Saving Queensland, it's the latest chapter in one of the movement's most enduring international friendships.

The Maroochydore SLSC-Shimoda LSC Sister Club Exchange has been connecting Queensland and Japanese lifesavers for nearly thirty years, built on the same values that unite every club across our state: a commitment to the water, to each other, and to the communities that call the coast home.

HOW IT BEGAN

The story starts in 1993, when the Director of the Australian Resource Centre at the Australian Embassy in Tokyo made a personal connection with Maroochydore SLSC while visiting the Sunshine Coast. What began as a passing conversation turned into an offer, from Maroochydore, to build a surf lifesaving and surf sports relationship between the two countries.

It took a few years to take shape. In 1996, Shimoda Life Saving Club picked up the idea, and by 1997 the exchange had its first real footprints in the sand. In 1997 and 1998, two Maroochydore lifesavers travelled to Shimoda to patrol and undertake training. In 1997, a Shimoda lifesaver also travelled to Maroochydore, where he stayed for the year and served as a patrolling lifesaver.

Then came December 1998, the moment that set everything in motion. Accompanied by three chaperones, including the Embassy Director, twelve Shimoda lifesavers arrived at Maroochydore SLSC, trained alongside their Queensland counterparts, and successfully earned their Australian Bronze Medallions. Awards in hand, they patrolled the

beach that had just taught them the ropes. It was the first of what would become an annual pilgrimage.

The following year, nine Maroochydore lifesavers and two chaperones travelled to Shimoda City for a formal signing ceremony, making it official: Maroochydore SLSC and Shimoda LSC were sister clubs. Fittingly, the agreement was backdated to 21 December 1998, the day the very first Shimoda squad patrolled Maroochydore's beaches.

A PROGRAM BUILT ON MORE THAN LIFESAVING

What began as a lifesaving exchange has evolved, over the decades, into a rich mix of lifesaving, surf sports, culture and friendship.

Each December, a large group of Shimoda lifesavers arrives in Queensland. They're welcomed at the airport, taken to Surf Life Saving Queensland's Brisbane headquarters, then delivered to Maroochydore, where they're registered as club members and settle into the dormitories for ten nights. From there, it's a nine-day surf sports training program woven together with sightseeing, fitness sessions and dinners hosted by local club families. Some stay on afterwards for homestays, extending the friendship well past the official program.

In July and August, the exchange runs in reverse. A smaller group, usually between two and six Maroochydore lifesavers, travels to Shimoda for a welcome dinner, accommodation in the lifesaving beach houses, full days on patrol, and the same blend of sightseeing and cultural exchange that Shimoda's visitors experience on the Sunshine Coast.



THE NUMBERS TELL THEIR OWN STORY

Since 1998, 97 Maroochydore members have travelled to Shimoda to patrol, train, coach or simply spend time alongside their Japanese counterparts. In the other direction, over 350 Shimoda members have made the trip to Maroochydore, with more than 150 earning their Bronze Medallion or other lifesaving awards along the way.

Behind every one of those numbers is a friendship, a shared patrol shift, a meal at someone's kitchen table. It's proof of what this kind of partnership can build when two clubs commit to it for the long haul.

THIS YEAR'S EXCHANGE: NOAH AND CONNER HEAD TO JAPAN

This year it's Noah and Conner's turn. Before they left, we caught up with the pair to find out what they were most looking forward to, and what had them a little nervous.

Food featured heavily. Conner is excited to experience Japan's lifesaving culture and, somewhat bravely, admits raw fish is both on his most-excited and least-excited list. Noah is simply looking forward to exploring the country, though the language barrier has him a little on edge. Neither is claiming any fluency going in, with both boys rating their Japanese a modest zero out of ten.

Asked what phrase they most want to bring home, Conner is holding out hope he'll be able to ask "do you have chocolate milk?", while Noah has his sights set on ordering a beer. Snacks made the packing list for Conner, while Noah is bringing his tech along for the ride.

Beyond the food and the phrases, what the boys are really chasing is what every participant before them has found on this exchange: new friends, new experiences, and a few good laughs along the way.

Keep an eye out for updates and photos from Noah and Conner's trip, and we'll check back in with them once they're home to hear how it went.

A PARTNERSHIP WORTH CELEBRATING

Nearly three decades since that first conversation on the Sunshine Coast, the Shimoda-Maroochydore Sister Club Exchange remains one of the clearest examples of what surf lifesaving can achieve beyond the flags. It has grown from a single offer into a lasting relationship between two countries, two clubs and the hundreds of members who have crossed an ocean to be part of it.

For Surf Life Saving Queensland, stories like this one are a reminder that our movement's reach extends well beyond our own beaches, and that the friendships forged through lifesaving can last a lifetime.



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CQU PHYSIOTHERAPY STUDENTS SUPPORT CAIRNS' ALL ABILITIES NIPPERS PROGRAM

A unique CQUniversity and Cairns Surf Life Saving Club partnership has helped youngsters of all ages and abilities hit the surf as aspiring Nippers – and provided Physiotherapy students with valuable experience.

The inaugural All Abilities Nippers program was held at Palm Cove recently, allowing children to develop surf awareness, water safety skills, confidence and a lifelong love of the beach.

CQU Physiotherapy Lecturer Dr James Czencz said the program involved first and third year physiotherapy students who volunteered their time to work alongside local surf lifesavers to ensure every child could participate.

Cairns Surf Life Saving Club proudly hosted our first-ever All Abilities Nippers program at Palm Cove – a milestone that I'm incredibly proud to have been part of.

"Through this grassroots community initiative, CQU supported participant memberships, providing uniforms and adaptive equipment, including custom rescue boards with additional safety straps," he said.

Three youngsters attended the event, including one who attended with his younger brother – a wonderful reminder that inclusion is about bringing families together, not creating separate experiences.

The children enjoyed beach games, warm-up sprints, swimming and catching waves on the rescue boards.

One parent welcomed the initiative and the opportunity for the children to participate.

"There are so few programs in the community where Rowan can do something alongside other kids his age," they said.

He said three physiotherapy students, who were very eager to be involved, gained invaluable experience in inclusive practice and participation-focused care.

