

SLSA Policy Statement – 1.1 Water Safety

No: 12/2011-12

To: SLS Clubs and Services
SLS Branches
SLS States/Territory

From: Surf Life Saving Australia

Date: 25/07/2011

Subject: SLSA Policy Statement - Water Safety

Overview:

The national Lifesaving Standing Committee, together with the Sport Standing Committee and Development Standing Committee, has recently reviewed and updated SLSA Policy 1.1 Junior Activities and Water Safety.

The updated policy has been re-named [1.1 Water Safety](#) and can be read in full in this circular. It can also be found on the SLSA website under Club and Member Resources – SLSA Policies.

A 'frequently asked questions' section has been included in this circular to assist clubs and services with the implementation of the new policy standards and operating procedures.

The policy has been updated to satisfy the following requirements:

- The need for an all encompassing water safety policy that considers ALL SLS members and also non members that participate in SLS activities.
- To provide clubs and services with clear instructions on standard operating procedures, minimum standards and standard risk assessment management process.

The updated water safety policy is enforceable from the start of the 2011/12 lifesaving season in your applicable State/Territory (first patrolling date).

The key principles of the policy are:

1. Water safety is to be provided for all SLS aquatic activities.
2. Each activity is to have an appointed water safety supervisor (a leader in the group to oversee safety of all participants)
3. Water safety supervisors must complete a risk assessment process and record the outcome before the event starts (an example form is provided in the policy or your State may have one available)
4. Minimum ratios: [Water safety personnel: participants in the water]
 - 1:5 for groups of unqualified participants (with low/medium risk) and 1:4 for high risk.
 - 1:12 for groups of qualified participants (SRC/BM qualified).
5. Follow standard operating procedures relating to use of rescue equipment, uniforms and beach patrols.

Please ensure you read the policy below in full

INTRODUCTION

All Surf Life Saving affiliated organisations have a duty of care towards those participating in a sanctioned surf lifesaving aquatic activity.

This policy sets out the risk management procedures and minimum requirements for the provision of water safety for surf lifesaving aquatic activities.

DEFINITIONS

Unqualified participant: An activity participant who does not hold an award in surf rescue (SLSA Surf Rescue Certificate or Bronze Medallion/Certificate II Public Safety – Aquatic Rescue or recognised international equivalent). For example: Bronze Medallion candidates in training and junior members.

Qualified participant: An activity participant who holds an award in surf rescue (SLSA Surf Rescue Certificate or Bronze Medallion/Certificate II Public Safety – Aquatic Rescue or recognised international equivalent).

Water safety: The use of human resources and rescue equipment in aquatic environments to provide a level of safety to activity participants.

Water safety supervisor: A qualified and proficient lifesaver (holding the SLSA Bronze Medallion - Certificate II Public Safety and Aquatic Rescue) with a leadership role within the team of water safety personnel. A water safety supervisor must be 18 years of age or above.

Water safety personnel: Qualified and proficient lifesavers (holding a SLSA Surf Rescue Certificate or SLSA Bronze Medallion - Certificate II Public Safety and Aquatic Rescue) who provide water safety for the activities listed above. Water safety personnel act under the leadership of the water safety supervisor.

Activity leader: A person who exercises control over an activity. Activity leaders must be suitably qualified for the activity they are responsible for. Activity leaders can include accredited Age Managers for junior activities and Training Officers for lifesaving educational activities. The role of activity leader and water safety supervisor may be combined.

SLS sanctioned aquatic activities: An activity that has been endorsed or approved by the relevant/managing organisation. This usually involves the activity being discussed and noted at organisation committee meetings or is a regularly occurring activity on an organisational calendar/diary.

Risk assessment: Is the process of analysing the potential risk of injury or illness from exposure to hazards.

Risk management: The process of recognising situations that have the potential to cause harm to people or property, and the act of doing something to prevent the hazardous situation occurring or the person being harmed.

IRB: Inflatable Rescue Boat

RWC: Rescue Water Craft, commonly referred to as a Jet Ski.

