

2023



Queensland

COAST SAFE REPORT 2023

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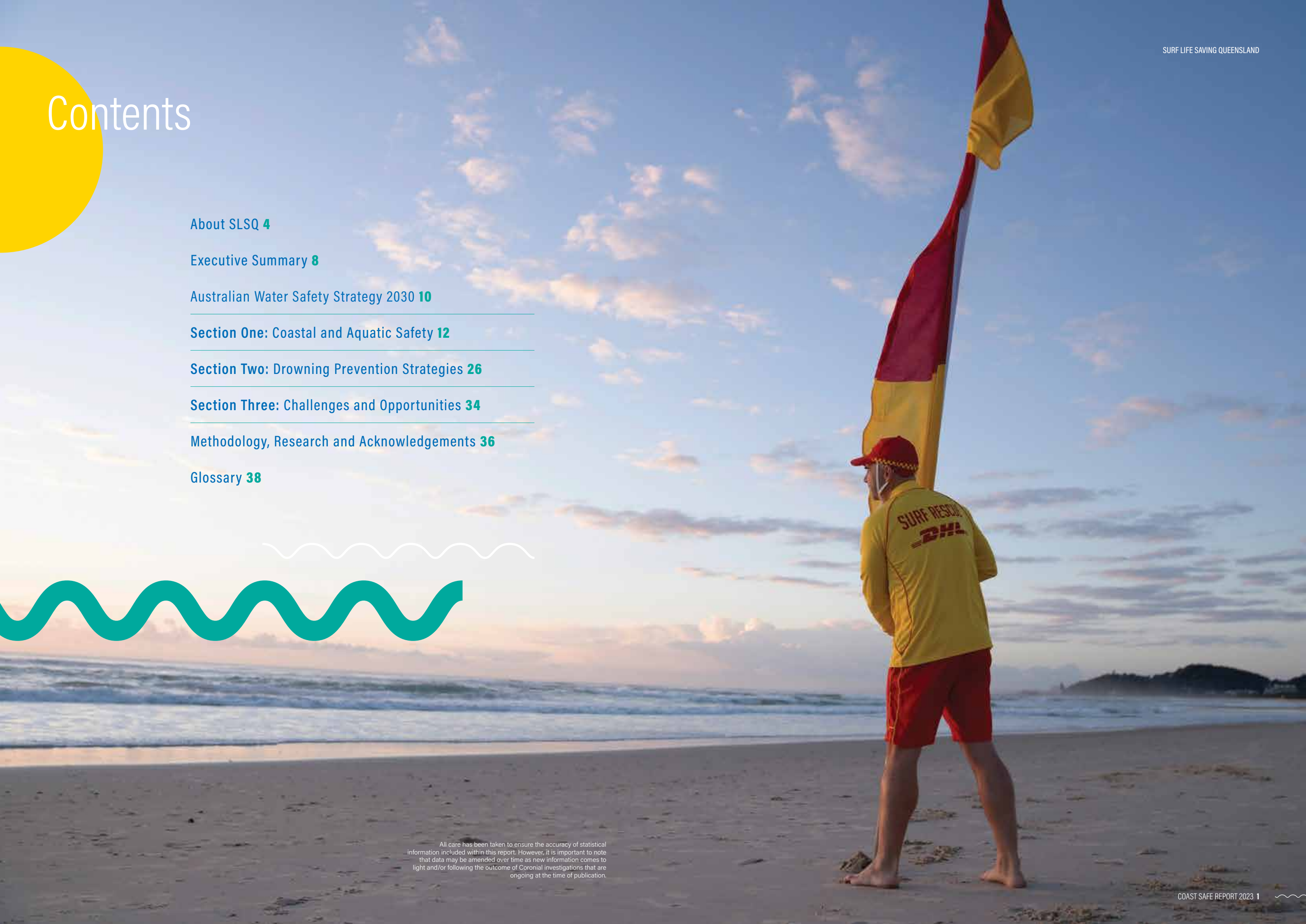
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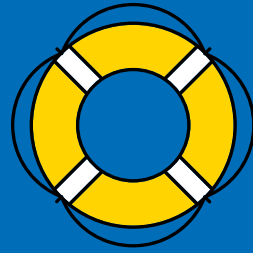
All care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of statistical information included within this report. However, it is important to note that data may be amended over time as new information comes to light and/or following the outcome of Coronial investigations that are ongoing at the time of publication.



QUEENSLAND
BEACHES

2022/23 Drowning Snapshot

7%



INCREASE
IN DROWNING DEATHS

14

OUTSIDE
OF PATROL FLAGS



14

DROWNING DEATHS
ON QUEENSLAND BEACHES

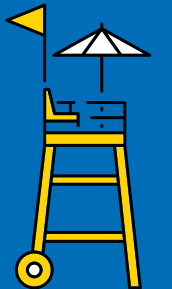


64%

AUSTRALIAN



64%



LESS THAN 1KM
FROM PATROL FLAGS

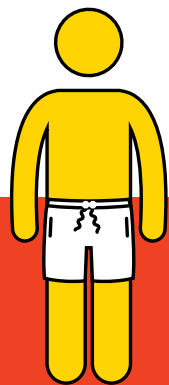
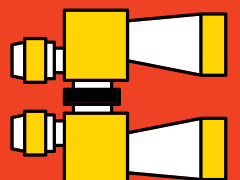
57%

AGED 20-49



5

OUTSIDE
OF PATROL HOURS



64% MALE



Surf Life Saving Queensland's

STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-2025

WHO WE ARE, WHAT WE DO

We are 35,386 volunteers in 58 clubs across six regions that save lives with vigilance and service. We strive for zero preventable deaths in Queensland public waters. We have returned 156,027 loved ones to their families, since the recording of rescues. Across our 540 staff, we are lifesavers, lifeguards, trainers and educators, pilots and crew, administrators, brand custodians and community advocates. Surf Life Saving Queensland is built on tradition, forged out of passion and focused on the future.

OUR VISION

Zero preventable deaths in Queensland public waters.

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

OUR MISSION

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

OUR PURPOSE

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

OUR MOTTO

Vigilance and Service

OUR FUNDING

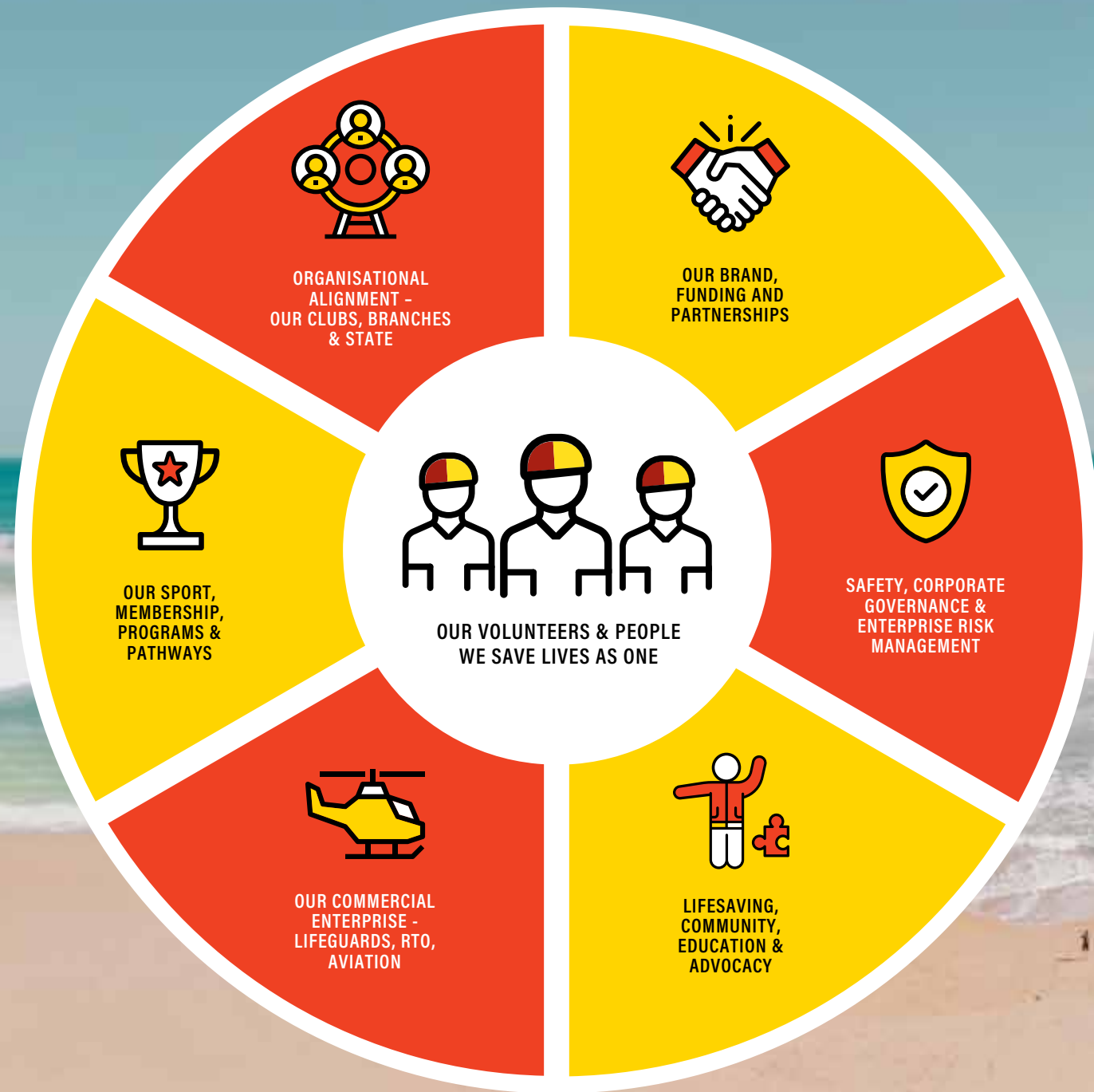
SLSQ is a not-for-profit community service organisation that relies heavily on public and corporate support to fund our operations along Queensland's coastline. In addition to public donations and sponsorship, SLSQ also receives financial support from the Queensland Government via Queensland Fire and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

OUR PRIMARY TARGET

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



Key Elements of Our Success



Our Values



SAFETY

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



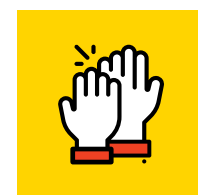
COMMUNITY

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



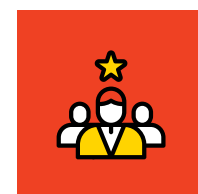
RESPECT

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



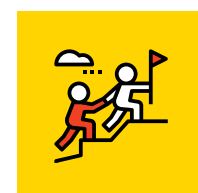
TRUST

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



LEADERSHIP

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



TEAMWORK

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

Executive Summary



Surf Life Saving Queensland is the peak body in aquatic safety in Queensland and a community service-based organisation committed to saving lives.

