COASTAL SNAPSHOT

2014-2015

OVERALL
• 12 coastal drowning deaths
• 25% decrease from previous season

DEMOGRAPHICS
• 58% were males
• 75% were in the 25-54yr life stage
• 42% were known to be of overseas nationality

TIME
• 42% occurred in Autumn and Summer
• 42% occurred in the afternoon

ACTIVITY
• 42% were swimming/wading
• 33% were rock fishing
• 25% were using non powered watercraft

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS
• 25% were attributed to a lack of appropriate safety equipment
• 17% were attributed to underlying medical conditions
• 8% were attributed to rip currents

LOCATION
• 83% were in regional or remote areas of WA
• No incidents occurred while surf life saving patrols were present

PREVENTATIVE ACTIONS
• 19,992 volunteer lifesaver actions
• 22,682 lifeguard actions
• 893 jet-ski actions
• 14% increase from the previous seasons total preventative actions

FIRST AIDS
• 2,252 volunteer lifesaver first aids
• 3,436 lifeguard first aids

CLUB MEMBERSHIP
• 11,346 senior members
• 8,793 junior members

PATROL HOURS
• 106,109 volunteer lifesaver hours
• 26,277 lifeguard hours
• 3,163 jet-ski patrol hours
• 839 aerial surveillance hours

RESCUES
• 625 volunteer lifesaver rescues
• 348 lifeguard rescues
• 256 jet-ski rescues

BEACHSAFE PARTICIPANTS
• 33,332 community members participated in BeachSAFE programs through the BeachSAFE Initiative

Source: WA Coastal Drowning Database, SLSWA SurfGuard Database 2015 and SLSWA Annual Report 2015
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Surf Life Saving WA (SLSWA) is a volunteer-based not for profit community service association and is the peak coastal aquatic safety and injury prevention organisation in WA. SLSWA creates a safe environment in and around our beaches through a patrolling presence on the beach, in the air and through community and workplace education and training programs. Despite the efforts of trained volunteer surf lifesavers, paid lifeguards and support operations teams, people continue to drown along the WA coastline each year, at non-patrolled beaches or at times when lifesavers and lifeguards are not on duty. The aim of all lifesavers and lifeguards is to achieve zero coastal drowning deaths.

Compared to other aquatic environments beaches pose many additional risks for drowning and injury such as rip currents, large waves, tidal surges and dangerous rocky coast. Between 1 May 2014 and 30 April 2015 there were 12 coastal drowning deaths at WA beaches. Sadly, 42% of coastal drowning deaths were people of overseas nationality, with significant risk factors including swimming ability, knowledge of sea conditions and level of experience in an ocean environment.

SLSWA’s BeachSAFE Report is produced annually to inform coastal safety stakeholders about current drowning risks and trends at WA beaches. The information provided will assist all WA water safety agencies to achieve the aspirational goal set by the Australian Water Safety Strategy of achieving a 50% reduction in national drowning deaths by the year 2020.

The report also details SLSWA patrol services rescues, first aids and preventative actions performed at over 30 WA beaches. Unfortunately, SLSWA lifesaving services cannot be everywhere, all the time, which lead to the development of the BeachSAFE Initiative. The BeachSAFE Initiative aims to improve the public’s awareness of coastal safety and promotes the importance of coastal aquatic education. A total of 33,332 people completed a BeachSAFE training program in the 2014-15 season, these BeachSAFE activities are showcased throughout the report.

The BeachSAFE Initiative

BeachSAFE activities are showcased throughout the report. Completed a BeachSAFE training program in the 2014-15 season, these contribute to raising awareness of specific hazards, improving safety and raising community awareness of injury prevention for children. BeachSAFE is based around four key principles of beach safety that are fundamental to safe recreation and represent the highest priorities for reducing drowning deaths in WA. These principles are;

Emergency Preparedness

Emergency preparedness means dealing with and avoiding emergency situations. It involves ensuring the appropriate equipment and processes are in place to lessen the impact and improve the chance of survival in an emergency situation. Emergency preparedness means dealing with and avoiding emergency situations. It involves ensuring the appropriate equipment and processes are in place to lessen the impact and improve the chance of survival in an emergency situation.