1. WATER SAFETY POLICY

1.1 Surf Life Saving Australia and affiliated State/Territory Centres, Branches, Clubs and Services are required to provide water safety to participants engaging in sanctioned surf lifesaving aquatic activities. These activities include:

- Lifesaving activities for SLS members
- Lifesaving educational activities for non-SLS members
- Junior activities

1.2 All aquatic activities must have an appointed water safety supervisor.

1.3 Prior to the commencement of all aquatic activities, the water safety supervisor must conduct the following:

1.3.1 Conduct a risk assessment to determine if the activity is safe to be conducted;

1.3.2 Adhere to the minimum supervision ratios AND standard operating procedures outlined in this policy;

1.3.3 Employ a risk management strategy if the risk assessment determines any risks that may prevent the safe running of the event.

1.4 In the case where a coastal aquatic activity is run by an external organisation (non-SLS affiliated/sanctioned) and a SLS affiliated club/service is providing the water safety, the Guidelines for Safer Surf Clubs Volume 4 is to be consulted with the event management team. An example is an ocean swim run by a local community organisation and the local surf club has been asked to provide water safety.

1.5 Activity leaders/water safety supervisors who identify reasonable need to deviate from this policy must present an alternative detailed risk assessment and management process and receive written permission from their respective state/territory director of lifesaving.

2. RISK ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

Risk assessment is an important process in determining the adequate level of water safety in relation to the type of activity, beach and weather conditions and hazards, participant ability and age.

Standard risk assessment and management process:

- i. Water safety supervisors are required to undertake a standard risk assessment process prior to the commencement of the aquatic activity and employ risk mitigation strategies to any identified risks (example form included in policy).
- ii. The risk management process must be documented. The water safety supervisor must record and if necessary provide evidence of the outcome/result.
- iii. If the level of risk changes, the risk management and documentation process requires the water safety supervisor to implement risk mitigation strategies and record the change in outcome/result.
- iv. Records of the risk management process outcome/result must be kept on file with the relevant organisation for future reference.

Comprehensive risk assessment and management tools:

Where an activity or situation calls for a more detailed risk assessment and management (E.g. where moderate or high risk has been identified) water safety supervisors are advised to consult the SLSA Guidelines for Safer Surf Clubs volume 4. This is available on the SLSA website.

3. SUPERVISION RATIOS

The following are the minimum standards for the provision of water safety - [Water safety personnel: participants in the water]

SKILL LEVEL	RISK ASSESSMENT		
	Low risk assessed	Moderate risk assessed	High risk assessed
UNQUALIFIED PARTICIPANTS	1:5	1:4	Activity to be cancelled
QUALIFIED PARTICIPANTS (SRC/BM Holders)	1:12	1:12	Activity to be cancelled

NB:

- The activity's level of risk will be determined once the water safety supervisor has completed the risk assessment and management form.
- Where unqualified participants are engaging in an activity with qualified participants, the minimum standards ratio for unqualified participants must be adhered to.
- For small groups (with less than 5 (unqualified) and 12 (qualified) participants), a water safety supervisor must still be appointed and take responsibility for the risk assessment and management process. However, additional water safety personnel do not need to be appointed.

4. STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

4.1 Activities during patrol hours

- When activities are being conducted during patrolled hours, the beach patrol captain/lifeguard on duty will oversee all aquatic activities. He/she has the right to cancel activities if the conditions are deemed unsuitable or hazardous.
- The beach patrol captain/lifeguard, in consultation with the water safety supervisor, is to decide the most appropriate area of the beach to be used for the activities.
- The beach patrol captain/lifeguard, in consultation with the water safety supervisor, is to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of water safety personnel for the activity.

4.2 Activities outside patrol hours

- When activities are being conducted outside patrolled hours, the water safety supervisor is responsible for all water safety for the activity. He/she has the right to cancel activities if the conditions are deemed unsuitable or hazardous.
- The water safety supervisor is to decide the most appropriate area of the beach to be used for the activity.
- The water safety supervisor is to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of water safety personnel for the activity.