With more than 35,000 volunteer members, SLSQ is one of the largest volunteer-based community service organisations in Australia. Throughout the long history of the organisation, members have never lost sight of the number one goal – zero preventable deaths in Queensland public waters.

The organisation has grown and expanded throughout the 90-year history and now encompasses several diverse arms – lifesaving services, community education, membership services, surf sports, fundraising and commercial training. SLSQ services go well beyond the beach and are essential for many Queensland communities, especially during times of natural disaster and crisis.

Between 1 July 2022 and 30 June 2023, lifesavers and lifeguards welcomed more than 22 million visitors to the beaches along Queensland's 6089km of mainland coastline. This included a combination of locals, interstate and international visitors.

For the last three years, Australia has had to endure the impact of extreme weather conditions, like La Niña, as well as state and international border closures. However, this season saw a return to high beach visitation as a result of favourable weather conditions and a return to pre-pandemic travel levels.

As such, lifesaver and lifeguards were kept busy looking after the bathing public and all beachgoers, and operations support resources were deployed across Queensland. While patrolling on the beach is the main function of our organisation, our lifesavers and lifeguards are also supported by the Westpac Lifesaving Rescue Helicopter Service, the State Operations Communication Centre, roving jet ski patrols and roving beach patrols.

These additional services are essential to patrol the growing number of 'blackspot' locations across the Queensland coastline. Over the last 20 years, SLSQ has increased lifesaving capability in Queensland and identifying 'blackspots' continues to be a key focus of the organisation.

Between 1 July 2022 and 30 June 2023, lifesavers and lifeguards welcomed more than 22 million visitors to the beaches along Queensland's 6089km of mainland coastline.

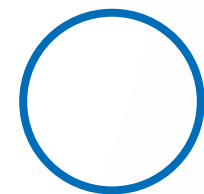
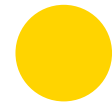
With regards to rescues, SLSQ lifesavers and lifeguards carried out 3,276 rescues with 85% of them occurring outside the flagged area. This is a 16 percent increase on last year which indicates that people are still taking the unnecessary risk to swim outside the red and yellow flags and therefore putting themselves, and others, in danger.

Of the 3,276 rescues completed by lifesavers and lifeguards, 768 of them were children under the age of 12 years who were mainly swimming or bodyboarding. Alarming, 75% of those rescued occurred outside the patrol flags, which is only a slight reduction on last year (83%). In 2022, SLSQ launched a state-wide surf safety campaign targeting families and reminding them of the importance of swimming between the flags. Given the continued trend of children needing to be rescued outside the flags, SLSQ will continue to promote this message through the surf safety campaigns.

Sadly, there were 14 beach-related drowning deaths in 2022/2023 in Queensland and Australian males continued to be overrepresented in these tragedies, especially those aged 20 – 49 years who accounted for 57% of deaths. All 14 occurred outside patrol flagged areas, with four occurring less than 200 metres from patrol flags.

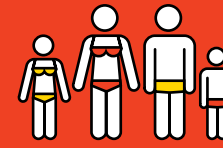
In addition to beach-related drowning deaths, a further 29 people drowned at inland aquatic locations and other public waterways in 2022/2023, a 25% decrease on last year's numbers. Last year's inland drownings were greatly impacted by the devastating floods throughout Queensland. Of the inland drownings, 26 of them were male and three were female, with 24% undertaking swimming or wading when they tragically drowned.

SLSQ strongly believes that even one drowning death is one too many and that is why SLSQ works tirelessly to address the risks identified in the annual Coast Safe Report. Understanding the trends and risks helps the organisation develop and implement new programs focused on drowning prevention, education, and building lifesaving capability. This includes identifying high-risk beaches and demographics, providing resources to clubs and developing or expanding a broad range of initiatives to help achieve SLSQ's vision of 'Zero preventable deaths in Queensland public waters.'



Australian Water Safety Strategy

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



PEOPLE

Focusing on the issue of drowning in:

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



PLACES

Focusing on the issue of drowning at:

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



ACTIVITIES

Focusing on the issue of drowning during:

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



RISK FACTORS

Focusing on the issue of drowning related to:

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



POPULATIONS

Focusing on the issue of drowning in:

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



SECTION ONE

Coastal and Aquatic Safety Snapshot

Rescues YEAR IN REVIEW

Over the 2022/2023 season, SLSQ volunteer lifesaver and paid lifeguards were kept busy with approximately 22.7 million visitors to Queensland beaches.

During this period, SLSQ services performed 3,276 rescues, 630,749 preventative actions and 18,868 first aid treatments. This reflects a 5% increase in rescues and a 6% increase in preventative actions compared to 2021/2022.

Of those 3,276 people rescued, 79% of them were Australian, followed by China (154), India (106) and United Kingdom and Japan (36 each).

A very concerning aspect of the 2022/2023 rescue data is the high number of people (85%) being rescued outside of the red and yellow flags. This is dangerously high and is a growing trend over the last few years that SLSQ wants to address.

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

85%

85% of all rescues were performed outside of the red and yellow flags, an increase of 16% from the previous year.

25

The average age of people rescued was 25 years.

75%

75% of children under the age of 12 years that were rescued were outside the flagged area.

79%

79% of the people rescued in 2022/2023 were Australian.

58%

58% of all patients rescued were male, 42% female.

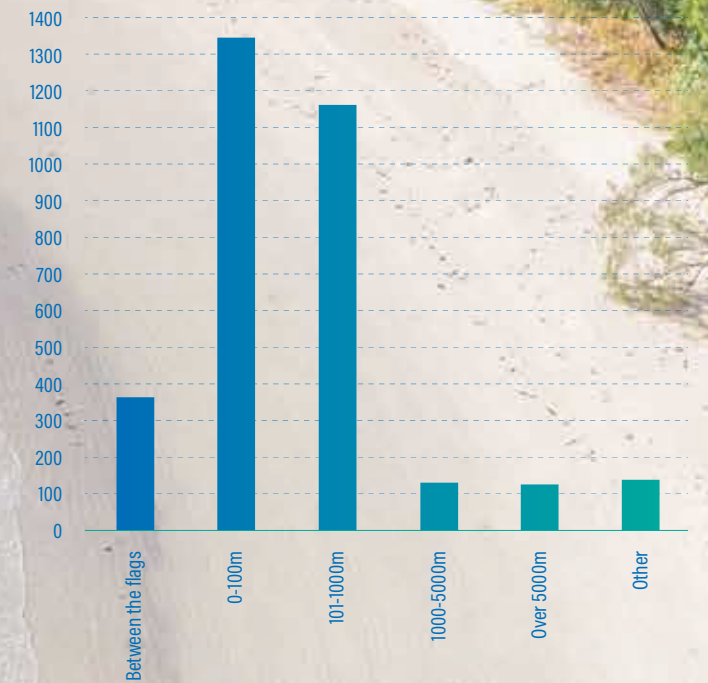
55%

55% of the year's rescues were performed in December and January – 7% increase on last year.

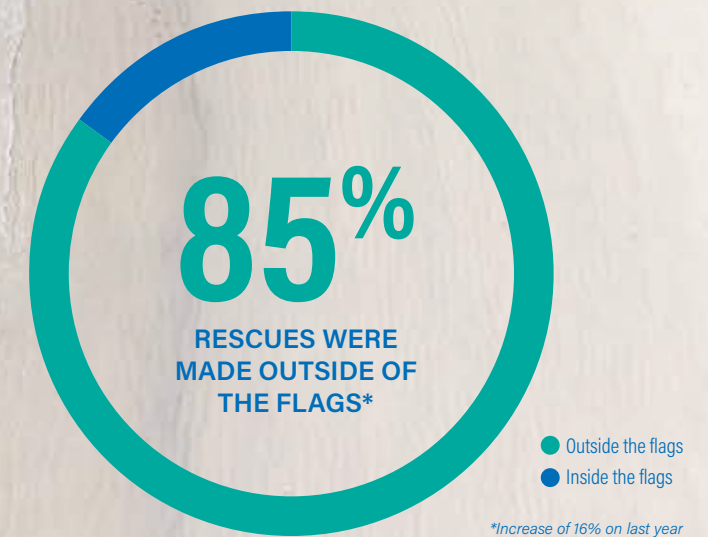
43%

Rescue Watercraft (jetskis) were used for 43% of rescues (a 6% decrease on previous year), followed by rescue board (34%), rescue tube (12%) and IRB (7%).