First Aid

Early response first aid is often the difference between life and death in an emergency situation. Being equipped with the knowledge and awareness of first aid and CPR, community members can potentially save someone’s life should they be involved in a coastal drowning incident.

Supervision

Whilst surf lifesaving services supervise beachgoers at over 30 beaches in WA, community members require the skills and knowledge to adequately supervise each other in the absence of supervision services.

Aquatic Education

Programs that increase the capacity of the community in relation to aquatic pursuits are at the core of the BeachSAFE Initiative. Increasing peoples understanding of the dynamic and ever changing hazards they may face on the coast and improving their skills to recreate safely significantly reduces their vulnerability.

Key Goal Areas

1. Children aged 0-14
2. Young people aged 15-24
3. People aged 55+
4. Inland waterways
5. Surf beaches
6. Aquatic industry
7. Alcohol and drugs
8. Watercraft & recreational activities
9. High risk populations
10. Impact of disaster and extreme weather

The BeachSAFE Initiative

In response to increasing coastal drowning trends in WA, SLSWA has developed the BeachSAFE Initiative to help the WA community become safer on the beach. BeachSAFE is based around four key principles of beach safety that are fundamental to safe recreation and represent the highest priorities for reducing drowning deaths in WA. These principles are;

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Australian Water Safety Strategy 2012-2015

SLSWA supports the priorities outlined in the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2012-15. With the 2012-15 Strategy in its final year, SLSWA will continue to focus drowning prevention efforts on the priorities of the 2016-20 Strategy to achieve the aspirational goal of a 50% reduction in drowning deaths by 2020.

Figure 1.0

Australian Water Safety Strategy 2012-2015

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The BeachSAFE Initiative

Surf Life Saving WA, BeachSAFE Initiative was awarded the 2015 Kidsafe WA Award at the Western Australian Consumer Protection Awards in April 2015. The award acknowledges the BeachSAFE Initiative’s significant contribution to childhood injury prevention, in particular its contribution to raising awareness of specific hazards, improving safety and raising community awareness of injury prevention for children.
The following are Surf Life Saving WA’s BeachSAFE Priorities, determined in response to the findings of the 2015 BeachSAFE Report:

**Supervision**
- Continue to support SLSWA lifesaving services to provide fast and effective patrols and emergency rescue and response services
- Promote Surf Life Saving memberships to people of diverse cultures to increase cultural capacity of SLSWA lifesaving services
- Work with Local Government Authorities to identify future locations for SLSWA lifesaving services

**Aquatic Education**
- Increase reach of Surf Life Saving coastal safety messages
- Expand reach of community education programs to high risk regions such as the South West, Great Southern and Perth Metropolitan regions
- Provide culturally appropriate drowning prevention programs and resources
- Encourage participation in WA surf life saving clubs to high risk groups
- Increase access to BeachSAFE programs for all schools in WA

**First Aid**
- Increase the community’s confidence and skill set to provide first aid and CPR in aquatic related incidents

**Emergency Preparedness**
- Continue to improve the provision of resources to SLSWA lifesaving services
- Promote the beachsafe.org.au website and smartphone app
- Provide advocacy for safe participation in high risk aquatic activities such as rock fishing, diving and snorkelling
- Increase youth completion of the Surf Rescue Certificate to increase emergency response capacity
- Promote the importance of carrying the appropriate safety equipment for the chosen recreation

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The BeachSAFE Initiative: Alkimos Beach

The 2014-15 season saw Lend Lease’s Alkimos Beach estate commit to becoming Australia’s first Surf Life Saving endorsed BeachSAFE community, following a ground-breaking agreement between Lend Lease and Surf Life Saving WA (SLSWA). The three year partnership brings an important SLSWA presence to Alkimos Beach and focuses on saving lives and building community capacity through the state-wide BeachSAFE program.

Alkimos Beach has been identified in the City of Wanneroo masterplan as a regional beach and potential future location for a new Surf Life Saving Club.

BeachSAFE will be delivered at schools, beaches and community spaces at Alkimos Beach with the aim to increase the entire community’s confidence and familiarity with the beach, from toddlers and their parents through to the elderly, as well as building a strong foundation for general life and survival skills, including first aid.

The partnership builds on the City of Wanneroo and SLSWA BeachSAFE pilot program delivered in Wanneroo during the 2014/15 Summer in response to critical incidents at local beaches.