"It was a powerful reminder that great rehabilitation and inclusion starts with participation first. The focus wasn't on disability or impairment– it was on fun, confidence, friendships, movement and belonging," he said.

"For me personally, this was a special day. As a Club Captain, Physiotherapist and Lecturer, it was incredibly rewarding to see these three passions come together in a way that genuinely benefits our community."

Dr Czencz thanked Cairns Surf Life Saving Club the student volunteers, families, and the children for being the trailblazers of the program.

"This is what community partnerships should look like – working together to remove barriers, create opportunities and ensure everyone has the chance to experience the beach, build confidence and make lifelong memories," he said.

The trial program will run over three sessions, with the potential to extend before launching a full All Abilities Nippers program alongside the Club's regular Nippers season next year.

Reference: <https://www.cqu.edu.au/news/1295426/cqu-physiotherapy-students-support-cairns-all-abilities-nippers-program>





YOUTH LEADING THE CHARGE ON CLEAN BEACHES

HOW ONE YOUNG MEMBER INSPIRED HER CLUB TO RETHINK WHAT IT MEANS TO PROTECT THE BEACH

For many surf lifesavers, the beach is where childhood memories are made. It's where nippers build confidence in the water, discover a love of the ocean and become part of a community that exists to protect others.

For today's young members, it's also where they're watching the coastline change.

The beaches they love are increasingly being littered by plastic and rubbish, and they'll be the generation that inherits them.

Australians produce 2.5 million tonnes of plastic waste each year, about 100kg per person. According to Clean Up Australia's 2025 Litter Report, plastics make up more than 80% of all litter counted. More concerning, around 130,000 tonnes of the plastic we consume contaminates the marine environment each year.

Rather than waiting for someone else to act, young surf lifesavers across the country are stepping forward, proving that protecting the coastline can be just as much a part of surf lifesaving as protecting the people who visit it.

Rose Fry is one of them.

A youth member at Beachport Surf Life Saving Club in South Australia, Rose was named National Youth Environmental Champion for Take 3 for the Sea after turning a simple beach clean-up into an ongoing environmental initiative embraced across her club. What began as a single clean-up day has grown into interactive nipper education sessions, annual community clean ups and a noticeable shift in how members think about caring for their local beach.

SHIFTING THE MINDSET, ONE CLUB AT A TIME

Ask Rose why she started, and the answer is simple.

"I always grew up near the beach, swimming since I was two months old, and I just saw it getting dirtier and dirtier."

That was enough.

Rather than accepting the change, Rose decided to do something about it. What started as one community beach clean-up has become an annual event that brings together club members, families and the wider Beachport community.

The impact has reached far beyond the rubbish collected.

In the two years since Rose started, she has noticed a difference not only in the condition of the beach, but in the attitudes of the people around her. Nippers proudly tell her how much rubbish they've picked up before training.

"They get excited about it," she said. It's not every day you hear children excited about picking up rubbish, but that's exactly the culture Rose is helping build.

What began with one young member and her mother, has encouraged an entire club to think differently about the role it can play in protecting the coastline.

For surf lifesaving clubs, it's a reminder that protecting communities doesn't begin and end in the water. Caring for the beaches, dunes and oceans that bring communities together is another way clubs can make a lasting difference.

Perhaps the most encouraging part is how achievable it all is.

Rose is quick to point out that clubs don't need major funding, specialist equipment or months of planning to get started. Beachport's annual clean-up is built on a simple idea: choose a date, invite the community, provide gloves and rubbish bags, and show up.

The local coffee shop donates coffee for volunteers. Residents spread the word. Rubbish is sorted, weighed and reported to Take 3 for the Sea, creating a tangible record of the community's impact and helping to inform policymaking and waste management.

It's proof that meaningful environmental action doesn't have to start with a large-scale campaign. Sometimes it starts with one club deciding that protecting the coastline is simply another way of protecting the community.

TEACHING NIPPERS TO SEE WHAT'S REALLY THERE

WFor Rose, inspiring the next generation is just as important as the clean-up itself.

Rather than delivering lectures, she uses games, quizzes and hands-on activities that help environmental messages stick. One of the favourites involves hiding rice through buckets of sand to demonstrate how difficult it is to remove microplastics once they enter the environment.

"You can be told all this is happening, but if you don't see it, you won't believe it."

By making learning interactive, Rose is helping young members connect with something much bigger than litter. Every piece of rubbish left behind has the potential to become part of the ocean they swim in, the beaches they patrol and the marine life they share it with.

Her experience also highlights something equally important: some of the best ideas come from young people.

"Don't forget about the younger people, because they're the ones that are going to grow up with this issue."

"They care more than people give them credit for."

Those words are a reminder for every surf club. Young members aren't simply the future of surf lifesaving—they're already helping shape it. They bring fresh ideas, energy and a determination to protect the coastlines they will inherit.

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

Rose's annual clean-up continues to grow, with more members getting involved each year and more nippers learning how small actions can make a lasting difference, creating a new generation of surf lifesavers who see environmental stewardship as part of protecting the places they love.

And the numbers suggest that when communities show up like Beachport has, it matters. CSIRO research comparing coastal debris surveys from 2022-2024 against surveys from a decade earlier found a 39 per cent decrease in plastic waste around Australian coastal cities, with 16 per cent more locations recording no litter at all. Researchers attributed that improvement in part to community clean-up efforts and awareness campaigns — exactly the kind of work Rose has been doing at Beachport.

The proof is there. The model is simple. And the next generation is already on board.

Protecting our communities doesn't begin and end in the water. It also means protecting the beaches, dunes and oceans that bring our communities together — and the wildlife that depends on them.

Every surf lifesaver has a beach they call home. The question isn't whether one club can make a difference — Beachport already has. The question is what happens when every club does the same.

References:

Clean-Up-Australia_LitterReport_FY25.pdf





LIFESAVERS LOOKING AFTER LIFESAVERS

They're not always on the sand when they're doing this job, but Queensland's Peer Support Officers are every bit as much a part of lifesaving as the patrols they support.

Every lifesaver knows the moment when a serious incident ends. The patient is handed over, the gear is packed away, the flags stay up and the patrol carries on. The beach goes back to normal.