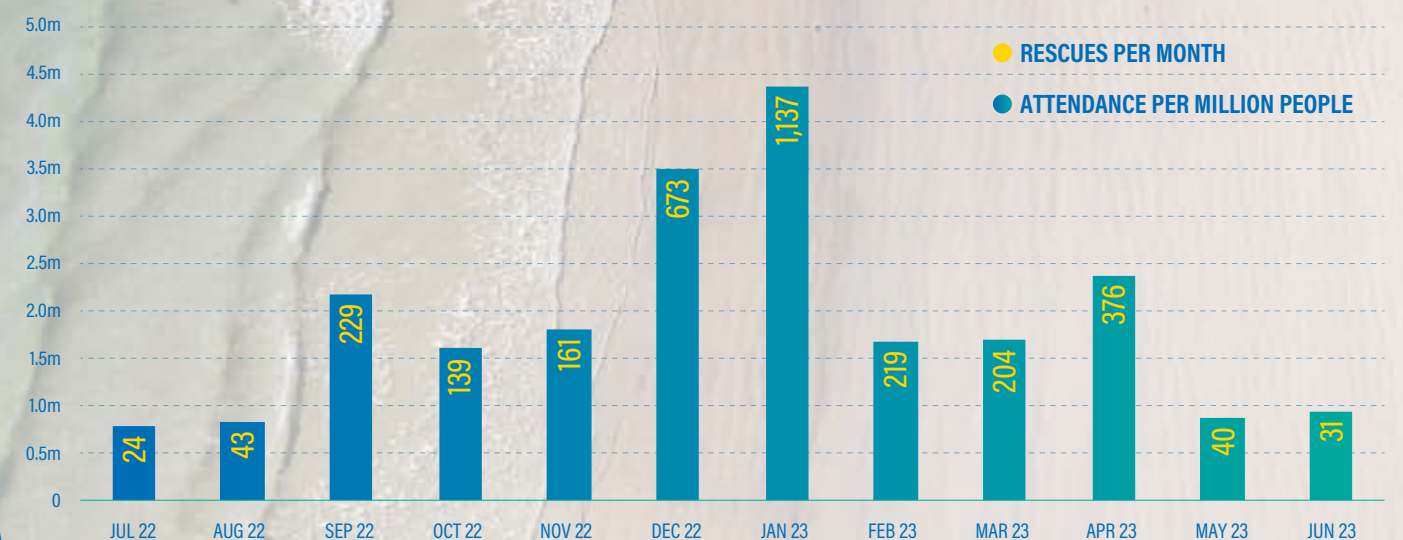
DISTANCE FROM THE FLAGS



LOCATION OF RESCUES 2022/23



RESCUES COMPARED TO ATTENDANCE



Regional Overview of Rescues and Drowning Deaths

NORTH QUEENSLAND



12 MONTHS BEACH-RELATED DROWNING DEATHS



5 YEAR RESCUES/ BEACH-RELATED DROWNING DEATHS



10 YEAR RESCUES/ BEACH-RELATED DROWNING DEATHS

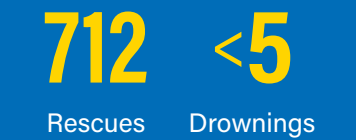
NORTH BARRIER



12 MONTHS BEACH-RELATED DROWNING DEATHS



5 YEAR RESCUES/ BEACH-RELATED DROWNING DEATHS



10 YEAR RESCUES/ BEACH-RELATED DROWNING DEATHS

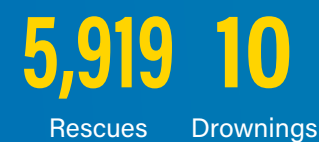
BRISBANE



12 MONTHS BEACH-RELATED DROWNING DEATHS

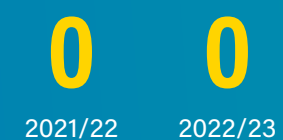


5 YEAR RESCUES/ BEACH-RELATED DROWNING DEATHS

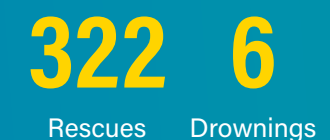


10 YEAR RESCUES/ BEACH-RELATED DROWNING DEATHS

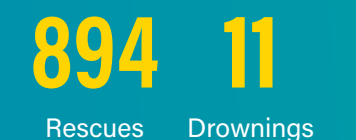
WIDE BAY



12 MONTHS BEACH-RELATED DROWNING DEATHS



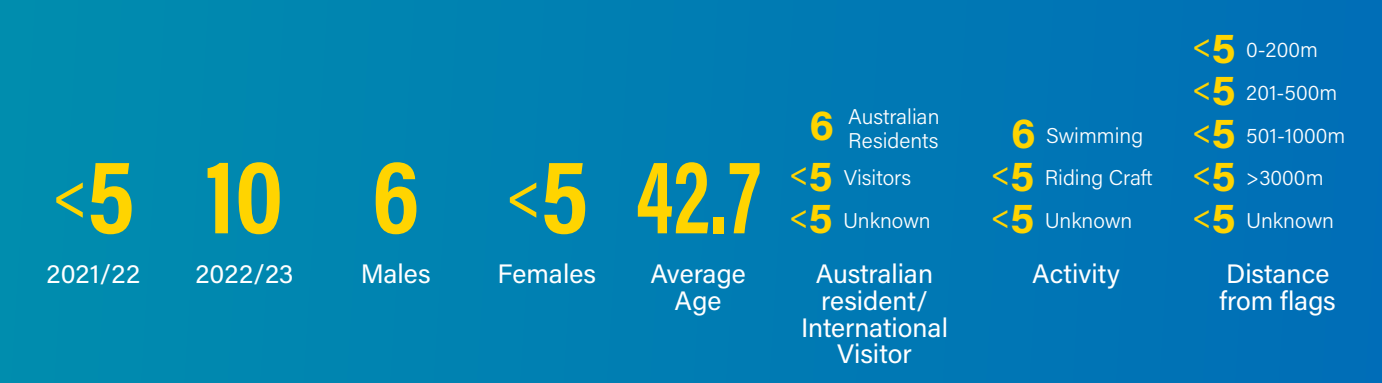
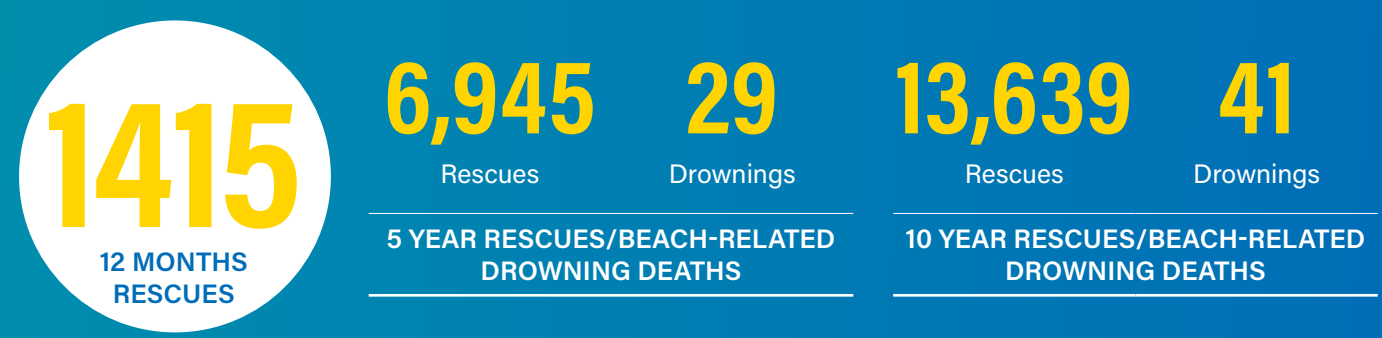
5 YEAR RESCUES/ BEACH-RELATED DROWNING DEATHS