BeachSAFE school based programs commenced at Alkimos Beach in February at St James’ Anglican School, with all students taking part in beach awareness courses in the classroom and senior students completing beach based surf survival programs.

Community members in Alkimos Beach and surrounds have completed first aid training programs at local Alkimos Beach community centres. 100% of whom had little to no prior experience in first aid.
A total of 143 coastal fatalities occurred along the WA coast between 1 May 2007 and 30 April 2015. As seen in Figure 2.0 coastal drowning deaths are the most represented with 107 occurring over the eight year period. Please note the remainder of this report will focus on coastal drowning deaths only (107).

Coastal drowning deaths have been increasing over the last eight years in WA with 107 deaths occurring between 2007-08 and 2014-15. The most recent season saw the lowest rates of coastal drowning deaths in the last five years, with 12 cases occurring, a 25% decrease from the previous season.

The crude incident rate for the 2014-15 season was lower than the eight year average at 0.46 per 100,000 persons compared to 0.52 per 100,000 persons.

Figure 3.0 displays an increasing trend of coastal drowning deaths since 2007-08. Although drowning figures continue to increase, surf life saving services prevent this number from sky rocketing, performing 1,229 lifesaving rescues and 43,567 preventative actions in the 2014-15 season.

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There are on average 10 hospitalisations from an immersion/submersion incident at WA beaches every year. A dramatic increase was seen in 2013 with a 114% increase in hospitalisations from the previous year, and has remained at a high level in 2014, as seen in Figure 4.0 below.

BeachSAFE Initiative: Case Study
In May 2014, Geraldton Surf Life Saving Club member Blair Wilkinston courageously rescued a surfer who had been knocked off his board with suspected spinal injuries at Back Beach.

Blair witnessed the incident and paddled over to the surfer to provide assistance. The surfer indicated head, neck and back pain and was visibly struggling to keep his head above water. Blair stabilised the patients head and neck and swam 100 meters to shore.

Once at shore, Blair instructed a group of surfers on how to stabilise the patients cervical spine while an ambulance was called and responded. In the meantime, the patient was placed on the spinal board and carried uphill to the Geraldton SLSC where he was fitted with a spinal collar before being taken to hospital for further treatment.

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**Figure 2.0**  
Type of Coastal Fatality  
WA 2007-08 to 2014-15

**Figure 3.0**  
Coastal Drowning Deaths by Year  
WA 2007-08 to 2014-15

**Figure 4.0**  
Number of Hospitalisations from an Immersion/Submersion Incident by Year  
WA 2007-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Hospitalisations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
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<td>2008</td>
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Source: WA Coastal Drowning Database 2015

Source: Epidemiology Branch, Department of Health 2015
WHO DROWNS AT THE COAST?

Age and Gender
Since 2007-08 males have been 5.3 times more likely to be involved in a drowning death than females at WA beaches and 2.3 times more likely to be hospitalised from an immersion/submersion incident at the beach. This was evident in the 2014-15 season, with 56% of the 12 coastal drowning deaths recorded in WA being male. This is likely related to higher male participation in aquatic recreations such as boating and fishing activities combined with higher risk taking behaviour.

All 12 coastal drowning deaths during the 2014-15 season were adults with 75% occurring in the 25-54 year age group.

The average age of those who drowned over the previous eight years was 46 years with a standard deviation of 16.7 and a range of 13 - 81 years. The average age of both males and females is similar with females averaging slightly older at 46 years compared to males at 45 years.

The 20 to 39 year age group had the most hospitalisations from an immersion/submersion incident, with 38 incidents occurring since 2007. This has traditionally been highest amongst the younger age groups however we are seeing this trend move into older age groups.

The age specific rate of coastal drowning deaths since 2007-08 is statistically higher for males than females in the 31-40, 51-60, and 61-70 year age groups as seen in Figure 5.0.

Nationality
During the 2014-15 season 42% of coastal drowning deaths were people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) backgrounds. Similarly, since 2007 nearly half of coastal immersion/submersion hospital admissions were people who identified as being CaLD.

Since the 2007-08 season, Australian/New Zealanders have the highest number of coastal drowning deaths, followed by Europeans. Overall, over 50% of drowning deaths were people who identify as having an overseas nationality, which is largely over-represented and has been identified by SLSWA as a priority area for drowning prevention efforts.