4.3 Roles and Responsibilities of the water safety supervisor

The water safety supervisor must ensure:

- i. A risk assessment has been completed and the minimum supervision ratios and requirements met.
- ii. Before commencement of the activity, they have ensured water safety personnel are:
 - Suitably qualified and competent for the conditions.
 - Briefed water safety personnel on the conditions likely to be encountered during the activity.
 - In good health and that they have been requested to inform the water safety supervisor of any pre-existing ailments that may impact on their participation.
- iii. Before commencement of the activity, they have ensured participants:
 - Have appropriate swimming and self survival skills for the activity and the prevailing conditions.
 - Are in good health and that they have been requested to inform the water safety supervisor of any pre-existing ailments that may impact on their participation.
- iv. The correct rescue equipment and/or patrol is available.
- v. Ensure that water safety personnel are qualified for their role. Please refer to the definitions on the front page of this policy for the minimum award criteria for water safety supervisors and personnel.

NB: Where water safety supervisors and personnel are using rescue equipment that requires a specific award, they must be a proficient operator (e.g. IRB Driver, IRB Crew, RWC Operator).
- vi. If also an active water safety personnel, they carry out search and rescues in line with their SLS training.

4.4 Roles and Responsibilities of the water safety personnel

Water safety personnel must ensure:

- i. The act in accordance with the water safety supervisor's directions.
- ii. Carry out search and rescues in line with their SLS training.
- iii. 100% of minimum required water safety personnel are to be in the water during the activity and using SLSA approved rescue equipment whilst conducting water safety (e.g. rescue board, rescue tube, rescue fins, IRB, RWC). Additional water safety personnel (above the minimum supervision ratios) may be on the beach acting as observers and ready to respond when needed.
- iv. They inform the water safety supervisor of any changes to the activity, environment or participants that may impact the level of risk.

4.5 Rescue Equipment

Rescue equipment used for the purposes of water safety must be equipment from the SLSA approved lifesaving gear and equipment list. This list can be found on the SLSA website.

4.6 Use of power craft

- i. It is highly recommended that an IRB or RWC be used for water safety (where safe and applicable).
- ii. If an IRB is used for water safety, the IRB accounts for 2 members of the water safety ratio (IRB driver and crew). If an RWC is used for water safety, the RWC only accounts for 1 member of the water safety ratio (RWC operator).
- iii. During the activity the IRB and/or RWC must be patrolling the course.
- iv. All care must be taken when using powered craft for the purposes of water safety; especially around junior members in the break.

4.7 General

- i. Members of 'on-duty' beach patrols can only be used as water safety personnel when the minimum patrol requirements have been met and at the discretion of the patrol captain.
- ii. The on duty patrol captain/lifeguard cannot also take the position of water safety supervisor.
- iii. In the case where there is only 1 group participating in the activity, the water safety supervisor may be in the water carrying out water safety duties. Where there are multiple groups participating in the activity, the water safety supervisor must remain on the beach, except in the case of an emergency.

4.8 Uniform

- i. Activity participants:
It is recommended that all activity participants be clearly identified with a standardised rash shirt or swimming cap as a means of easy identification.
- ii. Water safety supervisors and personnel:
All water safety supervisors and personnel must be clearly identified with a water safety uniform. This uniform can be either:

Water safety uniform:

- A brightly coloured cap secured under the chin;
- An **optional** brightly coloured rash shirt branded with 'WATER SAFETY' on the front and back of the shirt.

NB: Water safety uniforms for an event are to be consistent for easy identification. I.e. all water safety personnel are to be wearing the same colour.

Patrol Uniform:

- SLSA Red and yellow quartered patrol cap; and
- SLSA patrol rash shirt branded with 'SURF RESCUE' on the front and back of the shirt.

NB: 'SURF RESCUE' branded wetsuits and stinger suits may also be worn where appropriate.