10 YEAR RESCUES/ BEACH-RELATED DROWNING DEATHS

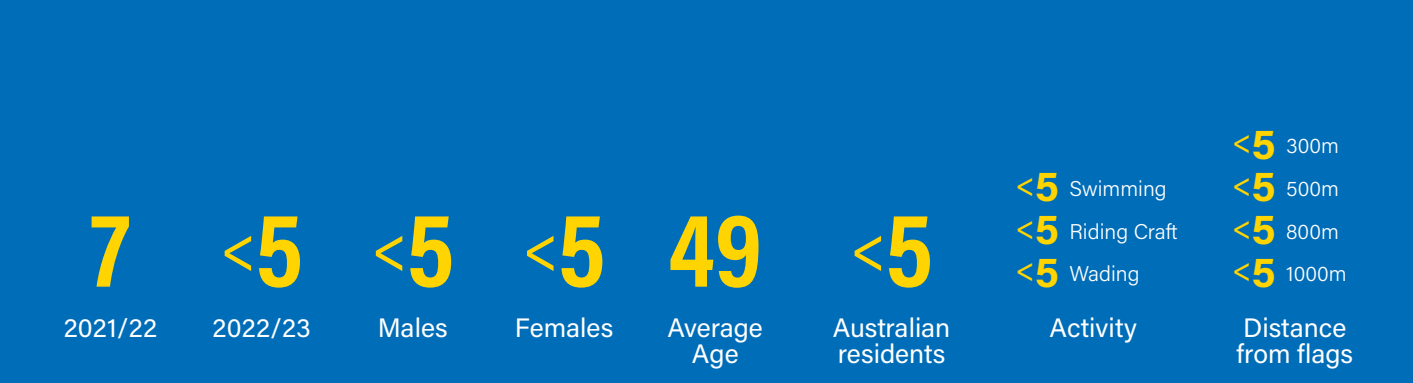
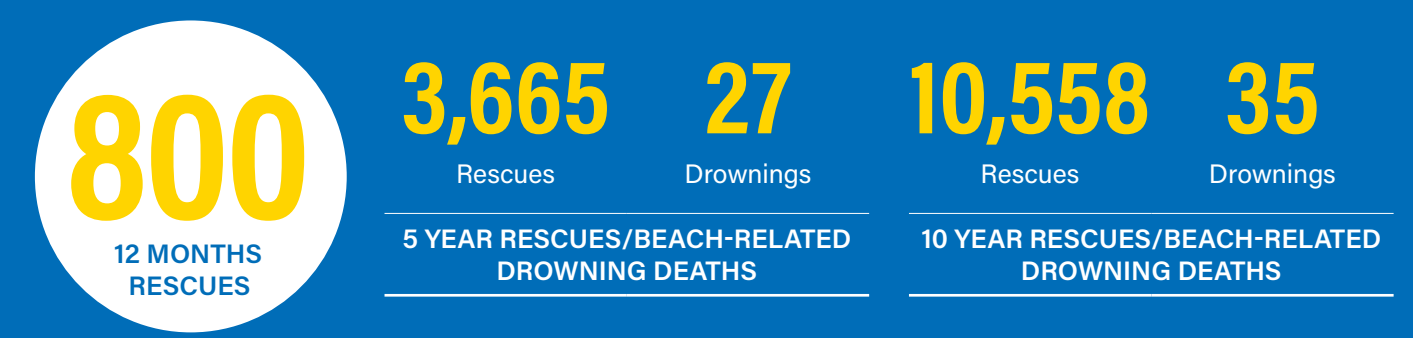


SUNSHINE COAST



12 MONTHS BEACH-RELATED DROWNING DEATHS

GOLD COAST



12 MONTHS BEACH-RELATED DROWNING DEATHS

Beach-Related Drowning Deaths

12 MONTH REVIEW

During the 2022/2023 season there were 14 beach-related drowning deaths recorded on Queensland beaches, a 7% increase on 2021/2022.

SLSQ strongly believes that even one drowning is too many and after a busy year across Queensland beaches, this report will be used to help reduce drownings across the coastline.

In 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 there was an ongoing trend of males aged 20 – 49 years being overrepresented in the beach-related drowning statistics. This trend has continued in 2022/2023, with 57% of victims being aged between 20 to 49. Over the last three years the average age of male drowning victims has increased from 40 years in 2020/2021 to 42 years in 2021/2022 and now 44.5 in 2022/2023.

Similar to the rescue statistics, Australians made up the majority of drowning victims at 64%. Alarmingly, all 14 of the beach-related drowning deaths occurred outside of flagged areas, with four of them taking place less than 200 metres from the flags.

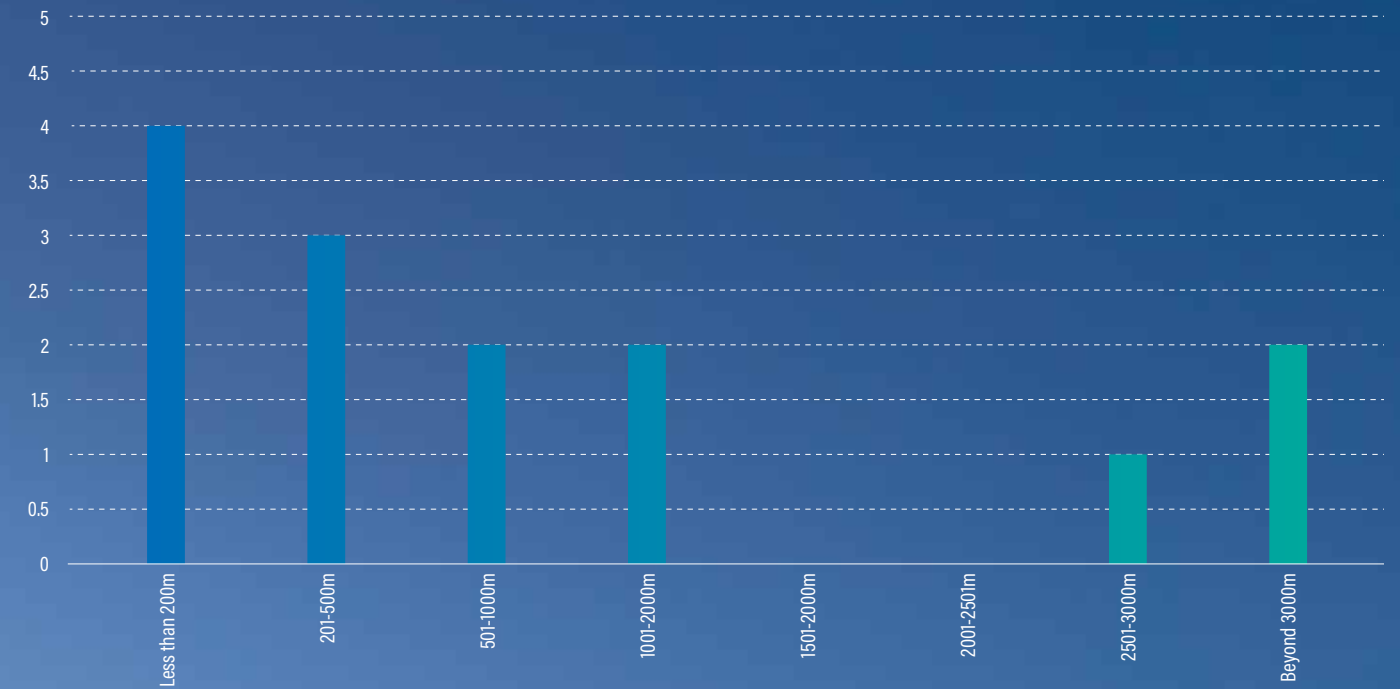
Across Queensland, the summer months during the 2022/2023 season saw six drowning deaths (43%) which is consistent with the results of the previous season.

In terms of regions across Queensland, the Sunshine Coast region experienced the greatest number of tragedies with ten drowning deaths (71%) and the remaining four on the Gold Coast. This is significant change from the previous year where the Gold Coast recorded the highest number of drownings.

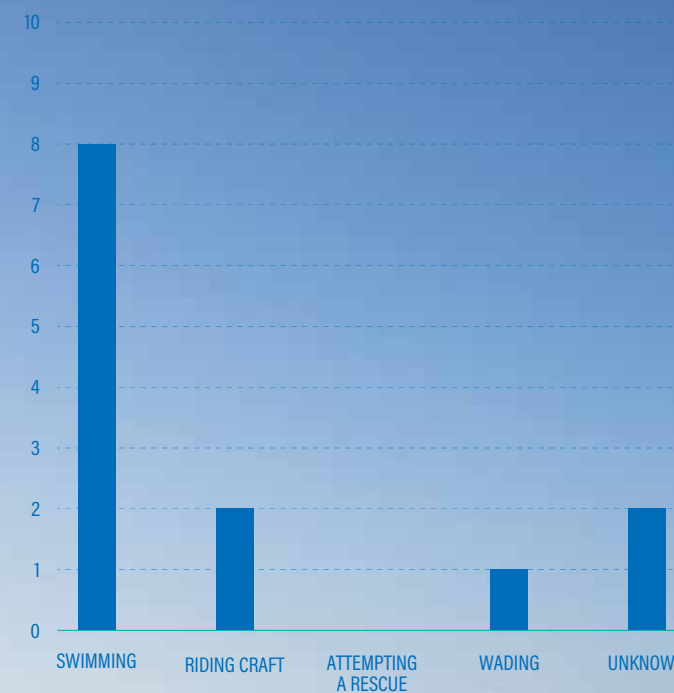
A further breakdown of key 2022/2023 beach-related drowning data has been provided below:

- 14** All **14** drowning deaths took place outside of flagged areas with four occurring less than 200 metres from the flags.
- 64%** Males accounted for **64%** of drowning deaths, reaffirming their position as a 'high-risk' demographic.
- 9** Australian residents accounted for **nine** of the drowning deaths with the nationality of two victims unknown.
- 57%** The average age of victims was 44.5 years, with **57%** of victims aged between 20 to 49 years.
- 36%** **36%** of drowning deaths occurred outside patrol hours, a 7% increase on 2021/2022.
- 57%** Eight victims (**57%**) were swimming; two (**14%**) were riding a craft, one was wading, and the remaining three are unknown.
- 6** **Six** drowning deaths were recorded across the summer months of December, January and February. There were four recorded in Autumn and two each in Winter and Spring.
- 7** **Seven** occurred on a weekend while **four** occurred on a Wednesday.