Figure 5.0
Age Specific Coastal Drowning Rates by Gender WA 2007-08 to 2014-15

Figure 6.0
Number of Coastal Drowning Deaths by Nationality WA 2007-08 to 2014-15

Source: WA Coastal Drowning Database 2015

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Source: WA Coastal Drowning Database 2015
WHERE AND WHEN DO THEY DROWN?

Region
People are 2.8 times more likely to drown at regional or remote coastal locations where vital life saving services and resources are limited compared to the Perth Metropolitan region. The 2014-15 season saw a significant increase in regional and remote drowning deaths with 83% occurring in regional WA, compared to the average of 73% over the previous eight years.

As seen in Figure 7.0, since 2007-08 the regions that have had the highest number of coastal drowning deaths were Perth Metropolitan (27%), South West (23%), Great Southern (18%) and Gascoyne (12%).

The most common activities being conducted prior to drowning in the Perth Metropolitan region were swimming/wading (52%) and diving/snorkelling (24%). Drowning deaths at regional or remote locations were most likely to occur as a result of rock fishing (27%), diving/snorkelling (19%) followed by operating non-powered watercraft (18%).

Source: WA Coastal Drowning Database and ABS 2015

Season
Coastal drowning deaths occur all year round, however over the previous eight years the majority have occurred in Summer (35%) and Autumn (32%) as seen below in Figure 8.0. These seasons are popular times of the year for coastal recreation due to the warmer temperatures and generally favourable weather conditions.

This trend was reflected in the 2014-15 season with 42% of coastal drowning deaths occurring in Summer and 42% in Autumn. Last season, surf life saving services performed 132,386 patrol hours, with no drowning deaths occurring during patrol times.

Source: WA Coastal Drowning Database 2015

BeachSAFE Initiative: City of Wanneroo

Through recent analysis of coastal drowning, rescue and injury statistics, the City of Wanneroo was identified as a national drowning blackspot, with seven lives tragically lost on the stretch of coastline since 2005. With these figures predicted to increase with new coastal developments influencing population growth and providing greater access to the City’s beaches, Surf Life Saving WA partnered with the City of Wanneroo to reduce the community’s drowning risk.

Under the National Drowning Blackspot Reduction Program, SLSWA delivered a capacity building project to build the community’s resilience to drowning. The project offered BeachSAFE education and awareness programs to residents of the City of Wanneroo through a series of school and community programs and public awareness campaigns.

Through partnerships formed with the local government, schools and community centres, SLSWA directly increased awareness of its BeachSAFE school programs to 52 schools within the City with 2,321 students completing a BeachSAFE program to increase their knowledge and skills on how to recreate safely at their local beaches.

In recognising the City’s high rates of new migrants and multicultural residents, SLSWA hosted a series of Multicultural BeachSAFE Programs with over 50 multicultural youth in attendance, learning valuable skills to keep themselves safe at the beach. Through land and water based games students from the Edmund Rice Centre and Koondoola Intensive English Centre learnt to check the beach conditions, identify lifesavers and how to identify and escape rip currents. For many of these children it was their first time at an Australian beach and the day was a positive experience learning to keep themselves and their family safe at the beach.

SLSWA highly commends the commitment of the City of Wanneroo in keeping their community safe at the beach. Programs delivered under the Blackspot project including the Multicultural BeachSAFE Programs and first aid training courses will continue to be delivered in the City to increase the community’s capacity to be BeachSAFE.
The majority of coastal drowning deaths since 2007-08 have occurred in the afternoon between 12pm and 4pm (44%). This may be attributed to adverse weather conditions that are more likely to occur in the afternoon compared to the morning, such as a strong sea breeze, tidal changes and higher swells.

The 2014-15 season showed similar results with 40% of coastal drowning deaths occurring in the afternoon.

Almost half (46%) of all coastal drowning deaths in the previous eight years occurred on weekends. This may be associated with higher beach attendance rates on weekends compared to weekdays. This was consistent in the 2014-15 season with 42% of coastal drowning deaths occurring on weekends compared to weekdays.

Coastal aquatic sports and recreation continue to be a popular aspect of West Australian culture. Unfortunately these activities do not come without risk. The 2014-15 season saw most coastal drowning deaths occur whilst the person was either swimming/wading (42%), rock fishing (33%), or using a non-powered watercraft (25%).