For the people who were in the thick of it, though, the job doesn't always finish there. A difficult rescue, a resuscitation, or an incident that just doesn't sit right can stay with a member long after they've signed off for the day. That's where SLSQ's Peer Support Officers come in, and it's why peer support has become such a vital part of how we look after our people.

WHAT PEER SUPPORT IS (AND WHAT IT ISN'T)

Peer Support Officers, or PSOs, are trained SLSQ members who reach out to fellow members after a potentially traumatic event. Their role is to check in, listen, and offer a safe and confidential space for someone to talk about how they're going. They share practical information about common reactions after a tough experience, and where someone needs more, they help connect them with further professional support.

PSOs aren't counsellors or clinicians, and they don't try to be. Their strength is that they're peers. They understand the beach, the patrol environment and the realities of lifesaving because they live it too. When a PSO picks up the phone, the member on the other end is talking to someone who gets it.

VOLUNTEERS, TRAINED FOR THE JOB

Just like the members who earn their Bronze Medallion and keep their skills current every season, Peer Support Officers are volunteers who put their hand up and train to be ready when they're needed. Every PSO completes peer support specific training and Psychological First Aid, and continues building their skills through ongoing professional

development. Supporting someone through a hard moment deserves the same care and preparation as any rescue.

And like patrol, peer support happens whether or not anyone is watching. Much of the work takes place quietly, by phone, often across club and branch boundaries. It's rarely seen, but for the members on the receiving end, it can make all the difference.

Two of the volunteers who make up this team shared what the role means to them.



SUE MONTEATH,
SOUTHPORT SLSQ

For Sue Monteath, becoming a Peer Support Officer was a natural next step. She applied and trained for the role to extend her skills and put her own experience to work helping others.

What she enjoys most is the chance to connect with members beyond her own club, and to give them somewhere safe to explore how they're feeling.

"Members are grateful for contact with PSOs," Sue said. "They acknowledge this support and appreciate the information regarding further options, if required."

Sue's commitment to peer support sits comfortably alongside her love of patrol. She's motivated to train, stay fit and keep her first aid knowledge current, and she values the teamwork that makes a beach run safely.

"I love the team work ethic and appreciate the camaraderie that underpins successful safe management of the beach," she said. "I enjoy meeting and working with like-minded people

representing a range of ages and backgrounds. Surf lifesaving provides an excellent platform to engage with the community and help everyone enjoy the water safely."



RILEY PALMER,
MARCOOLA SLSQ

For Riley Palmer, peer support is personal.

At 17, Riley was involved in a potentially traumatic event during the off-season, in circumstances that were complex. In the weeks that followed came common reactions like hypervigilance and trouble sleeping, and Riley is candid that it could easily have been the moment to walk away from surf lifesaving altogether.

Instead, a Peer Support Officer was assigned to help.

"This person promoted good habits and reminded me the important role lifesaving plays in the community," Riley said. "They were attentive, patient and checked in with me regularly. I am grateful that I had such a positive experience with the peer support team and that encouraged me to join."

Today, Riley is the one making those calls. PSOs are usually reaching out to people on a challenging day, but Riley says the work is still deeply rewarding, and it has built a strong connection to the wider organisation.

"One day you could be checking in with someone from the next club down the road and the next you might be calling someone in a different branch," Riley said. "If I can make a small positive impact on someone that has been involved in a potentially traumatic event, then I am content."

That commitment has travelled well. Riley even spent a couple of years living interstate and kept doing PSO work for SLSQ the whole time.

Riley also sees peer support as something bigger than a one-on-one conversation. It's one of the reasons members stay.

"I see Peer Support as a great member retention initiative and really value their work in supporting our members," Riley said. "Surf lifesaving is my community. The people are what make it such a successful organisation. I will always believe that surf lifesaving has given me more than I can give it."

LOOKING OUT FOR EACH OTHER

Riley's story shows exactly why peer support matters. One well-timed check-in helped keep a young lifesaver in the movement, and that lifesaver is now paying it forward to members right across the state.

That's the heart of peer support. It's lifesavers looking after lifesavers, backed by training, delivered by volunteers, and built on the same values that bring us to the beach every weekend.

If you've been involved in an incident and would like to talk to someone, support is there for you. Speak with your club or your patrol captain, or email the Member Welfare team at memberwelfare@lifesaving.com.au.





WOMEN IN LIFESAVING

BUILDING CONNECTIONS AND CREATING PATHWAYS TO LEAD

Women from across the Surf Life Saving Queensland (SLSQ) community came together on the Sunshine Coast on 19 September for SLSQ's Women in Lifesaving Networking Event, creating connections and sharing perspectives on leadership, development and providing safe environments for everyone.

The event brought together women at different stages of their lifesaving journey, from new members beginning to find their place in the movement to experienced leaders and Life Members who have helped shape surf lifesaving over decades.

SLSQ was honoured to welcome the Hon Fiona Simpson MP GAICD, Minister for Women and Women's Economic Security, who shared her personal journey and insights into the Queensland Government's Women's Economic Security Strategy 2026.

The event also featured insights from SLSQ Board Member Dr Mel Cowlshaw, who shared her perspective on the work being done across movement. Her contribution highlighted the value of women bringing different experiences, expertise and perspectives into leadership roles; from clubs and lifesaving through to governance and the SLSQ Board.

Attendees also heard from an inspiring panel featuring Toni Read, Kylie Robins and Rachael Robinson, facilitated by SLSQ's State Membership Officer Kirsten Phillips. The panel members participated in last year's SLSQ's Advancing Women in Leadership program. Together, they shared their experiences of leadership and growth, the lessons they have learned along the way and the importance of creating opportunities for other women to contribute, progress and lead.

For SLSQ, supporting women in lifesaving extends beyond individual development. It is about strengthening leadership pathways and building the culture, networks and systems that enable women to participate, progress and lead across all areas of the movement.

Women already play an integral role throughout surf lifesaving, from patrolling beaches and responding to emergencies to training and assessing, coaching, officiating, supporting Nippers, serving on committees and contributing to professional teams.