Aquatic Activity Risk Assessment and Management Form

ACTIVITY INFORMATION

Activity type/name:	
Venue/Beach:	
Date:	/ /
Time:	AM / PM
Number of participants:	

RISK ASSESSMENT

As a minimum, the following factors must be assessed when determining water safety:

- Surf conditions
- Weather conditions
- Skill/competency levels of participant/s
- Number of participants
- Patrol on duty and rescue equipment available for use
- Local knowledge of the beach and area to be used
- Other location specific hazards

Potential Risk: (Please tick if risk has been identified)		Specific Details:	Comments:
Surf conditions are considered dangerous	✓ / *	Swell <input type="checkbox"/> Wave type <input type="checkbox"/> Water depth <input type="checkbox"/> Tides/Current <input type="checkbox"/>	
Weather conditions are considered inclement	✓ / *	Wind <input type="checkbox"/> Temperature <input type="checkbox"/> Storms <input type="checkbox"/>	
Skill/competency levels of participant/s is low or unknown for the type of activity	✓ / *	No level of skill/competency <input type="checkbox"/> Limited level of skill/competency <input type="checkbox"/> Mixed level of skill/competency <input type="checkbox"/>	
Number of participants is high	✓ / *	>40 <input type="checkbox"/> >60 <input type="checkbox"/> >100 <input type="checkbox"/>	
No patrol on duty and/or limited rescue equipment available	✓ / *	No patrol on duty <input type="checkbox"/> Limited access to equipment <input type="checkbox"/>	
No/limited knowledge of the beach	✓ / *	No knowledge of beach <input type="checkbox"/>	
Other location specific hazards	✓ / *	Stingers <input type="checkbox"/> Exposed rocks <input type="checkbox"/> Jetty/wharf <input type="checkbox"/> Debris <input type="checkbox"/>	
TOTAL NUMBER ✓:	/ 7		

RISK RATING	
A risk management plan must be implemented if low, moderate or high risk is identified:	
Key risk factors:	Level of risk:
0-2 ticks apply to the activity	Low risk
3-5 ticks apply to the activity	Moderate risk
6-7 ticks apply to the activity	High risk

MINIMUM RATIOS (Please circle corresponding ratio)	RISK ASSESSMENT (water safety personnel : participants)			
	Low risk is assessed	Moderate risk is assessed	High risk is assessed	N/A
UNQUALIFIED PARTICIPANTS	1:5	1:4	Activity to be cancelled	Participant number is under 5. Only water safety supervisor required.
QUALIFIED PARTICIPANTS (SRC/BM Holders)	1:12	1:12	Activity to be cancelled	Participant number is under 12 Only water safety supervisor required.

RISK MANAGEMENT		
If any of the above points are assessed as risks, the water safety supervisor must employ actions to minimise or eliminate the risk.		
Please tick the action undertaken to minimise risk	Comments:	
Increasing the minimum standard ratios	✓ / *	
Moving the event to another location that presents less risk	✓ / *	
Delaying, postponing or cancelling the event	✓ / *	
Ensuring a full patrol is available	✓ / *	
Increasing the number of rescue power craft (as appropriate)	✓ / *	
Other (Please state)	✓ / *	
Other (Please state)	✓ / *	

WATER SAFETY SUPERVISOR INFORMATION	
Water Safety Supervisor Name:	
Water Safety Supervisor Signature:	

Q & A: SLSA Policy Statement – Water Safety

Q: Why do we need a water safety policy?

A: SLS has a duty of care to those engaging in Surf Life Saving activities. This duty of care extends to all SLS members and members of the public participating in a Surf Lifesaving Saving activity.

A duty of care is a legal obligation to adhere to a standard of reasonable care whilst performing acts that could foreseeable harm others.

SLS needs to have a standard to apply when providing water safety to its members so that those providing water safety and those receiving the supervision are protected.

Q: What are the essential points of the policy that I need to be aware of?

A: We advise that you read the complete policy to be across all important points.

The essential points include:

1. Water safety is to be provided for all SLS aquatic activities.
2. Each activity is to have an appointed water safety supervisor (a leader in the group to oversee safety of all participants)
3. Water safety supervisors must complete a risk assessment and management form before the event starts (this form is available in the SLSA policy or your State may have one available)
4. Minimum ratios: [Water safety personnel: participants in the water]
 - 1:5 for groups of unqualified participants (with low/medium risk) and 1:4 for high risk.
 - 1:12 for groups of qualified participants.
5. Follow standard operating procedures relating to use of rescue equipment, uniforms and beach patrols.