This trend has continued from 2007-08 with swimming/wading, diving/snorkelling, and rock fishing being the top three high risk activities for coastal drowning deaths in WA. Rip currents continue to be a contributing factor in nearly a quarter (21%) of all coastal drowning deaths since 2007-08.

HOW DO THEY DROWN?

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Drowning by Activity

Swimming/wading
Learning to swim is a primary skill for safe aquatic recreation; however the coast is a dynamic environment with constantly changing risks that can place even competent swimmers in difficult situations. Unfortunately, 24% of coastal drowning deaths in WA since 2007-08 were swimmers, of which a large proportion (38%) occurred due to the presence of a rip current. People of overseas nationality were also highly represented in swimming/wading deaths with 54% known to be of foreign ethnicity. A significant proportion (42%) of swimming/wading deaths were people over the age of 55, of which 73% had an underlying medical condition.

Diving/snorkelling
Diving and snorkelling are exhilarating recreational activities commonly participated in along the WA coastline. Unfortunately, these activities have inherent risks and have accounted for 21% of coastal drowning deaths since 2007-08, with 50% snorkelling, 32% scuba diving and 18% free diving at the time of the incident. Diving is a high risk aquatic activity and lack of experience, and familiarity with equipment and the environment prove to be common risk factors in diving/snorkelling incidents.

Rock fishing
Slippery and uneven surfaces combined with the unpredictable nature of the ocean make rock fishing one of the most dangerous recreational activities in Australia. Over the last three years an average of four (4) people have lost their lives whilst rock fishing every year. Of incidents that have occurred since 2007-08, 86% were males and 73% of total cases were known to be of overseas nationality. The reduction of rock fishing related drowning deaths remains a priority for SLWA through the emergency preparedness principle of the BeachSAFE Initiative.

BeachSAFE Initiative: Case Study

In December 2014, off duty lifeguards Pete Geall, Janek Ferrandi and Danny Smyth earned a national Rescue of the Month award for their educative rescue of an injured body boarder at a remote surf spot in Yallingup.

Danny and Pete were enjoying an early morning surf when they spotted the lone body boarder lying flat in the water calling for help. The lifeguards paddled over and used the casualty’s body board as an improvised spinal board and carried him out of the surf zone.

The casualty was experiencing severe back pain, a tingling sensation and had very limited movement. Danny remained with the casualty while Pete ran 2km back to the car park to summon help from local surfers, one of whom was Janek, off duty lifeguard and previous SLWA Rescue of the Month award winner.

The group managed to find a patch of mobile reception in the remote area and called an ambulance, before returning to the incident location. They improvised another spinal board using a surf board, and using their lifeguard training, were able to log roll the casualty and carefully carry him 1km before the ambulance arrived.

The casualty, a local teacher from Busselton, had suffered four fractured vertebrae, a compressed C-spine and spent four days in hospital in Perth. His doctors noted that without receiving the level of spinal management from the lifeguards, he would have ended up with more severe and permanent injuries.

Danny’s incredible display of skill and fitness ensured they were not only able to extract the casualty from a remote surf spot, but also do so with the utmost care to his severe spinal injuries.

BeachSAFE Initiative: 0 to 14 years

Parents, carers and surf lifesaving services providing supervision are to be commended for the low rates of coastal drowning and injury amongst the 0 to 14 year age group. In 2014-15 SLWA delivered its SurfBabies and SurfKids program to 1,718 parents and their children across nine metropolitan and regional locations in WA. Children aged 2 to 7 gained valuable water familiarisation and coping skills whilst their parents and carers learnt how to effectively supervise their children at the beach.

As children further engage in coastal recreation independently or with their peers, it is important that they are equipped with the skills and knowledge to do so safely.