The focus is on ensuring those contributions are highlighted and that women have clear and accessible pathways to continue developing their leadership and influence across the movement.

This work is informed by listening to women's experiences. Following the first Women@SLSQ Diagnostic in 2022, SLSQ has continued to engage with women across the movement through the Women@SLSQ Diagnostic 2026. The findings will help identify where progress is being made and where further action is needed to strengthen safe, inclusive and welcoming environments for women and girls.

The Advancing Women in Leadership program is another important part of that work, providing women with opportunities to build business, social and emotional capability, strengthen peer networks and identify pathways for their continued development in SLSQ.

The 2026 program demonstrated strong aspirations for continued leadership progression, with 87.5 per cent of participants indicating they intended to pursue a new or more senior leadership role within SLSQ over the following 12 months; a 46.5 percentage point increase from the baseline.

For Peregrine Beach Surf Life Saving Club member Brooke, who is in her second year of surf lifesaving, the networking event highlighted the breadth of opportunities available within the movement.

"The biggest takeaway from this event was the insights into how women in lifesaving can make a major impact, and how we can empower and support women to step up into higher leadership roles," Brooke said.

"I would definitely attend one of the women's networking functions because you'll then know what's available to you. I've learned today that there





are quite a few things that I'd like to attend and engage in, and I've met some really cool women who are doing some really cool things in surf."

That opportunity to connect was also a highlight for SLSQ State Lifesaving Officer Samantha Fien.

"One key takeaway from the Women in Lifesaving event was that it's always an amazing opportunity to be in the same room with individuals and share our stories in a safe and vulnerable place," Samantha said.

"We have an amazing network of women throughout all the different decades and life spans, and to hear some of these stories together is an amazing opportunity."

She encouraged other women across the movement to take advantage of future networking and development opportunities. With the upcoming Women in Lifesaving Workshops being held on 25

October (Southeast Queensland) and 21 November (Central and North Queensland) Sam said:

"You'll get to develop your skills, meet like-minded individuals, share your story and hear from others as well, and create that support network that enables you to expand your direction and your leadership skills."

Creating lasting change requires more than increasing the number of women in leadership positions. It means building an environment where women can contribute, have their voices heard, access opportunities and see a pathway for their leadership growth.

With further Women in Lifesaving events and development opportunities ahead, SLSQ will continue building on this work and creating a strong network for women to connect, develop, feel supported and lead across lifesaving.

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ON THE WATER: **INSIDE SLSQ'S ROLE AT THE 2026 PACIFIC AIRSHOW**

While the crowd on Surfers Paradise beach had their eyes on F-35s and Spitfires, a 26-strong Surf Life Saving Queensland team had theirs on the water. Twenty-four jet ski operators and two Duty Officers spent the Pacific Airshow's three days working alongside Queensland Police Service's Water Police, making sure the biggest show in the sky didn't turn into a problem on the water.

The 2026 Pacific Airshow ran from 14 to 16 August 2026 and drew crowds estimated at more than 250,000, with organisers putting its contribution to the Gold Coast economy at close to \$40 million. It's now Australia's largest spectator airshow. This year's line-up included the RAAF Roulettes, an F-35 Lightning, a Spitfire, a P-51 Mustang and a jet pack demonstration that reportedly took organisers two and a half years to get approved.

None of that happens safely without someone managing the water in front of it, and that's the job SLSQ's Gold Coast Operations Support team was there to do.

WHAT THE TEAM WAS TASKED WITH

Working under Water Police direction, SLSQ's crew had three jobs across the weekend: keep the public out of the exclusion zone in front of the display area, provide water safety cover for people swimming nearby, and stay on standby to be tasked by QPS if something went wrong.

It's a harder brief than it sounds. An exclusion zone has to hold with aircraft performing low-level passes directly overhead and a crowd of thousands wanting a closer look, while ordinary swimmers are still using the same stretch of water a short distance away. Holding that line for three straight days takes coordination, not just presence.

"An event like this comes with a lot of moving parts, aircraft overhead, thousands of people on the sand,

and a public swimming area right next to an active exclusion zone," says Nathan Fife, SLSQ's Gold Coast Regional Manager. "What I'm most proud of is how our operators handled it. Twenty-four RWC operators and two Duty Officers held that line all weekend, worked seamlessly alongside Water Police, and didn't miss a beat. It's the kind of job that looks simple from the beach, but it takes real skill and a cool head to get right."

A PARTNERSHIP NOW THREE YEARS RUNNING

This was SLSQ's third year supporting the Pacific Airshow since it launched on the Gold Coast in 2023, and the arrangement has stayed much the same each time. Crew are sourced through an Expression of Interest sent out to Gold Coast RWC operators, giving experienced members across the region a chance to put their hand up for the job. If SLSQ is asked to support the event again in 2027, the same EOI process will run, and Gold Coast operators keen to be involved should keep an eye out for it.

THE HELICOPTER'S PART IN THE SHOW

The Westpac Lifesaver Rescue Helicopter, which has patrolled the Queensland coast since 1976 and works alongside QPS, AMSA and Queensland Fire and Emergency Services on real rescues, was also part of the weekend's program. It sat on static display for spectators and carried out a live winch rescue demonstration as part of the show.

For most of the crowd, it would have registered as one more impressive act in a weekend full of them. For SLSQ members, it's worth knowing that the aircraft performing that demonstration is the same one on call for genuine rescues along the coast every other week of the year.



WHY IT MATTERS

A jet ski patrol isn't going to out-compete an F-35 for attention, and it isn't trying to. But an event of this size, run on a public beach with a quarter of a million people watching, doesn't happen safely without a team managing the water in front of it. That's the job SLSQ's Gold Coast members did this year, largely unseen by the crowd they were protecting.

Thanks to Nathan Fife and every member of the Gold Coast Operations Support team for the work put in over the airshow weekend.



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RACING INTO A NEW SEASON: SLSQ PARTNERS WITH THE WORLD OCEAN SERIES

Another huge season of surf sports is on the horizon, with Surf Life Saving Queensland proud to once again partner with the Shaw and Partners World Ocean Series for the 2026/27 season.