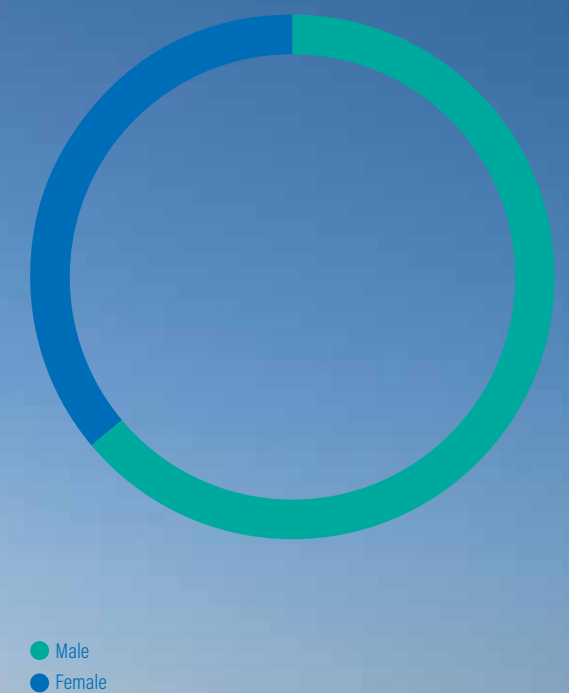
DISTANCE FROM FLAGS



BY ACTIVITY



BY GENDER



FIVE-YEAR REVIEW

SLSQ collates data on rescues and beach-related drowning deaths to identify any trends or risks, and then implement programs or initiatives to respond.

This part of the report draws on data recorded from 1 July 2018 through to 30 June 2023 and will provide a five-year snapshot of beach-related drowning deaths.

The past five years have been an interesting time for the world with the unprecedented impact of the pandemic. From closed international and domestic borders, to nationwide lockdowns and vaccine mandates, COVID-19 has impacted lifesaving operations and beach visitation.

2022/2023 was the beginning of a post-pandemic world and it is clear the world has changed as a result of COVID-19. People have altered their behaviours, and in many respects business and government have also changed the way they operate.

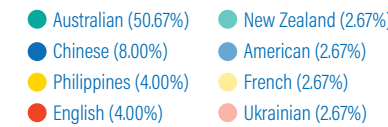
One thing that has remained prevalent over the past five years is the overrepresentation of males in the drowning statistics. While older males were highly represented in 2017 – 2020, there was a shift to towards young males in the early 2000s and for the past three years the average has been between 40 and 43 years.

SLSQ are still seeing similar trends with a higher representation of Australians and drownings occurring outside the flagged areas, most within 200m of patrol flags or where they would've been during patrol hours.

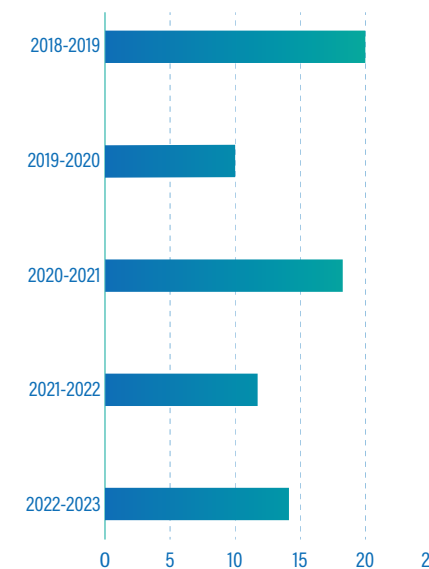
A further breakdown of beach-related drowning deaths data from past five years has been provided below:

- 75** Over the five years from 2018 – 2023, there have been **75** beach-related drowning deaths in Queensland.
- 46** The average age of victims was **46** years and males made up **80%** of them.
- 45%** **45%** of beach-related drowning deaths occurred in the summer months (December to February).
- 51%** Australians accounted for **51%** of the total number of beach-related drowning deaths.
- 74** **74** of the drowning deaths occurred outside of flagged areas, with **24** taking place less than 200 metres from patrol flags.
- 36%** **36%** of beach-related drowning deaths occurred within the Gold Coast City Council limits.
- 44** The majority of deaths occurred when the victim was swimming (**44**), followed by riding craft (**15**), snorkelling (**6**). Other activities including attempting a rescue, wading and using non-powered craft. The other five are unknown.

BY NATIONALITY



BY YEAR



10 YEAR REVIEW

This part of the report draws on data recorded from 1 July 2013 through to 30 June 2023 and provides a 10-year snapshot of beach-related drowning deaths.

Since 1 July 2013 there have been 115 drowning deaths recorded on Queensland beaches. The 2018/2019 season recorded more drowning deaths than any other year in the past decade, with 20 lives lost. There was another spike in drowning deaths during 2020/2021 with 18 drowning deaths recorded, making it the second highest yearly total on record. This past season, 2022/2023, saw 14 drowning deaths which is one more than recorded the previous season.

As was seen in the five-year review, males continue to be overrepresented in drowning statistics for the past 10 years, with 79% of all victim's male (91 in total).

The past ten-year period we have seen a change of trend in age demographics. The current trend emerging is 20 – 29 years to have the highest number at 23, with 30 – 39 years (21), 50 – 59 years and 60 – 69 years both at (20).

Australian residents represent 55% of the drowning deaths over the past ten years, with the Sunshine Coast region recording 42 beach-related drowning deaths, followed by the Gold Coast with 33, North Queensland with 17, Wide Bay Capricorn with 11, Brisbane with 11 and North Barrier with one. It is important to highlight that these are regions used by SLSQ, not local council areas.

COUNCIL	10 YEAR TOTAL BEACH-RELATED DROWNINGS
Gold Coast City Council	33
Sunshine Coast Council	25
Cairns Regional Council	13
Noosa Shire Council	11
Redland City Council	8
Great Sandy National Park	6
Gladstone Regional Council	<5
Moreton Bay Region Council	<5
Bundaberg Regional Council	<5
Fraser Coast Regional Council	<5
Livingstone Shire Council	<5
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park	<5
Gympie Regional Council	<5
Townsville City Council	<5
Dept of National Parks	<5
Shire of Torres	<5
Mornington Shire Council	<5

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

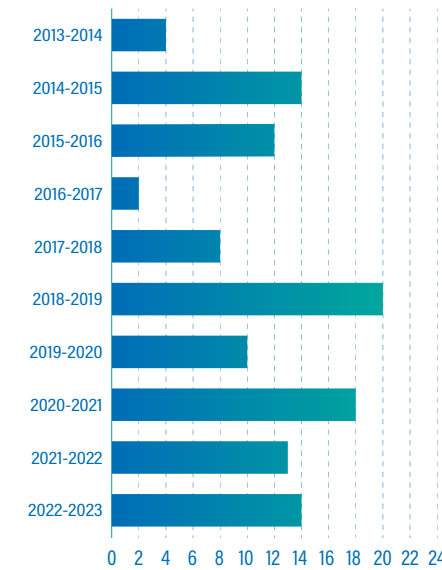
- 39%** Approximately **39%** of drowning victims aged between 20 – 39 years were male.
- 63** A total of **63** victims were swimming just prior to drowning. Meanwhile, **18** were engaged in riding a craft (including surf boards, paddleboards or body boards) and a further **11** were snorkelling.
- 25%** **25%** of all drowning deaths occurred more than three kilometres away from the nearest patrol service. A further **18%** of all drowning deaths occurred within 200 metres of a patrol service or where one would have been during patrol hours.
- 45** Over the past 10 years, **45** drowning deaths occurred in the peak summer season, followed by autumn with **32** then spring with **25** and winter with **13**.
- 14.6%** January and March are the deadliest months over the past 10 years recording **14.6%** each of deaths (17).
- 24** Saturday was the most common day of the week for a drowning to be recorded with **24** taking place over the past 10 years. This was closely followed by Sunday (**23**), Wednesday (**22**), Thursday (**15**), Tuesday (**12**), Monday (**10**), and Friday (**9**).
- 41%** In total, **47** (41%) drowning deaths occurred on a weekend.
- 9** Outside of Australian residents, the most common nationalities of drowning victims were Chinese (**9**), English (**6**), Philippines (**3**) and American (**3**).

BY LOCATION

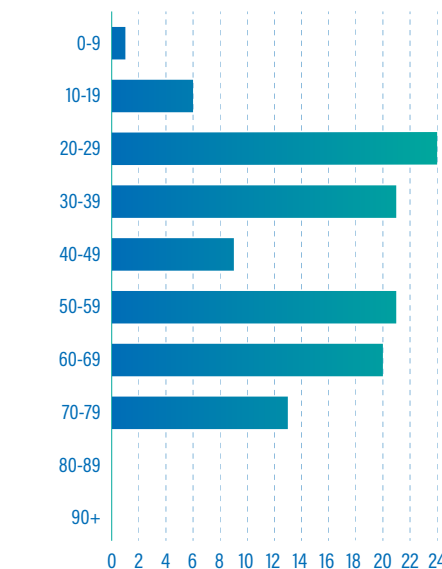


- Surfers Paradise – Gold Coast (8)
- Green Island – Cairns (<5)
- Teewah Beach – Sunshine Coast (6)
- Southport Spit – Gold Coast (<5)
- Fitzroy Island – Cairns (<5)

BY YEAR



BY AGE



Inland Drowning Deaths

FIVE-YEAR REVIEW

As SLSQs vision is zero preventable deaths in Queensland public waters, SLSQ also analyses drowning deaths at inland waterways, including but not limited to, rivers, dams, lakes, creeks, bays and swimming holes.

This section of the report draws on data recorded from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2023 however please note the following data does not include public and private pools or beach-related drowning deaths.*

Over the past five years there have been 169 drowning deaths at inland waterways across Queensland, with the highest ever annual number recorded in 2021/2022. In 2022/2023, there were 29 inland drowning deaths which is a significant decrease on the following year when the state endured devastating flooding.

Over the last five years, Summer has been the most dangerous month for inland drownings with 71 recorded, followed by 46 in Autumn, 34 in Spring and 18 in Winter.