BeachSAFE Priorities

1. Continue supporting SLWA lifesaving services to provide effective patrols and search and rescue solutions
2. Expand the reach and further promote parental supervision programs such as the SLWA SurfBabies and SurfKids programs
3. Continue implementation and further promotion of aquatic education and first aid programs such as the SLWA Life Skills for Life program in schools and community groups
4. Provide culturally appropriate supervision messages to diverse groups, particularly about the role of surf lifesaving services and the ‘Swim between the Flags’ message
5. Promote the Beachsafe.org website and smartphone app to parents and carers of young children
6. Work with land managers to ensure appropriate coastal aquatic safety signage is installed at beaches including appropriate CaLD solutions if required
Young people 15-24 years
A tragic 12 people aged between 15 and 24 years have drowned at WA beaches since 2007-08 with another 17 young people hospitalised from a submersion/immersion incident at the beach. During the 2014-15 season one (1) coastal drowning death occurred in WA in this age group.
Of the 12 lives lost since 2007-08, 92% were males with nearly half (42%) of the coastal drowning deaths in this age group identified as being of overseas nationality.
Common activities at the time of the incident include diving/snorkelling (33%) and rock fishing (25%).
The majority (83%) of these drowning deaths occurred in the regional areas of WA with 75% occurring in the South West and Great Southern regions.
The incidents occur mostly in Autumn (50%) and a significant proportion (58%) occurred in the afternoon which is likely to be associated with adverse weather conditions such as a strong sea breeze, high swells and tidal changes. Rip currents were involved in 42% of coastal drowning deaths in this age group.

BeachSAFE Priorities
1. Continue to support SLSWA lifesaving services to provide fast and effective emergency response services
2. Further promote and establish BeachSAFE community programs in high risk regions including the South West, Great Southern and Perth Metropolitan area.
3. Develop culturally appropriate programs and resources for this life stage, particularly rip current education
4. Address emergency preparedness education in young people, particularly for higher risk activities; rock fishing and diving/snorkelling
5. Promote the beachsafe.org.au website and smartphone app to young people 15-24 years.

BeachSAFE Initiative: 15 to 24 years
In a trend seen over many years, males are commonly over represented in coastal drowning statistics particularly in the 15 to 24 year age group. This is likely attributed to increased male participation in risk taking behaviour and activities.
SLSWA encourages all members of the community to join a surf life saving club (SLSC). SLSC’s offer a range of recreational opportunities to their members including social, voluntary and competitive and recreational sports.
With 30 clubs in WA, from Esperance to Broome, SLSC’s offer a range of training opportunities to develop the skills of their members. To become a patrolling Surf Life Saver and undertake a number of roles including aquatic rescue, providing first aid and emergency care and providing safety information to the public, members must attain a Surf Rescue Certificate or Bronze Medallion, of which 1,383 members attained in the 2014-15 season.

Adults 25-54 years
Since the 2007-08 season, 58 people aged between 25 and 54 years drowned at the WA coast, with a further 41 adults hospitalised from an immersion/submersion incident. During the 2014-15 season nine (9) adults drowned in this age group.
Common activities at the time of the incident include; swimming/wading (24%), rock fishing (24%) and diving/snorkelling (22%) and 74% occurred in the regions with the majority occurring in the South West and Gascoyne. Rip currents attributed to 22% of all drowning deaths in this age group.
Trending across most life stages, males were predominantly represented with 81% of coastal drowning deaths. Over half of all drowning deaths in the 25 to 54 year age group (53%) identified as having an overseas nationality.
Drowning deaths occurred across all seasons however over 67% occurred in Summer or Autumn. Most drowning deaths occurred in the afternoon (48%) coinciding with common adverse weather conditions experienced in the afternoons.

BeachSAFE Priorities
1. Increase support to SLSWA lifesaving services to provide fast and effective emergency response services, particularly in high risk areas including the South West and Gascoyne regions
2. Develop culturally appropriate programs and resources
3. Address emergency preparedness initiatives for rock fishing and diving/snorkelling safety
4. Promote the beachsafe.org.au website and smartphone app
5. Continue to work with land managers to ensure appropriate coastal aquatic safety signage is installed at beaches, including options for CaLD groups
Older Adults 55+ years

There were two (2) coastal drowning deaths that occurred in the 55+ age group during the 2014-15 season. Between 2007-08 and 2014-15, 36 coastal drowning deaths occurred in this age group with a further 15 hospitalisations from an immersion/submersion incident.

Males were over represented, accounting for 86% of all coastal drowning deaths. Nearly half (44%) of this age group identified as being of overseas nationality.