Now entering its 15th year, the World Ocean Series continues to provide a platform for some of the world's best surf sports athletes to compete at iconic locations across Australia and internationally, while creating opportunities for the next generation of athletes to experience racing on a major stage.

Following the opening international rounds in Great Britain, France and the United States, the Series will return to Australia in October, with Queensland playing a significant role throughout the 2026/27 calendar.

WORLD-CLASS RACING RETURNS TO QUEENSLAND

The Australian leg will get underway on the Gold Coast, with Burleigh Heads hosting racing from 2–4 October.

From there, the Series will travel around the country before returning to Queensland for events at Alexandra Headland and Maroochydore, with the season culminating at Northcliffe for the Shaw and Partners Shannon Eckstein Ironman Classic on 19–20 February.

Across the full season, athletes will have the opportunity to compete in 18 Open events, with their best five results contributing towards the overall World Ocean Series championship.

The calendar will bring together established champions, emerging athletes and competitors from across the surf sports community, continuing to showcase the skill and athleticism at the heart of lifesaving sport.

For SLSQ, partnering with the Series provides another opportunity to support high-level surf sports competition in Queensland and see our beaches and athletes represented on a national and international stage.

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

While the Open competition will once again attract some of the biggest names in surf sports, an equally important part of the 2026/27 Series is providing opportunities for younger athletes.

Three dedicated youth events will feature across the Australian calendar, beginning with the Shaw and Partners Burleigh Youth 5,000 on 4 October, followed by the Race One World Youth Championships on 1 November and the Shaw and Partners Hayden Kenny Classic Youth on 29 November.

Giving young athletes opportunities to compete at major events alongside some of the sport's leading competitors provides valuable racing experience and a glimpse at where surf sports can take them.

It also helps build the pathway between junior and senior competition, giving emerging athletes something to work towards while allowing them to test themselves in a competitive environment.

For SLSQ, supporting these opportunities is an important part of encouraging the next generation to remain engaged in surf sports and continue developing their skills.

MORE OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS THE SERIES

The 2026/27 season will also introduce several new elements designed to broaden participation and create further opportunities for athletes and clubs.

A new World Ocean Series Club Championship will see clubs nominate athletes across Swim, Board, Ski, Iron and Mixed Taplin disciplines, bringing another team element to the competition.

Community participation will also expand through the introduction of 2km Ocean Swims, beginning at Burleigh Heads on 4 October before being introduced at additional events throughout the season.



SUPPORTING THE FUTURE OF SURF SPORTS

From a single event in Coffs Harbour in 2011 to a calendar spanning international and Australian locations, the World Ocean Series has continued to grow alongside the athletes and communities that support it.

For Queensland, the 2026/27 season will provide plenty of opportunities to see that growth firsthand, from the opening Australian round at Burleigh Heads through to racing on the Sunshine Coast and the season finale at Northcliffe.

We are proud to once again partner with the Shaw and Partners World Ocean Series and support a competition that showcases our sport at its highest level, while continuing to create opportunities for the next generation of surf sports athletes.

With Open and Youth racing returning to Queensland beaches, there is plenty to look forward to as the 2026/27 season gets underway.





WHY RECOGNITION MATTERS: INSIDE SLSQ'S AWARDS PROCESS, WITH ROB CAMPBELL

Ask Rob Campbell what keeps a volunteer coming back season after season, and his answer isn't about equipment, training or even the water. It's simpler than that. It's being seen.

Campbell is a life member of Dicky Beach Surf Life Saving Club, the Sunshine Coast Branch and Queensland, and for the past 15 years he has sat on the Meritorious Award Selection Panel (MASP) — the group responsible for SLSQ's honours and awards program. In a recent episode of SLSQ's Successful Surf Club Series, host Alex Walker sat down with Campbell to unpack why recognition matters so much in a volunteer organisation, and how clubs can do it well.

His starting point is Volunteering Australia's definition: volunteering is time willingly given for the common good, without financial gain. It's a neat summary, Campbell says, of exactly what SLSQ's members do — and roughly what they get paid for it.

THE CASE NO ONE TALKS ABOUT

Recognition isn't a nice-to-have, Campbell argues — it's the only reward a volunteer organisation actually has to offer. He lays out four reasons it matters as much as it does. Volunteer organisations simply don't exist without their people. Those people are giving their own time, at no cost, to keep the organisation running. Less obviously, there's real competition between volunteer organisations for the same pool of people, who will gravitate to wherever they feel most valued. And increasingly, economic pressure and shifting generational attitudes to volunteering are making it harder for organisations to attract and retain members at all.

"The importance of recognition is that it's the only form of reward that our organisation has for its members," Campbell says.

That's why the informal side matters just as much as the formal one. Alongside SLSQ's structured awards, Campbell points to the smaller gestures — a shared meal, a genuine "job well done" — as part of building what he calls a broader culture of

recognition, one that extends to members who never set foot on patrol but keep the club running behind the scenes: fixing IRBs, clearing the storeroom, doing the jobs nobody sees.

HOW THE PATHWAY WORKS

For members and club administrators navigating the formal side, Campbell walks through the annual cycle. SLSQ releases an awards circular to clubs each March, in agreement with Surf Life Saving Australia, covering everything from process to online nomination links. Club awards are typically announced in May and June, branch awards follow in July, and state winners are named at the Awards of Excellence, usually in August or into September. From there, around 11 state category winners — covering roles like Lifesaver of the Year, Youth Lifesaver of the Year, Lifeguard of the Year, and Volunteer and Youth Volunteer of the Year — go on to the national awards in November. North Queensland Branch runs on its own timeline and is typically well ahead of its southern counterparts by the time state awards come around.

Beneath the roughly 27 Awards of Excellence categories sits a broader landscape: meritorious awards for bravery during lifesaving operations, and service awards recognising the less headline-grabbing contributions — 100-hours and 100 per cent patrol attendance, frontline service, patrol milestones from five to 50-plus years, and dedicated awards for trainers, assessors, age managers, coaches and administrators. There are national awards and medals available too.

WHAT A NOMINATION NEEDS

Campbell's advice for anyone writing a nomination is deceptively simple: focus on the facts.