In terms of council locations, City of Gold Coast recorded the highest amount of inland drowning deaths with 21 over the past five years. This is followed by Brisbane City Council with 19, Cairns Regional Council with 17, and Townsville City Council with 13.

Similarly, to beach-related drowning deaths, males were highly represented making up almost 85% of victim's over the last five years. The most common nationality was Australian with 94 inland drowning deaths, 34 from overseas and 41 unknown.

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



COUNCILS 2018 - 2023 (TOP 5)	TOTAL INLAND DROWNING DEATHS
City of Gold Coast	21
Brisbane City Council	19
Cairns Regional Council	17
Townsville City Council	13
Sunshine Coast Council	11

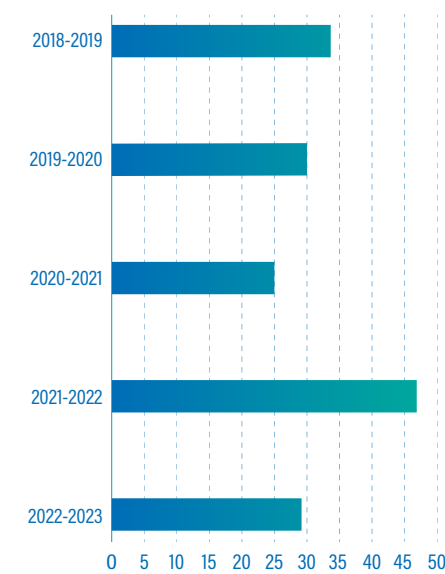
*It is important to note this data excludes drowning deaths at beaches and in public or private pools, but includes all other confirmed cases of drowning deaths which have occurred in Queensland waterways as determined by the Coroner's Office at the time of print.

BY LOCATION

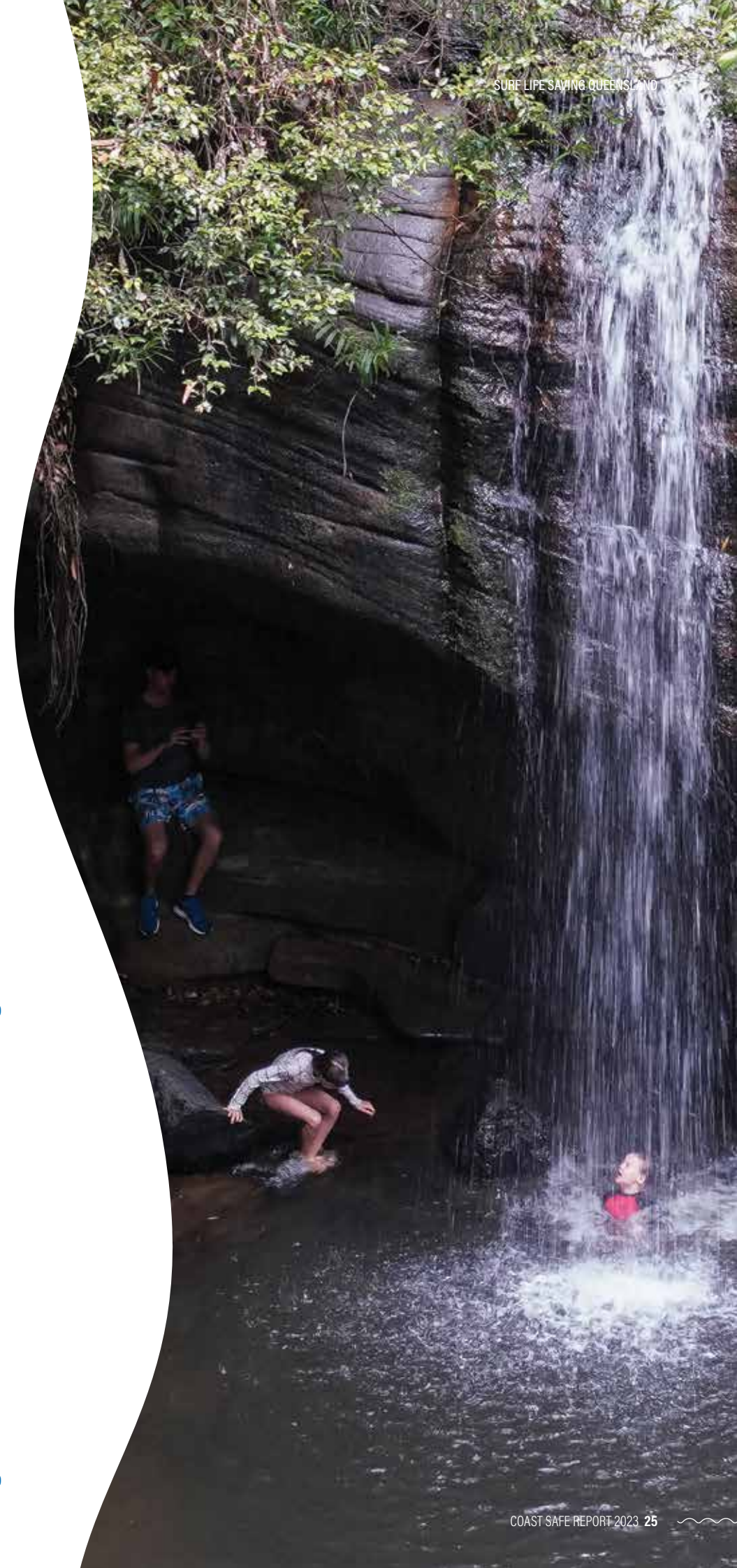
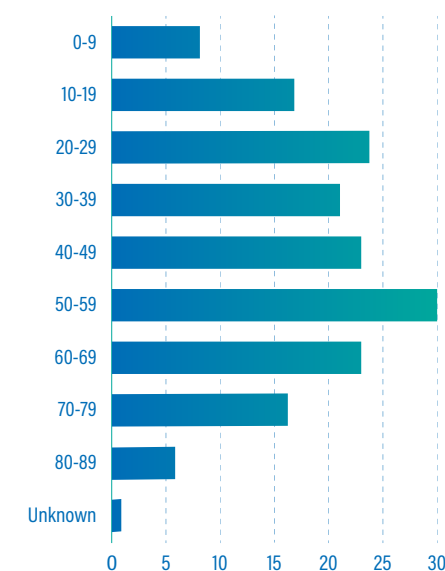


- Brisbane River Sector 2 (8)
- Ross River (Townsville) (5)
- Nerang River (<5)
- Tully River (<5)
- Babinda Boulders (<5)

BY YEAR



BY AGE



SECTION TWO

Drowning Prevention Strategies

After reviewing the coastal and aquatic safety data from the 2021/2022 season, SLSQ developed and introduced a range of initiatives to help reduce drowning deaths on Queensland beaches during the 2022/2023 season.



OBJECTIVE

STRATEGIES

Change the mindset of the male demographic between the ages of 20 - 39 years; and continue to reduce beach related deaths amongst males aged 50+

- Partner with clubs, pubs and other licensed venues to implement a 'Swim Responsibly' campaign that seeks to educate and warn young males about the risk of swimming while under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs.
- Develop an educational video targeted to Year 12 school leavers that highlights key surf safety messages, including the importance of not swimming under the influence, not swimming after dark, and never swimming alone.
- With domestic travel increasing, work with local tourism bodies to promote SLSQ's surf safety messages, with a particular focus on camping and caravanning holidaymakers.
- Expand the locations of the current 'Water Safe Seniors' program which aims to improve the knowledge and surf skills of beachgoers over the age of 50 years.
- Explore the use of new technology to improve warning systems and public announcements across Queensland beaches.
- Provide additional training for lifesavers, particularly Club Captains and Patrol Captains, to re-enforce the importance of taking preventative action and communicating safety messages with beachgoers.
- During peak times, expand the operational capability of the Westpac Lifesaver Rescue Helicopter Service to service remote areas north of the Sunshine Coast.
- Continue to promote Marine Stinger Awareness through community education, training and signage.



Key Initiatives

2022 / 2023

Each year SLSQ collates and analyses data related to drowning deaths, rescues, and other incidents along Queensland's coastline. This helps the organisation identify any emerging trends, high-risk locations and overrepresented demographics. SLSQ then develops and implements strategies to increase capability where needed and provide a more targeted approach to surf safety.

Following an extensive review of coastal and aquatic safety data from the 2021/2022 season, SLSQ identified the following areas of concern:

- An over-representation of men aged 20 to 39 years in beach-related drowning deaths;
- High number of beachgoers being rescued when swimming outside the red and yellow patrol flags;
- A concerning number of Australians being rescued;
- Over 50% of beach related drowning deaths taking place on the Gold Coast.

OBJECTIVE STRATEGIES

With Australian borders reopened, prevent drowning-related deaths of international visitors

- Increase SLSQ presence, through additional signage and displays, at international and domestic airports across Queensland, particularly Cairns, Gold Coast and Brisbane.
- Partner with international airlines to showcase surf safety messages on board international flights carrying passengers to Australia.
- Work with local governments to expand the current community awareness pop-up clinics at popular beaches in high tourism areas.
- Continue to conduct coastal audits at key and 'at risk' locations, especially those that attract a large number of international visitors.
- Increase surf safety awareness messaging and education for visitors travelling to Green Island, Fitzroy Island, the Whitsunday Islands, Magnetic Island, North Stradbroke Island, Moreton Island, and Fraser Island, through formal partnerships.
- Expand SLSQs surf safety brochures and public materials to cover the languages of Australia's top five inbound international visitor markets.
- Increase the operational capability of the Roving Surf Crews to cover more hotspot areas at peak times.
- Continue to promote Marine Stinger Awareness through community education, training and signage.
- Leverage the Lifesaving World Championships being hosted on the Gold Coast in 2024 to build greater relationships with the international lifesaving community and form more 'sister' club relationships.

