



PUBLIC SAFETY & AQUATIC RESCUE TRAINING MANUAL

35th EDITION





Module 1: Introduction to SLSA

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Surf Life Saving Australia

Surf Life Saving (SLS) exists to save lives, create great Australians and build better communities. It is a unique not-for-profit cause that exists through donations, fundraising, corporate sponsorship and government grants. Since Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) was established in 1907, over 650,000 people have been rescued by our surf lifesavers [1].

SLSA is Australia's peak coastal water safety, drowning prevention and rescue authority. With over 170,000 members and 314 affiliated surf lifesaving clubs, SLSA represents the largest volunteer movement of its kind in the world [2].

Our history



A brief history of surf bathing, lifeguarding and surf lifesaving in Australia

18 July 1818—A Sydney newspaper (<i>Sydney Gazette</i>) records the first surf drowning in Australia, at Bondi Beach.
Late 1800s—Some basic lifesaving and rescue assistance are provided by surf brigades and councils.
Early 1900s—Daylight bathing bans (introduced in the mid- to late-1800s) are lifted and the earliest surf lifesaving clubs were formed in Sydney.
1906–07—Manly Council employs a lifeguard, Edward 'Happy' Eyre, who dons a water polo cap to identify himself on the beach when on duty. The idea was adopted by surf lifesaving clubs for competition and patrols.
18 October 1907—The Surf Bathing Association of NSW (SBANSW) is formed by a group of surf lifesaving clubs, swimming clubs and the Royal Life Saving Society. The association regulated and promoted matters relative to surf bathing and was the precursor to the organisation known today as Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA).
1907—Reel, line and belt lifesaving equipment is introduced in Australia.
1910—The first SLSA Bronze Medallions are awarded to five men from Sydney clubs. The Bronze Medallion becomes the basic qualification required to perform surf rescues.
20 March 1915—The first Australian Surf Lifesaving Championships are held on Bondi Beach. This is now an annual event.
Mid-1930s—The red and yellow colours are adopted from the maritime warning flag system for patrol caps (the diagonal red and yellow flag is the international maritime warning flag for 'man overboard').
1935—Red and yellow beach flags are introduced, replacing the earlier colours of blue and white.
6 February 1938 ('Black Sunday')—hundreds of swimmers are swept into the water at Bondi Beach. Roughly 250 were rescued, making this the biggest mass rescue in SLSA history. Sadly, five men died.

1939–45 (World War II)—Active surf lifesavers on military service overseas set up patrols on beaches in the Middle East and the Pacific, undertaking training sessions and instructing locals in surf rescue techniques. Back in Australia, women and schoolboys play an important role in ensuring that surf lifesaving clubs continued to operate.
1956—The Surf Life Saving Association of Australia join with those of Ceylon, Great Britain, Hawaii, New Zealand, South Africa and the USA to establish the International Council of Surf Life Saving (ICSLS).
Mid-1960s—Nippers programs are developed to provide surf skills training for children (boys only until females are admitted as members by SLSA, in 1980).
1970s—Inflatable rescue boats (IRBs) are introduced for surf rescue work.
1970—The use of stinger suits is introduced to Northern Australia.
1971—A meeting takes place in Sydney at which all affiliates to the ICSLS join to form a new, fully constituted organisation called World Life Saving (WLS).
1973—First use of oxygen equipment on patrol.
1980—Females are admitted as full patrolling members of surf lifesaving clubs for the first time. Today, almost 40 per cent of patrolling lifesavers are female.
1993—WLS and the Fédération Internationale de Sauvetage Aquatique (FIS) unite to become the International Life Saving Federation (ILS), with their headquarters in Leuven, Belgium.
1997—First successful use of a defibrillator by a volunteer surf lifesaver.
2007—Centenary of surf lifesaving; designated the ‘Year of the Surf Lifesaver’.
2015—The Australian Surf Life Saving Championships celebrates its 100th anniversary of the first-ever staging of The Aussies in April.
2017—First-ever drone-assisted rescue in the world.