"A good nomination has strong alignment between the nominee's achievements and the award criteria," he says — and it's the single most important thing



to get right. He's seen strong nominations fail simply because they were submitted in the wrong category, most commonly a mix-up between Volunteer of the Year and Lifesaver of the Year.

The word limit for each award question has grown from 200 to 400 words since the process moved online, and Campbell is comfortable with nominations that use dot points where they sharpen the message. Judging panels — six people, one per branch, for each award — are comparing nominations against each other and against the criteria, so clarity beats padding every time.

Sometimes the best material has to be drawn out. Campbell recalls one nomination for a member who didn't think what he'd done was especially notable — until the details emerged: three rescues in 45 minutes, one using an IRB, a second after the IRB ran out of fuel and he swam it in on a rescue tube. "Some people are just focused on the doing," Campbell says. "They're not thinking about recognition at all." It's on clubs, he says, to ask the extra questions and draw those stories out.

A LEG UP FOR YOUNG MEMBERS

For junior and youth members, Campbell sees recognition as something bigger than the awards themselves.

"Surf Life Saving is a very respected brand and organisation," he says, "but it's not until you actually meet and hear and understand what some of these young people are doing in their lives" that the impact becomes clear.

His advice to clubs is to build awareness of awards early each season, so young members have something to work towards, and to keep records of achievement as they go rather than trying to reconstruct them later. Structured youth leadership — junior and youth club captains, mentored leadership groups — builds the same skills that make for strong nominations and strong CVs.

He also points to something that isn't an award at all: a club reference. "Any young person who rocks up with a reference from Surf Life Saving for a job at McDonald's is guaranteed to get it," Campbell says, "because at that stage they will have life-saving skills." It's a small thing clubs can offer that pays off well beyond the beach.

Campbell's own path onto MASP began exactly this way. Working with Nippers at his club, he wrote his first nomination in 2005 — for an outstanding Under

14 member, for Junior Lifesaver of the Year. She won. "I remember the euphoria that I felt," he says. Her parents still thank him for it, 20 years on. He wrote a second successful nomination two years later, and has been hooked on the process ever since.

BUILDING RECOGNITION INTO CLUB LIFE

Best practice, Campbell says, starts with structure. He recommends clubs establish a small honours and awards panel — two or three people, provided for in the club's bylaws — to oversee nominations and keep them aligned to criteria. Whoever writes a nomination needs a genuinely good understanding of what the nominee has achieved; warm words alone don't carry a nomination without facts behind them.

He also encourages clubs to invest properly in the background write-up for club-level award winners, even when that award goes no further. Done well, that document becomes the foundation for a branch or state nomination later — write it once, and write it properly. Where club awards have historically diverged from branch and state naming and criteria, Campbell suggests bringing them into line — turning, for example, a "Patrolling Award" into a "Lifesaver of the Year Award" — so clubs aren't rewriting nominations from scratch at every level.

For smaller and regional clubs working with limited time and budget, Campbell's message is not to rule anything out. Grants and sponsors can support award nights, and small clubs are often more closely connected to their local community than they realise — an asset worth leaning on. Other clubs and SLSQ itself are available to help set the process up efficiently.

One practical habit underpins all of it: entering every award and recognition into SurfGuard as it happens. "That is the point of truth," Campbell says, "and will become an investment in any future nominations." Recognition doesn't stop at SLSQ's own program either — community awards, OAMs and life memberships at every level of the organisation are all worth clubs keeping front of mind, and the SLSQ Member Hub carries further support and guidance for clubs ready to get started.

Campbell's final words.

"The feeling that a person gets from volunteering," he says, "is only surpassed by the feeling that recognition and appreciation for that effort provides."





TEAM WELLBEING LAUNCHES THIS OCTOBER

There's a moment on most patrols where someone quietly checks in on someone else. A "how are you going, really?" after a tough rescue. A joke that breaks the tension. A mate who notices you've gone a bit quiet and doesn't let it slide. Surf lifesavers have always looked out for each other. This October, that instinct gets a name, a structure, and some serious backing from SLSQ.

Team Wellbeing is officially launching across Queensland, timed to land alongside Wellbeing Month, Queensland Mental Health Week and World Mental Health Day on 10 October. It's a statewide network of members who put their hand up to champion wellbeing in their own club, and it's built on a simple idea: the best mental health support often starts with a mate noticing, asking, and staying in the conversation.

WHY THIS, WHY NOW

Surf lifesaving is built on people who show up for others, often at the hardest moments. That's exactly why so many of our own members are reluctant to put their hand up when they're the ones doing it tough. National research through the Answering the Call survey found that more than half of first responders who needed help for a mental health issue never sought it or never received it, with stigma and low mental health literacy named as the biggest barriers. The first dedicated study into the mental health of Australian surf lifesavers and lifeguards told a similar story, and a hopeful one: members with stronger self-efficacy and social support reported significantly lower post-traumatic stress symptoms.

In other words, the culture in the shed matters. Team Wellbeing exists to strengthen it, deliberately, in every club across the state.

It's worth being clear about what Team Wellbeing is and isn't. It sits alongside SLSQ's existing Peer Support program, not inside it. Peer Support is reactive: trained members step in after a critical incident or a genuinely hard event, when someone needs structured, confidential support. Team Wellbeing is proactive. It's

the everyday culture-building that happens well before a crisis, the conversations, the check-ins and the small moments that make a club feel like somewhere people can be honest about how they're going. Both matter. Neither replaces the other.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY LOOKS LIKE ON THE GROUND

Team Wellbeing isn't a course you complete or a box you tick once. It's an ongoing collective of members, as many as want to join from a single club, who become SLSQ's eyes and ears on wellbeing at the local level. Each month, Member Welfare provides a theme, resources and ready-to-go activation ideas that clubs can run their own way, whether that's a full club event or a five-minute moment at the end of a patrol briefing.

Two things run continuously in the background all year. Mate Check is a short, practical wellbeing tip sent to every member via member mail, built to give people the language and confidence to check in on each other without it feeling awkward. My SLSQ Story invites members to share, in their own words or on video, what the surf lifesaving community has meant for their own wellbeing, stories that get shared across SLSQ channels to remind the whole movement why this work matters.