Increase surf safety awareness and engagement for all beach goers

- Build on SLSQs state-wide campaigns that promote the core message "Always swim between the red and yellow flags"
- Partner with the State Government and local tourism bodies on domestic tourism campaigns to ensure the widespread communication of surf safety messages.
- Increase Operations Support surveillance patrols outside flagged areas with greater engagement between the operator and members of the public swimming outside flags.
- Expand operational support services in North Barrier Region with a particular focus on Magnetic Island.
- Increase membership of Brisbane Lifesaving Service to build greater capability to support beach safety from the Sunshine Coast to the NSW Border.
- Work with the Queensland State Government to continue the SharkSmart program and community awareness campaign.
- Partner with leading private businesses to spread surf safety messages through their advertising.



Case Studies



NORTH STRADBROKE ISLAND BEACON

SLSQ has continually reviewed rescues and incidents around the Point Lookout gorge and Frenchman's area for many years. As a result, SLSQ implemented some recommendations to improve outcomes, including the installation of emergency call point beacons and signage updates.

Since the installation, there have been a number of callouts from the beacon that have saved lives, including an incident at approximately 11.23am on Saturday 25 February 2023, when the emergency beacon at North Gorge was activated as there were multiple swimmers in the water needing assistance.

At the time, Wave Runner 8 was patrolling Cylinder Beach and was dispatched to North Gorge immediately. Whilst Main Beach was closed due to dangerous conditions, Point Lookout SLSC also began preparations to launch the patrol IRB. Wave Runner 8 was met on scene by an Australian Lifeguard Service lifeguard who was on duty close-by and had run around the North Gorge walk scaling the rocks and jumping into the gorge.

The Wave Runner operator picked up the lifeguard in the challenging and rough conditions and proceeded to the patients. After assessing the situation, the lifeguard entered the water from the wave runner and retrieved a then unconscious seven-year-old female swimmer.

Two other patients managed to climb back up onto the rocks to higher ground, while Wave Runner 8 proceeded to Main Beach with the lifeguard performing CPR on the seven-year-old patient on-board. Upon arrival to the beach, they were met by patrol members who took over CPR on the patient who was at this stage unconscious and unresponsive with no signs of life. Lifesavers and lifeguards continued CPR until QAS paramedics arrived and continued CPR until the patient was air-lifted to the mainland in a serious condition.

GOLD COAST HELICOPTER INCIDENT

At 1:58pm on 2 January 2023, Broadwater lifeguards watched two helicopters collide in mid-air with one helicopter emergency landing safely on a sand bank and the other crash-landing upside down on the edge of the sand bank. The lifeguard notified SLSQs State Operations Command Centre and the appropriate emergency services of the incident.

Westpac Lifesaver 45 was tasked and was the first emergency service asset on scene, triaging 13 patients, administering first aid and providing support for other attending emergency services upon their arrival.

The SLSQ Duty Officer also tasked Wave Runner 5 and 6 to transport Broadwater lifeguards with first aid equipment to the scene so they could assist QAS with the treatment of patients. SLSQ personnel provided support to QPS, the Water Police and other emergency services on scene in a variety of ways, including conducting crowd control and organising logistics.

This was a horrific incident and everyone's involvement to assist was truly remarkable. If not for the quick actions of this team, there could have been more fatalities as a result.

HAPPY VALLEY

Last season, Happy Valley on the Sunshine Coast kept local lifesavers and lifeguards busy despite the area being unpatrolled. Many beachgoers ignored warning signs and chose to swim at Happy Valley with 42 of them needing to be rescued.

The area has changed over the years, particularly due to a tidal breakthrough at nearby Bribie Island 18 months ago, and the area is now a lot sandier with dangers just beneath the water's surface. There are also sharp rocks covered with oysters and people use the rocks to enter the water not realising the dangers below.

The nearest patrolled beach last season was 500 – 700 metres away so responding to incidents was difficult and put a strain on lifesaving resources. Despite this, SLSQ personnel recorded 34,408 visitors to Happy Valley with

lifesavers and lifeguards needing to perform 66 first aid treatments, 1,323 preventative actions and 796 public relations.

As a result of the popularity and often dangerous conditions, SLSQ and the Sunshine Coast Council have now included Happy Valley in the Sunshine Coast Council Lifeguard Service Plan 2023-28. They have implemented a surveillance service with two lifeguards on duty with an ATV during Christmas and Easter Queensland school holidays, and one lifeguard during the remaining school holidays and weekends between September and May.

This is a great example of how SLSQ identifies 'blackspots' and amends local priorities and services to address the problem. SLSQ is constantly reviewing service capability and delivery to respond to community needs.

Key Initiatives

2023 / 2024

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

1. Males aged 20 to 49 years continue to be overrepresented in beach-related drowning deaths.
2. The number of beach-related drowning deaths related to rip currents.
3. High number of beachgoers being rescued when swimming outside the red and yellow patrol flags.
4. A concerning number of Australians being rescued.
5. A significant increase in drowning-related deaths on the Sunshine Coast.

In response to the data and identified trends and risks from the previous 12 months, SLSQ will develop and introduce the following initiatives and programs to help reduce drowning deaths on Queensland beaches:

OBJECTIVE STRATEGIES

Reduce the number of people swimming outside of patrol flags - therefore helping to reduce rescues.

- Increase roving patrols – this includes increased education for volunteers about the importance of and opportunities for roving patrols – and direct swimmers to relocate to a patrolled area. Roving patrols are where patrol members patrol the areas by foot or vehicle outside the patrol flags.
- Greater use of jetski patrols – educating drivers to increase patrols inshore where rescues are occurring. Jetski patrols are vital for covering the areas outside patrol flags and identified ‘blackspots’
- Continue to invest in new technology and innovation that improves capability, particularly for surveillance patrols.
- Increase drone capability and additional support for lifesavers and lifeguards with a focus on blackspot areas. Additional support includes the services of SLSQs operations support from jetskis, helicopters, communications, and various surveillance patrols.
- Work with local councils to ensure there is adequate beach signage across the Queensland coastline and implement new measures like QR codes on beach signage which advise on beach conditions and safety.
- Increased promotion of the BeachSafe App by ensuring the app details are included in all SLSQ promotional and community awareness materials.
- Continue to expand the operational capability of the Westpac Lifesaver Rescue Helicopter Service during peak times.
- Continue to conduct coastal audits at key and ‘at risk’ locations.
- Increase public awareness and education of rips – including how to identify them and what to do if you are caught in one – by holding a rip demonstration with media outlets.

OBJECTIVE STRATEGIES

Review and strengthen SLSQ community awareness outreach and surf safety messaging to target Australian beachgoers.

- Increase the operational capability of the Roving Surf Crews to cover more blackspot areas at peak times. The Roving Surf Crews can educate swimmers and beachgoers about dangers and direct them to patrolled areas.
- Build on SLSQs state-wide campaigns that promote the core message “Always swim between the red and yellow flags”.
- Enhance the ‘Be a Lifesaver’ campaign to ensure the key safety messages are targeting the right audience.
- Ensure surf safety campaigns are widely promoted during peak holiday periods, including, but not limited to Christmas, Australia Day and Easter.
- Continue the successful *Beach2Bush* program and ensure other community awareness programs are fit for purpose. Community awareness programs need to align with surf safety key messages and target the demographics overrepresented in rescue and drowning data.
- Partner with the state government and local tourism bodies on domestic tourism campaigns to ensure the widespread communication of surf safety messages for interstate visitors.
- Explore opportunities to engage with businesses, organisations and education facilities to expand SLSQs community awareness programs.
- Engage with Year 12 school leavers to educate them on the statistics relating to their age demographic and the risks of swimming under the influence of alcohol.
- Continue to promote Marine Stinger Awareness through community education, training and signage.
- Review the ways SLSQ is communicating surf safety messaging with the public to ensure effective communication with the overrepresented demographic of males aged 20-49.
- Increase support for SLSQs community awareness programs.

Continuous investment in our membership to improve our services and capability.

- Enhance training and education opportunities for our members, particularly in the regions.
- Provide regional workshops for Patrol Captains to ensure a high standard of service delivery on the beach.
- Encourage members to upskill and complete more lifesaving qualifications to enhance their lifesaving skills and knowledge.
- Identify members who are interested in operations support and create pathways for them to participate. This includes the additional lifesaving services SLSQ provides including jetski patrols, roving beach patrols, dawn and dusk patrol services, the Westpac Lifesaver Rescue Helicopter, 24-hour callout and communication services.
- Utilise the recent regionalisation restructure to provide more programs and greater resources for members at a local level.
- Audit SLSQs data collection processes to ensure all necessary membership statistics, rescue and beach incidents, and service capability data is being captured.
- Use data to identify gaps in capability and implement solutions to address the gaps.
- Maintain up-to-date records of club patrol resources and equipment to ensure there is a high level of capability and work to address any identified shortages or problems.
- Continue to work with state and federal governments to identify funding opportunities to deliver resources, facilities and equipment for clubs in need across Queensland.

Challenges and Opportunities



Ahead of the upcoming 2023/2024 season, SLSQ has identified a number of key challenges and opportunities when it comes to reducing, and ultimately trying to eliminate, drowning deaths and other fatalities at coastal and inland aquatic locations.