Q: What happens if an incident occurs and there was no water safety provided for the activity or the SLSA water safety policy was not adhered to?

A: There may be serious legal and insurance consequences for services and individuals if water safety is not provided for an SLS activity according to predetermined standards. This could be classified as a failure to provide reasonable duty of care.

Providing water safety to the standards in the SLSA water safety policy ensures that our members are taking the necessary steps to provide reasonable duty of care. Adhering to the policy ensures that an appropriate risk assessment has been conducted and that appropriate standards have been implemented. This will provide the evidence in the event that an incident occurs.

Q: Why do our members need water safety when most of our members are proficient lifesavers and can swim well?

A: Proficient lifesavers are not immune from sustaining an injury whilst in the water. e.g. spinal injuries, severe marine stings and collisions with other swimmers or other objects in the water. In addition some lifesavers may have medical conditions that may impact on them when participating in an activity e.g. asthma, epilepsy, heart conditions.

We must provide water safety and have rescue services available should these members unexpectedly experience difficulty.

Q: Who does the policy apply to?

A: It applies to ALL SLS members and those non-members participating in an SLS sanctioned aquatic activity. Water safety is essential for everyone.

Q: What type of aquatic activity does the policy apply to?

A: The policy applies to ALL aquatic activities that are SLS sanctioned across Lifesaving, Sport and Junior Activities.

SLS sanctioned means that the relevant managing organisation is aware of and has authorised the event e.g. Bronze Medallion training squads at a local club, Nipper activities, club swims, carnivals, training for SLS sport (board, ski, surf boat, IRB training) etc.

It does not apply in the case, for example, where somebody wishes to go for a casual swim with a group of friends; this activity risk is then taken on by the individual/s.

Q: We run 'come and try days' for non-members. Is this classified as an SLS event and does it require water safety?

A: Yes, it is an event set up by an SLS organisation and we have a duty of care to non-members participating in this activity.

Q: Does the policy apply to public aquatic events such as ocean swims and triathlons where SLS is providing the water safety and there are often hundreds of people in the water?

A: No, these events are unique and require a detailed and specific risk assessment and management process to devise a water safety strategy. We advise using the risk assessment and management tools in the "Guidelines for Safer Surf Clubs Volume 4". These are located on the SLS website.

Where the activity is run by an external organisation (e.g. a Triathlon club or external swim club) you will also need to liaise with their event management team to discuss a comprehensive water safety strategy as well as consider their insurance cover for the event.

Q: My group has less than 5 unqualified participants or less than 12 qualified participants; do I still need water safety?

A: The group still needs a water safety supervisor and the completion of the risk assessment and management form, however additional water safety personnel are not required.

Q: How do you define qualified and non-qualified participants?

A: Qualified: Any person that holds an award in surf rescue. Minimum award is the surf rescue certificate.

Unqualified: Any person that does not hold an award in surf rescue e.g. Most non-SLS members and most juniors.

Q: Why do we need to do risk assessments and risk management?

A: Risk assessments and risk management is now common practice across all workplace industries and SLS is not exempt. We need to ensure our activities are as safe as possible for participants. A risk assessment helps to identify any risks for the activity and a risk management strategy helps to minimise those risks.

Q: Why do we have to document the risk assessment process outcome/result, rather than just use my experience to make a judgment call?

A: Should an incident occur, relevant authorities will require evidence that you took appropriate steps to ensure a duty of care to the participants. Without written evidence, there is no proof that the possible risks were considered and minimised.

We have created an easy to use template to ensure that members undertaking these responsibilities are covered.

Unless provided an alternative process by your state centre, we suggesting printing off these forms and leaving them ready to use in a folder with a pen in the club house or gear storage areas. Members can simply fill them in and return to the folder when completed.

SLSA are looking into options for the form to be readily available in a log book.