Clubs running an activation aren't left to cover the cost themselves either. Team Wellbeing members can apply for a subsidy toward food, drinks, guest speakers, printing and other reasonable expenses, because a good idea for connecting a club shouldn't stall on budget.

WHY OCTOBER IS THE BIG ONE

Every month on the Team Wellbeing calendar has a focus, but October carries extra weight. As Wellbeing Month, it's anchored to Queensland Mental Health Week and World Mental Health Day, and it's designed to be the loudest, most visible moment of the year for looking out for each other.

TEAM WELL BEING

IS LOOKING FOR PASSIONATE MEMBERS WHO
WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THEIR CLUB.



Queensland

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Clubs are encouraged to get involved however suits them. Coffee with Team Wellbeing is an informal, no-agenda open chat session members can just turn up to. The Wellbeing Relay sees a symbolic baton passed from club to club across Queensland throughout the month, with each club doing something wellbeing-related and tagging the next one to keep it moving. There's a Wellbeing Bingo card of simple activities to work through, content busting common myths around asking for help, and honest conversations about burnout, aimed squarely at long-serving members and club leaders who so often put everyone else first. Clubs are also encouraged to make space for grief and loss, acknowledging that members may be carrying it quietly, particularly after a difficult season.

None of it requires a big production. A five-minute chat at a briefing about the signs a mate might not be okay counts just as much as a full club event. What matters is that every club is doing something.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Getting involved is deliberately simple. Team Wellbeing opens an expression of interest each year for members across every SLSQ club to apply directly to Member Welfare. There's no interview and no selection

process. Any member registered for the current season who puts their hand up is in.

There's also no cap on numbers. If there are a few like-minded people in your club who care about this, you're encouraged to join up together rather than go it alone, and the more members invested in wellbeing at club level, the stronger that culture becomes for everyone around them.

For members who aren't ready to take on a formal role but want to be part of it anyway, that's easy too. Read the Mate Check tip when it lands in your inbox. Share a myth-buster with your club group chat. Stay back for fifteen minutes after patrol with no agenda, just company. Ask a mate how they're really going, and mean it.

Surf lifesaving has never needed reminding that people look out for each other. Team Wellbeing simply gives that instinct a home, a calendar, and a movement's worth of support behind it. This October, that's worth making some noise about.

For more information about Team Wellbeing or to express your interest, contact memberwelfare@lifesaving.com.au

TEAM WELLBEING

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

1. APPLY

Fill out the expression of interest form at the link below. Any registered SLSQ member can apply. There is no interview process. If you are registered for the current season, you are in.

2. CONNECT

Once your application is received, Member Welfare will connect you with any other Team Wellbeing members from your club or branch. We encourage you to join forces and share the load, but you are equally welcome to fly solo.

3. GET STARTED

You will receive your Team Wellbeing Member Handbook, access to the full activation bank, and your first monthly newsletter with suggested activities and resources to help you hit the ground running.

4. MAKE IT HAPPEN

Choose an activation that suits your club, request your collateral from Member Welfare, and bring it to life. Big or small, every activation counts.



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HUET TRAINING: PREPARING BELOW THE SURFACE

Strapped in, submerged and turned upside down, Helicopter Underwater Escape Training prepares Westpac Lifesaver Rescue Helicopter crews for an emergency they hope they'll never face.

When most people picture training for the Westpac Lifesaver Rescue Helicopter Service, they might imagine winching from the aircraft, rescue scenarios or hours spent perfecting procedures in the air.

They probably don't picture being strapped into a simulator, plunged underwater and turned upside down.

But for aviation crews who regularly operate over Queensland's coastline and waterways, preparing for the unexpected is an essential part of being rescue-ready.

Helicopter Underwater Escape Training, better known as HUET, prepares crew members to safely escape an aircraft following an emergency water landing. The training deliberately places participants in situations involving submersion, inversion and disorientation, teaching them how to overcome their natural reactions and follow a clear escape process under pressure.

According to SLSQ Aviation Crew Training Officer Andrew McNeilly, that's precisely why the training matters.

"The core rationale for Helicopter Underwater Escape Training is simple and uncompromising: when helicopters ditch or crash into water, survivability depends almost entirely on whether occupants can overcome disorientation, cold shock and time pressure long enough to locate an exit and escape," Andrew said.

WHEN INSTINCT ISN'T ENOUGH

A helicopter entering the water can rapidly invert and flood, leaving occupants without their usual visual references and forcing them to locate exits, release restraints and orient themselves while underwater.

In those circumstances, instinct isn't always helpful.

HUET teaches crews a deliberate sequence of actions: brace, wait, orient, locate an exit, release the harness, escape and surface.

Participants learn to maintain a physical reference point within the aircraft, locate exits by touch, correctly release their harness and navigate their way out when visibility and orientation are compromised.

"The core purpose of HUET scenario-based drills, especially inverted and submerged escapes, is to build automatic, non-instinctive survival behaviours," Andrew explained.

By repeatedly practising these actions in a controlled environment, crews develop the procedural discipline and muscle memory needed to respond under pressure.

TURNING THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

During HUET, a simulator introduces participants to many of the physical, sensory and psychological challenges they could encounter during a real water impact.

While the simulator isn't an exact replica of the aircraft operated by the Service, it exposes crews to critical stressors including inversion, flooding, disorientation and the challenge of finding an exit underwater.

For Andrew, one of the greatest challenges isn't necessarily the physical act of escaping. It's overcoming the natural response to the situation.

"I remind our crew that we are a land animal that chooses to swim, not a water animal that chooses to walk," Andrew said.

"Being strapped into a cage and rolled upside down in water is by no means a pleasant experience."

Participants have to overcome their natural flight response, trust their ability to remain underwater and concentrate on the process they've been taught.



Andrew says the transformation throughout training can be significant.

“The biggest transformation you see in a crew member from start to finish is a shift from instinctive, reactive behaviour to calm, procedural discipline.”

By the end, crews demonstrate greater confidence in their breathing control, orientation, decision-making and ability to work together, skills that extend well beyond the HUET simulator.