CHALLENGES

- Global supply chains have impacted the costs of goods and services across the world and lifesaving is no exception. There has been a significant increase in the cost of lifesaving equipment and facilities which will impact service delivery and capability.
- The increase in identified 'blackspot' locations improves SLSQ service delivery but comes at a significant cost to the organisation. With new equipment being trialled across various blackspots, SLSQ will need to meet increasing costs.
- SLSQ and the 58 clubs, including their supporters' clubs, continue to experience financial difficulties as a result of COVID-19. This will continue to impact the purchasing power of critical lifesaving equipment.
- Australians still make up the majority of rescues and beach-related drownings and there is a continued risk that some Australians are overconfident or complacent when it comes to beach safety.
- In certain locations along the Queensland coastline, people have created 'goat-track' paths down to the beach meaning there is no surf safety signage or warnings for beachgoers to read when they utilise these pathways.
- SLSQ will need to address the increase in beach-related drownings on the Sunshine Coast and ensure there is adequate lifesaving capability for the region.
- All beach-related drownings in 2022/2023 occurred outside patrol flagged areas demonstrating that beachgoers are still taking unnecessary risks and putting their life and that of lifesavers in danger.
- Consistency between local councils with regards to safety signage, emergency beacons, cameras, and drone operations continues to present challenges for SLSQ.
- There is an ongoing inconsistent approach to or lack of awareness of aquatic safety amongst some tourism operators.
- Increasing demands on SLSQ lifesavers and lifeguards.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Continue to work with the Queensland Government to ensure SLSQ has the capacity and resources to continue saving lives and eliminating drowning deaths in Queensland public waters.
- Work with all levels of government to secure funding for vital lifesaving facilities and equipment, especially in regional areas.
- Increase public awareness about rip currents and the dangers they pose, while also educating beachgoers how to identify a rip and how to respond in an emergency situation.
- Use all communication tools and platforms to reinforce key surf safety messaging, including swimming between the red and yellow flags, to all Queenslanders and visitors.
- Promote campaigns that target Australians and remind them of the number one surf safety message – "Always swim between the red and yellow flags".
- Build relationships with Tourism Queensland, Queensland Parks and Wildlife tourism operators, and local tourism bodies to ensure all organisations are promoting consistent surf safety messaging.
- Continue to identify blackspot locations and increase SLSQ services at these locations through the use of roving patrol services, coastal cameras, lifesaving equipment or emergency response beacons.
- Coastal auditing enables SLSQ and councils to understand the dangers along the Queensland coastline and provide beachgoers with necessary information about the conditions. As such, SLSQ will continue to work closely with councils to increase the use of appropriate and consistent aquatic safety signage at high-risk locations across Queensland.
- Explore partnerships with businesses, organisations and other stakeholders to help spread awareness and surf safety messages to the general public.
- Continue working directly with schools, government and education providers to develop and implement school-based programs, designed to help improve the swimming ability of Queensland residents.
- Work closely with key stakeholders and partners, like Royal Lifesaving and swim schools, to promote safe swimming behaviours amongst identified high-risk groups and demographics.

Methodology, Research and Acknowledgement

METHODOLOGY

Contained within the Coast Safe Report 2023 is information and data obtained by SLSQ's major incident notification forms, as well as witness reports, media analysis, and Surf Life Saving Australia. Where possible, this information has been verified with National Coronial Information System (NCIS) data for coastal drowning deaths for the period 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023.

While all care has been taken to ensure that statistical information included within this report is accurate as of the date of publication, it is important to note that data may be amended over time following the outcome of coronial investigations that are ongoing at the time of print.

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

CAPABILITY AND RESCUE ANALYSIS

SurfGuard, the Lifesaving Incident Management System and Operational Console (LIMSOC), the Incident Report Database (IRD), and SurfCom management system are web-based applications making up part of a suite of applications that enables members, clubs, branches and states to enter and access Surf Life Saving data.

This data includes operational (including rescues, preventative actions and first aid treatments), capability (including assets and services), educational, and administrative. Information extracted from LIMSOC can be used to identify how many rescues were performed by volunteers, lifeguards and support services during the 2022/2023 patrol season.

DROWNING DATA ANALYSIS

SLSQ collects data and information on key coastal and inland incidents and fatalities from LIMSOC IRDs, SOCC, SLSA, the NCIS, and media (including social media) reports. This information is verified and compiled for analysis by SLSQ's Lifesaving Operations Department.

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

DROWNING DATA LIMITATIONS

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

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

INDUSTRY EXPERTS

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

- Jamie Seymour and James Cook University for expert advice and guidance regarding Irukandji and other marine stingers;
- The Department for Environment Science for assistance with the collation and analysis of data pertaining to crocodiles in Queensland;
- Surf Life Saving Australia;
- National Coronial Information System; and
- Queensland Coroner's Office.

FUNDING SUPPORT

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

Glossary

ALSQ	Australian Lifeguard Service Queensland.	Lifeguard	An individual that undertakes patrols at a beach or another aquatic environment. This is typically a salaried member, qualified in public safety and aquatic rescue.	Preventative action	Direct action taken to reduce or eliminate the probability of a specific rescue, first aid or other reportable incident from happening in the future. Note: A preventative action will be recorded as the singular activity taken (i.e. clearing the water for lightning will be one action. The number of people warned/alterd as a result of this action will be recorded separately as a warning).	SLSA	Surf Life Saving Australia.
Aquatic environment	Areas such as coastal and inland beaches and waterways, swimming pools and their facilities, and other bodies of water, slurry and other agricultural and industrial liquids storage.	Lifesaver	An individual that undertakes patrols at a beach or another aquatic environment. This is typically a non-salaried member, qualified in public safety and aquatic rescue.	Prevention	Where intervention by a lifesaving resource averts a person/s from getting into a potentially life-threatening situation.	SLSQ	Surf Life Saving Queensland.
Beach-related drowning death	A death by immersion or submersion that has occurred in a beach environment.	Lifesaving service	A coordinated group that exists to provide aquatic safety services to the public. This includes surf life saving clubs, lifeguards, SOCC, drones, rescue water craft, inflatable rescue boats, helicopters, ATVs and 4WDs.	Public waters	Any freely accessible waterway including, but not limited to, beaches, rivers, creeks, dams, lakes, lagoons and streams; this excludes commercial and private swimming pools, as well as household waters such as bath tubs, sinks and backyard containers.	SOCC	State Operations and Communications Centre.
Blackspot	An area with a high concentration of coastal/ ocean incidents and a high probability/risk of ongoing recurrence.	LIMSOC	Lifesaving Incident Management System and Operational Console.	Rescue	Retrieving a person in distress, delivering them to a place of safety and the application of first aid and basic life support as may be required.	Surf Life Saving Club (SLSC)	An SLS-affiliated not-for-profit organisation which has volunteer members who provide coastal safety services to the community.
Coastal drowning death	Where the location of the drowning is on the coast, in the ocean up to two nautical miles (2NM) offshore.	Local Government Area (LGA)	Also known as local councils, LGAs include cities, towns, shires, municipalities or boroughs.	Rescue water craft (RWC)	A personal water craft (e.g. jet ski) used by lifesavers and lifeguards for performing rescues and preventative actions.	SurfCom	SLS radio communications centre which assists in managing the communications of lifesaving operations and data collection.
Drowning	The process of experiencing respiratory impairment from submersion/immersion in liquid; outcomes are classified as death, morbidity and no morbidity.	NCIS	National Coronial Information System.	Resuscitation	Preservation or restoration of life by establishing and maintaining a person's airway, breathing and circulation.	Undetermined	Cases that are not associated with a closed Coroner's report on NCIS are often left 'undetermined' until an official cause of death has been determined. Some examples are cases where bodies have been found washed up on the beach; reports of individuals struggling in coastal environments are made and the bodies are not found/ missing persons reports are not made; or a suspected heart attack in a coastal environment rather than death due to immersion. These deaths will all be followed up on and the incident category updated once Coroner determinations are made accessible.
First aid	Assessments and interventions that can be performed by a bystander (or by the victim) with minimal or no medical equipment.	Ocean drowning death	Where the location of the drowning is in the ocean further than 2NM offshore, but no further than 12NM.	Riding craft	A piece of non-powered recreational and/ or sporting equipment used in the surf and other aquatic environments including surfboards and boogie boards.	Unpatrolled location	An area that has no service, is not monitored or not patrolled.
Incident	Any unplanned event requiring lifesaving services intervention.	Offshore	Beyond the surf zone. Open ocean – The seabed, water and air space above the water between 2NM and 12NM (the Australian territorial waters limit) offshore.	Rip current	A seaward flowing current of water moving through a surf zone.	Unpowered craft	A piece of non-powered recreational and/ or sporting equipment used in the surf and other aquatic environments. Examples include kayaks and canoes.
Inland	An area that is beyond the high waterline or within a landward distance of 5 times the width of the coastal inlet/river mouth and is an aquatic influenced environment located within land boundaries.	Operations support	Rapid response rescue units, not affiliated to any specific Surf Life Saving Club. Patrol – Service undertaken to monitor activities in/ around an aquatic environment and respond accordingly through either preventative actions or rescue operations	Service season and hours	Vary between regions due to climatic factors, but in the context of this report, the season is for the period July 2020 to June 2021.	Watercraft	A piece of non-powered recreational equipment used in the water. Examples include surfboards, stand-up paddle boards, boogie boards, windsurfers or kayaks.
International	An individual who is confirmed to reside overseas and/or is a temporary visitor to Australia.						
IRB	Inflatable rescue boat.						

Zero preventable deaths in Queensland public waters

Our Partners

PRINCIPAL



GOVERNMENT



COMMUNITY, BUSINESS AND MEDIA



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