Drowning prevention strategies

SLSA aims to base its drowning prevention strategies and programs on substantial evidence. Equally important is the use of research strategies to fill gaps in our knowledge and to discover new and effective strategies. SLSA collaborates with many research institutions to ensure that evidence is of a high quality, independently evaluated and of value to SLSA program and service improvement.

SLSA has developed a ‘total service plan’ that outlines some initiatives for addressing each aspect of the [International Life Saving Drowning Prevention Chain](#). This plan recognises that lifesavers need to be skilled in prevention, recognition, rescue and recovery strategies in order to effectively prevent drowning. Each module of this manual links to one or more aspects of the *Drowning Prevention Chain*.

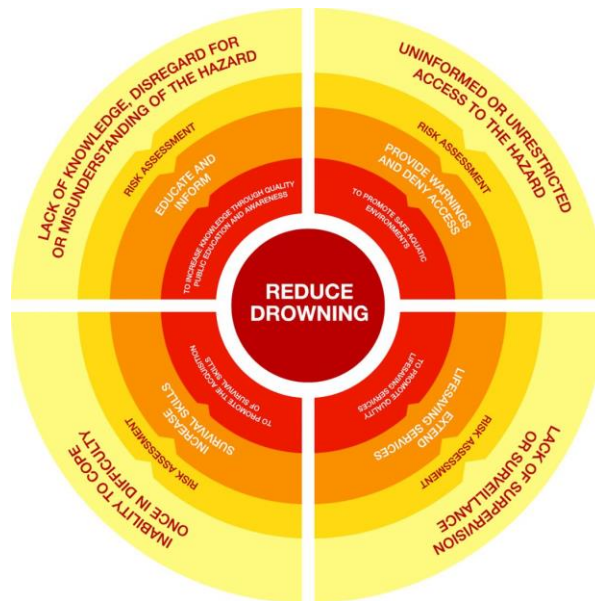


Diagram 1 - The drowning prevention chain and strategies to reduce drowning

Lifesavers and lifeguards

Many members of the public ask what is the difference between surf lifesavers and lifeguards. Surf lifesavers are trained volunteers who patrol our beaches and provide beach safety services on weekends and public holidays during the peak school holidays and summer season. They undertake a number of roles including aquatic rescues, providing first aid and emergency care, and providing surf safety information to the public.

Lifeguards are paid employees undertaking patrols at a beach or another aquatic environment. The Australian Lifeguard Service (ALS) is the national lifeguard provider of beach and pool lifeguard services to government councils and land managers across Australia. You can refer to the [Australian Lifeguard Service](#) website for more information on lifeguarding in Australia.

For simplicity in this manual, *lifesaver* is used to refer to both lifesavers and lifeguards except when there is a point of difference between the two.

SLSA and international life saving

SLSA is one of many national aquatic lifesaving organisations from around the world that collectively form the International Life Saving Federation (ILS). The ILS leads the global effort and establishes international best-practice strategies for improving drowning prevention, water safety, lifesaving and lifesaving sports. Refer to the [ILS](#) website for more information.

SLSA governance and organisational structure

As one of the largest volunteer organisations in Australia, we depend on the contribution of our volunteer members for everything from patrolling beaches, to providing input for the strategic direction for the organisation. Thanks to its members, SLSA has evolved over time into a highly federated and geographically dispersed organisation, made up of surf lifesaving clubs, regional branches (in New South Wales and Queensland), state centres, support operations (regional rescue and response teams), as well as paid lifeguard services. Refer to the [SLSA website](#) or the *SLSA Annual Report* for more information.

