

POSITION STATEMENT: WATER SPORTS PERSONS AS LIFESAVERS

BACKGROUND

Death by drowning for those persons participating in water sports is very low compared with those persons participating in water related recreation. Anecdotal evidence from developed nations suggests water sports persons participate in their chosen activity often under a level of supervision, and in many instances with equipment that can provide a level of buoyancy such as a surfboard or body board.

Persons taking part in water sports should do so in safety.

Safety considerations should include the person's ability to handle the water conditions and the vessel craft or equipment used for the sporting activity. In addition, the water sports person should be mindful of the other persons using the waterway and be mindful of the appropriate regulations applicable for the chosen location.

There are recorded instances where persons taking part in water sports (eg. Surfing) have responded to others in difficulty in the water and have effected a rescue. In some cases the people have water safety and lifesaving knowledge and skill and in others the fact of them having an item of equipment with floatation capability (e.g. Surfboard or Bodyboard) has provided rescue capability.

Water sports are many and varied, with all having some form of member based organisation to which people can belong and who in many cases offer instruction or formalised training in the chosen water sport. The level of water safety and lifesaving considerations within this instruction and training can vary depending on the experience and commitment to safety of the operators.

There are however many persons who undertake unstructured water sports activities outside the structured organisations. There are recorded cases of untrained persons requiring rescue as they have not had sufficient skill or knowledge of the water sport, equipment, or water conditions of the chosen location. In numerous cases the rescues have been attempted by persons without the necessary lifesaving knowledge, skill and competence with tragic consequences often for the rescuer and also for both the rescuer and the victim.

The general public is under the impression that a water-sports person would have enough expertise to tackle a drowning incident which we know is not quite true. Quite often at a site of an accident water sports persons are persuaded to respond to drowning incidents when they are not quite qualified to do so. The public does so in ignorance and the water sports persons often in bravado and ignorance. It is therefore, suggested that water sports persons should acquire skills to save a drowning person should a need arise in their vicinity.

There are reported instances of surfers rescuing people in difficulty having been swept out to sea in RIPs or offshore winds. However there is an absence of data on the level of swimming, water safety and lifesaving skills of those rescued.

POLICY STATEMENT

The objective of the policy is to ensure that all participants in water sports have a minimum amount of water safety education and/or appropriate qualifications to participate. Further, it requires all persons selling, hiring or lending water sports equipment to provide information on water safety and for appropriately trained personnel to be present during water sports activity.

PURPOSE

To minimise the risk of persons participating in water sports from death by drowning.

STATEMENT

1. All water sports persons should have minimum water safety education and/or qualifications consistent with an ILS or relevant award, certification, qualification or guideline before they compete in any water sport at any level.
2. All persons selling, lending or renting water sports equipment should provide to the purchaser information on water safety, lifesaving training as well as safe handling of the equipment.

3. All water sports persons should have minimum water safety skill and competence, evidenced by an ILS or relevant award, certification or qualification, before they can compete in a water sport at any level.
4. There should be an appropriately trained, experienced and equipped lifesaving service readily available during all structured water sport activities, including training and competition.
5. Water sports trainers (instructors) should have a lifesaving qualification related to the area or discipline in which they will be teaching and issued by a recognised lifesaving organisation.
6. Water sports organisations should provide water safety and lifesaving training as a component of the respective water sport training.

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