Common activities at the time of the incident include swimming/wading (31%), operating non-powered watercraft (22%) and boating (16%). Rip currents were reported in 17% of drowning deaths within this age group which is comparatively lower to other groups.

Drowning deaths occurred mostly in Summer (42%) and Autumn (22%), and predominantly occurred in the afternoon (36%), which is likely to be associated with adverse weather conditions.

A significant amount of coastal drowning deaths (69%) occurred in regional or remote areas, with (22%) occurring in the South West.

Over 44% of coastal drowning deaths in this age group were associated with pre-existing health conditions with majority related to cardiovascular disease.

BeachSAFE Priorities

1. Increase the communities confidence and skill set to provide first aid and CPR in aquatic related incidents
2. Increase awareness of the benefits of regular health checks in this age group
3. Target high risk locations including regions, particularly the South West
4. Address emergency preparedness, by providing age, culture and activity appropriate interventions
5. Promote the beachsafe.org.au website and smartphone app
6. Increase support to SLSWA lifesaving services to provide fast and effective emergency response services

BeachSAFE Initiative: 55+

A high proportion of coastal drowning deaths in the 55+ age group were attributed to pre-existing medical conditions. Had these incidents occurred in lifesaver patrolled locations, or had other suitably qualified persons been present, the chance of survival would have been significantly greater given the possibility of rescue and immediate administration of first aid and CPR.

Unfortunately SLSWA lifesaving services cannot be present at all times and it is important for individuals to be equipped with lifesaving first aid and CPR skills. The 2014-15 season saw over 13,100 West Australians complete a training course with SurfLife Saving WA, equipping them with the skills to save a life.

Early response first aid and CPR can be the difference between life and death in an emergency situation. SLSWA encourages all WA community members to complete regular first aid and CPR courses to ensure they can assist in the event of an emergency.

BeachSAFE Initiative: Case Study

Through the development of a significant partnership with BHP Billiton, a generous $1.35 million was invested in a new state-of-the-art emergency and rescue communications network to bolster the safety of WA’s beaches.

Designed to address communications black and brown spots at some of the State’s most popular beaches from Esperance to Yanchep, direct communications will be possible for the first time between SLSWA’s communications hub SurfCom, the clubs, helicopters, jet-skis, inflatable rescue boats, 4WDs, All Terrain Vehicles and lifesavers on the beach.

Increasing SLSWA’s communications capabilities will not only make it safer for swimmers who visit WA beaches, but it will also be safer for the 20,000 volunteer surf lifesavers that protect the WA community.
Western Australia’s coastline is patrolled by a combination of professional and volunteer lifesaving services that both protect and save people’s lives on the coast. These services include:

- Volunteer Lifesaver patrols
- Professional Lifeguard patrols
- Wesfarmers Emergency Response Jet-ski Teams
- Westpac Lifesaver Rescue Helicopter Services

These services survive on community support and involvement. Without this contribution, the number of coastal drowning deaths and related injury would be drastically higher in WA. This is a testament to the countless hours of training, skill and dedication of Surf Life Saving patrol members.

Rescues

On average SLSWA lifesaving services rescue approximately 1,271 people each year at WA beaches. Without these services, it is anticipated that a significant proportion of these people would have drowned and many more would have been seriously injured.

Figure 11.0 shows that the number of rescues performed by SLSWA lifesaving services remains steady due to a significant shift in patrol service proactivity around educating the public around being BeachSAFE and averting people from dangerous situations. This education is considered a ‘preventative action’ and therefore results in less people requiring rescuing at patrolled beaches (see Figure 12.0).

In addition, the Perth Metro and South West Westpac Lifesaver Helicopter responded to 81 search and rescue operations in the 2014-15 season including assisting emergency response agencies in responding to upturned vessels, flare sightings, overdue vessels and missing people.

Preventative Actions

A preventative action involves SLSWA lifesaving services educating beachgoers about being safe at the beach and averting them from potentially life threatening situations.

On the beach, if there are potential hazards and incidents (such as a rip current) SLSWA lifesavers and lifeguards will alert beachgoers to the presence of the hazard, provide basic information on how to identify, avoid and escape the hazard, and ensure that they continue their recreation in a safer manner or location.

As seen in Figure 12.0 preventative actions have increased by over 200% since 2009-10. This has directly contributed to a decrease in the number of rescues as the WA community are prevented from placing themselves in harm’s way.