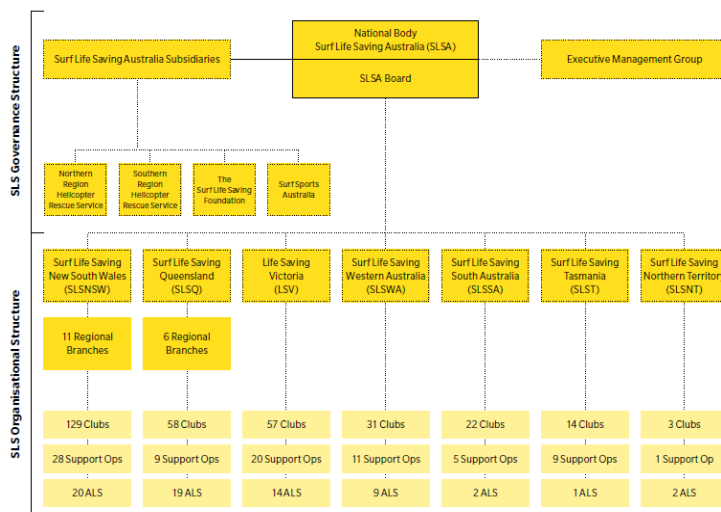


Diagram 2 - SLS Governance and Organisational Structure

As one of Australia's largest volunteer movement, SLS has several committees at every level of the organisation to ensure volunteer representation in key decisions. Committees may comprise of SLS staff and/or volunteer members. Some committees cast votes to make changes in the strategic direction of SLS, while other committees provide recommendations for consideration, e.g., WHS committees. Refer to your SLS state centre, branch and/or club's annual report for more information on the structure and function of your local SLS workplace committees.

Training and education

There are multiple entry-level qualifications for being a lifesaver. Refer to your SLS club or state centre website for more information on courses available in your state as well as their prerequisite and proficiency requirements. You can supply feedback on training through your surf lifesaving club's chief training officer or by contacting SLSA directly and speaking with a member of the learning and development team.

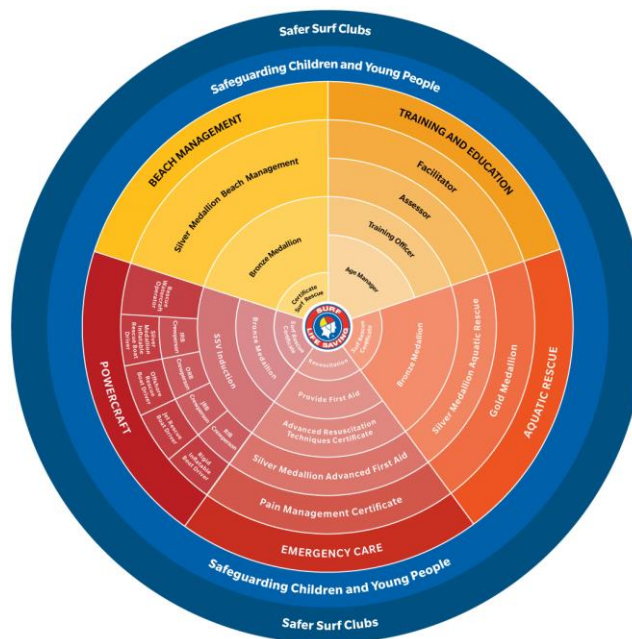


Diagram 3 – SLS progression pathways

Progression and competition opportunities

Many potential employers and members of the community recognise the skills and positive values that volunteer lifesavers uphold. Getting involved in SLS activities, progressing through SLS pathways and participating in other SLS training or leadership programs can lead to various career and competition opportunities, both within Australia and internationally. There are also opportunities at every level of the organisation to progress as a volunteer or paid staff member. Refer to any of the SLS entity’s websites for information on what further options are available.

References

[1] SLSA Annual Report 2016-2017. Section 1: Introduction.
<https://sls.com.au/slsa-ar-2017/section-1-introduction/who-are-we/>

[2] SLSA Annual Report 2017-2018
https://issuu.com/surflifesavingaustralia/docs/slsa_annual-report-2018_lr