BEFORE THEY'RE RESCUE-READY

HUET is just one part of the extensive preparation behind every Westpac Lifesaver Rescue Helicopter mission.

As Andrew explains, the aircraft the public sees responding to an emergency represents countless hours of work from the people inside it.

“What they don't see is the enormous, multi-layered preparation that turns an ordinary person or surf lifesaver into a rescue-ready crew member,” he said.

Before becoming operational, new crew members undertake training across human factors, fatigue management, aircraft safety and familiarisation, rescue equipment, technical rescue skills, winch operations, emergency procedures, sea survival, navigation, radio communications and mission management.

They must also complete supervised operational hours before becoming fully operational.

And qualification isn't where the training ends.

Crew members undergo formal operational and rescue procedure assessments every six months, alongside six-monthly fitness assessments. Between these assessments, they're expected to continually train to maintain the recency of their skills.

It's a significant commitment, particularly considering the majority of crew members are volunteers balancing their aviation responsibilities with work, family and life outside the Service.

Andrew describes the person they're ultimately developing as “part-aviator, part-lifesaver, part-medic, part-safety officer and part-mentor to the next generation.”

TRAINING FOR THE UNEXPECTED

For the crews of the Westpac Lifesaver Rescue Helicopter Service, training isn't simply about knowing what to do when everything goes according to plan.

It's about knowing what to do when it doesn't.

HUET prepares crews for a scenario they hope they'll never experience. But by confronting disorientation, discomfort and pressure in training, crew members develop the confidence and skills to remain calm, follow procedure and work together if the unexpected happens.

Long before the helicopter lifts off for its next mission, the work to make sure everyone on board is prepared has already begun.





HONOURING A LIFETIME OF SERVICE

FOUR DECADES OF SERVICE, ONE COMMITMENT TO KEEPING OUR BEACHES SAFE

When Gary Patterson first joined Carrum Surf Life Saving Club in Victoria more than 40 years ago, he couldn't have imagined where the journey would take him. From club leadership and regional operations in Victoria to supporting some of Queensland's busiest beaches, his lifelong commitment to surf lifesaving has now been recognised with the 2026 Gold Coast Duty Officer of the Year award.

For Gary, however, the recognition isn't about individual achievement.

"I feel extremely proud to receive the award," he said. "But I was also surprised because there is a team of fantastic Duty Officers who are all deserving of the acknowledgement. We all bring different strengths, knowledge and experience, and you never stop learning from each other."

Ironically, Gary wasn't even present to accept the award. Instead, he was completing Incident Control Levels 1 and 2 training at Surf House, continuing to build the skills needed to coordinate major incidents and support frontline lifesavers.

A JOURNEY BUILT ON LEADERSHIP

Gary's lifesaving journey began in the early 1980s at Carrum SLSC, where he progressed through numerous volunteer roles before serving as Club President for more than 13 years. During that time, he helped guide the club through its transition from Royal Life Saving to Surf Life Saving.

He also spent several years as a Regional Officer in Victoria, a position similar to Queensland's Duty Officer role, before relocating north in 2010.

After arriving in Queensland, Gary joined Brisbane Lifesaving Service (BLS), attracted by the opportunity to support multiple clubs across the region. He later became part of Operations Support Services, earning his Rescue Water Craft qualification in 2013 before stepping into the Duty Officer role on the Gold Coast the following year.

More than a decade later, he's still doing exactly what drew him to the position in the first place, supporting clubs, members and the wider community.

BEHIND THE SCENES OF A DUTY OFFICER

While beachgoers often see the red and yellow uniforms on the sand, much of the coordination that keeps beaches running safely happens behind the scenes.

A Duty Officer's day can begin up to 30 minutes before patrol starts and often doesn't finish until well after the final patrol signs off, with shifts stretching to 12 hours during extended patrol periods.

Covering the entire Gold Coast from the Southport Spit to Rainbow Bay, Gary and his fellow Duty Officers continually monitor radio traffic, travel between clubs and remain ready to respond whenever additional support is required.

"The role can vary significantly depending on the circumstances," Gary explained.

"One moment you might be speaking with members on patrol or talking with the public, and the next you're coordinating resources during a major rescue or prolonged search."

Duty Officers work closely alongside patrol teams, directing specialist resources such as Rescue Water Craft and the Westpac Lifesaver Rescue Helicopter when required, while also coordinating with SurfCom and other emergency services during significant incidents.

Even while visiting clubs or assisting on beach patrol, the responsibility never switches off.

"You never stop being a Duty Officer," Gary said. "We're always monitoring radio traffic and ready to respond if something happens."

SUPPORTING PEOPLE WHEN IT MATTERS MOST

Throughout the season, Gary helped respond to a wide variety of incidents, from mass rescues and missing swimmers to shark sightings and medical emergencies.

While Patrol Captains successfully managed many of these incidents, Duty Officers provided additional leadership, operational support and welfare assistance where required.

Looking back on the season, one of Gary's proudest achievements wasn't a major rescue, but helping develop the next generation of Duty Officers.

"I was fortunate to team up with a number of probationary Duty Officers throughout the season," he said.

"It was fantastic getting to know their backgrounds, sharing my experience and supporting them as they learned the role."

Just as memorable, he says, are the quieter moments spent visiting clubs, chatting with members and building relationships across the coast.

"There's always plenty of banter between the Duty Officers," he laughed.



LOOKING BEYOND THE FLAGS

For Gary, the Duty Officer role highlights just how much happens beyond the red and yellow flags.

Duty Officers provide critical leadership, operational support and incident coordination, ensuring clubs have the backup they need while working alongside agencies such as Queensland Police and other emergency services during complex incidents.

"We're a vital part of the overall safety network," Gary said. "We're there to support our clubs, make critical decisions when required and help keep the community safe."

For members considering taking the next step into Operations Support Services, Gary believes it's an opportunity unlike any other.

"It gives lifesavers a broader perspective of how our services operate beyond the normal flagged area and how we work alongside other emergency services," he said.

"If you're interested, speak to someone in the Operations Support team. It's a fantastic opportunity to grow your leadership skills, develop your incident management experience and make a real difference to beach and water safety."



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