The Westpac Lifesaver Rescue Helicopter patrols the coast for potential hazards and incidents from the air and alerts swimmers and lifesavers of visible hazards including rip currents and marine sightings. In the 2014-15 season the Perth Metro and South West services performed 169 preventative actions.
Patrol Hours

Over the six year period from 2009-10 to 2014-15 the community benefited from over 712,742 supervision hours from SLSWA lifesaving services at over 30 beaches in WA.

WA is one of the fastest growing states in Australia and is one of the fastest growing urban sprawl cities in the world. In addition, the popularity of beach recreation is increasing and a more diverse range of activities are occurring on the coast such as abalone fishing and kite boarding.

To accommodate the rapid population growth, supervision hours from SLSWA services have been increasing since 2009-10, as seen in Figure 14.0. This has been achieved through a combination of more volunteer and professional lifesaving services being available to the community, as well as current patrols being stretched to cover more of WA’s beaches.

In the 2014-15 season the WA community benefitted from a further 839 hours of aerial supervision from the Perth Metro and South West Westpac Lifesaver Rescue Helicopter services.

Source: SLSWA Surf Guard Database 2015
Economic Impact
Surf Life Saving offers a unique and valuable drowning and injury prevention service to the community, which is largely supported and operated by community volunteers. Surf Life Saving is the largest volunteer organisation of its kind in Australia and without the selfless vigilance of many tens of thousands of volunteers, the coastal drowning landscape would be vastly worse.

According to the Price Waterhouse Coopers Report ‘What is the economic contribution of Surf Life Saving in Australia’ (2011), 5% of people rescued by surf lifesaving services would have resulted in a drowning death, and a further 3% would have resulted in permanent incapacitation.

It is therefore predicted that between 2009-10 and 2014-15, SLSWA lifesaving services were able to:

- prevent 38,1 people from drowning at WA beaches
- save 228 people from permanent incapacitation
- prevent 381 people from drowning at WA beaches
- save the WA economy over $1.89 billion
Methodology

Coastal drowning data was obtained from the WA Coastal Drowning Database compiled by SLSWA through media monitors and verified with NCIS data. The data has been analysed by gender, age, year, nationality, location, time and activity.

Only unintentional coastal drowning cases are included in this report. Deaths are omitted if they are reported as intentional, undetermined (open finding) or if drowning/immersion is not a primary cause of death. Omissions include; suicide, homicide and shark attack fatalities.

Hospitalisation data was accessed and verified through the Department of Health WA, Epidemiology Branch. This data was analysed by gender, age, year, location and country of birth.

Drowning and hospitalisation rates per 100,000 populations have been based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) standard population data cube within ‘Australian Demographic Statistics’ (cat. no. 3101.0).

Surf lifesaving service statistics were obtained from the SLSWA SurfGuard Database and was analysed by patrol hours, rescues, preventative actions and first aid treatments.

Please note all drowning death data and SLSWA lifesaving service data is presented as a SLSWA season from 1 May to 30 April from 2007-08 to 2014-15 and immersion/submersion hospitalisation data is presented by calendar year 1 January to 31 December from 2007 to 2014.

All care is taken to ensure the information contained in this report is correct, however pending coronial investigations this data may be amended over time. As part of the NCIS process, cases are amended as new information becomes available prior to their closure. As a result, the number of coastal drowning deaths may have changed from the totals that have been previously reported. These changes are summarised in Figure 15.0.

Figure 15.0
Changes in the number of Coastal Drowning Deaths per year as previously reported.

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Source: WA Coastal Drowning Database 2015

Partners

SLSWA would like to thank all partners who contributed to the BeachSAFE Report.

With thanks

- Surf Life Saving Australia
- Public Health and Clinical Services Division, Department of Health WA
- Epidemiology Branch, Department of Health WA
- National Coronial Information System
- 30 West Australian Surf Life Saving Clubs
- 17 Professional Lifeguard Services
- Local Government Authorities with surf life saving clubs and/or professional lifeguard services

SLSWA would like to highlight the dedication and contribution of WA volunteer patrol members from the 30 WA Surf Life Saving Clubs for their work in recording invaluable data into the SurfGuard database and their ongoing dedication to protecting the WA community at the beach.

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