

Title: The Australian Public Coastal Safety Guidelines

Names of authors: Peter Agnew¹, Norman Farmer ESM
¹Surf Life Saving Australia

ABSTRACT

Guidelines and Standards for aquatic locations are nothing new – many organisations have guidelines for safe pool operations and the like. There are also many separate standards relating to signage, risk and the management of particular segments of aquatic locations.

The Australian Coastal Public Safety Guidelines has been designed as a comprehensive guide encompassing the knowledge from a range of guidelines from around the world to guide coast and beach managers and operators in providing a safe aquatic environment for all users.

The first Draft edition has been developed following extensive research into Australia's best practice arrangements and those in existence internationally, in particular the United Kingdom and Canada.

The coastal zone and its beaches provide a vast array of passive and active recreational opportunities. Australians value the coast as a high quality of life experience, whether it be in the short or long term. The quality of life is directly proportional to the level of safety, perceived or real.

The beach is the highest use area on the coast for public recreation, issues relating to public access, amenity and safety rank more highly in beach management than they may in the more general field of coastal management. Public safety has in the past tended to be the forgotten issue in coastal policy and management, although this is now starting to change; while environment protection and protection of property have traditionally received considerable attention in government policy and coastal zone management (Sheedy et. al. 1993)

The Guidelines are categorised in nine sections:

1. Safer Coastal Environments
2. Coastal Safety Signage
3. General Operations on Beaches
4. Lifesaving Services
5. Lifesaving Equipment and Facilities
6. Emergency Management
7. Policy and Planning
8. Storage and Handling of Dangerous Goods
9. Tourism Safety

Learning Outcomes

1. To understand how risk management plays a role in managing the coast
2. To introduce a set of public safety guidelines for the coast
3. To identify how these guidelines can play a role in improving safety on the coast.

References:

1. 2004 National Surf Safety Report, Surf Life Saving Australia, Sydney, Australia 2004
2. 2005 National Surf Safety Report, Surf Life Saving Australia, Sydney, Australia 2005
3. Australian Bureau of Statistics, Regional Population Growth, Australia and New Zealand, 2001-02, cat.no. 3218.0
4. Coastline Lengths, Geoscience Australia, www.ga.gov.au/education/facts/dimensions/coastlin.htm
5. Hugo, G 1996, 'Counterurbanisation', Population Shift: mobility and change in Australia, eds. Newton, PW and Bell, M, AGPS, Canberra
6. Moller J., Injury Expert, New Directions in Health and Safety, Mount Compass, South Australia, Email: jmoller@dove.net.au
7. Watson, WL & Ozanne-Smith, J. The Cost of Injury to Victoria. December 1997. Monash University Accident Research Centre. Report No. 124.

INTRODUCTION

In a major step towards the further reduction of death and injury on Australia's coastline, Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) has launched the first-ever Australian Coastal Public Safety Guidelines. The Guidelines have been developed over a period of more than two years using research, best practice operations, and relevant reference to guidelines, standards and regulations from around Australia and overseas.

THE AUSTRALIAN COASTAL PUBLIC SAFETY GUIDELINES

The Guidelines are a single and extensive set of guidelines that have been brought together to assist anyone with an interest in or a responsibility for coastal public safety to provide safer aquatic environments for the community. This initiative will provide world-best practical advice to land managers in any organisation with a responsibility for public safety around the Australian coast.

The Guidelines are to be publicly released in September 2007 for a six-month consultation period, after which time industry committees will be formed to provide ongoing oversight. Subsequent releases will expand their coverage and scope through close liaison with other organisations and the Guidelines will become the definitive resource in the prevention of coastal injury.

As the Guidelines will become an important part of public safety risk management strategies for all coastal land managers, we believe it is critical that all relevant stakeholders have the opportunity for input. The Guidelines will form the basis of how we operate as lifesavers and lifeguards. It will be the foundation of how we manage our beaches and services, identify

and deal with risk on our coast and how we are seen as leaders in the Coastal Safety area. One of the lasting legacies from 2007 Year of the Surf Lifesaver will be a reduction in the coastal drowning rate, through the creation of lasting partnerships between all organisations with an interest in coastal public safety and the development of a uniform set of coastal risk management guidelines.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND THE GUIDELINES

The guidelines are underpinned by a philosophy of risk management.

- Risk management should be integral to an organisation's operation.
- The aim of risk management is to minimise losses and maximise opportunities that are closely aligned to improving safety; not only from the physical risk perspective, but including all risks associated with the use or operation of a particular area and activity.
- Appropriate control measures for each area should be determined by the hazard rating of the area, local environmental conditions such as weather and water, and other local conditions such as geography and population demographics.
- A risk assessment should be conducted for all areas to which the public has ready access to identify not only risks, but also current control measures and their appropriateness.
- Coastal managers should identify any foreseeable hazards, assess their risks and take action to eliminate or control them.

SCOPE

The *Australian Coastal Public Safety Guidelines* present the minimum guidelines for the safety of the public and communities when using coastal environments, including ocean coastline as well as saltwater waterways that open to the oceans surrounding Australia.

The *Australian Coastal Public Safety Guidelines* apply to areas where supervision (surf lifesavers or lifeguards) may or may not be present or available.

The *Australian Coastal Public Safety Guidelines* do NOT apply to docks or similar areas covered by separate legislative requirements, even though the public may have access to them.

The *Australian Coastal Public Safety Guidelines* do NOT take into consideration all health and safety issues relating to pollution.

The Guidelines are categorised in nine sections:

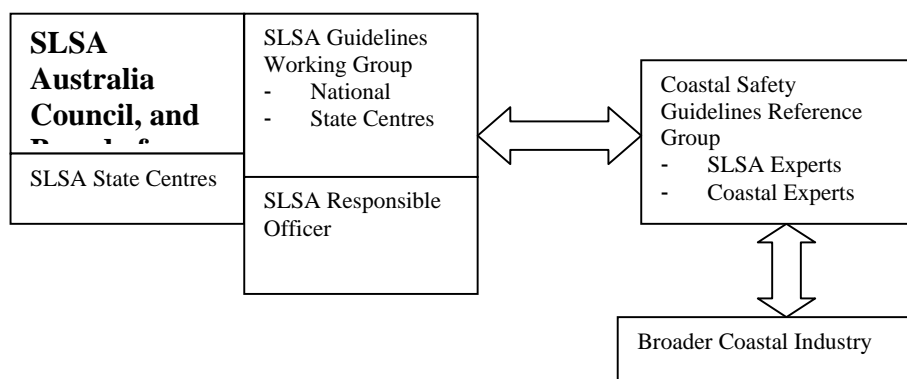
10. Safer Coastal Environments
11. Coastal Safety Signage
12. General Operations on Beaches
13. Lifesaving Services
14. Lifesaving Equipment and Facilities
15. Emergency Management
16. Policy and Planning
17. Storage and Handling of Dangerous Goods
18. Tourism Safety

Examples of Section 1 of the Guidelines include:

SE1100-1199	1. STANDARDS FOR PROVISION OF SAFER COASTAL ENVIRONMENTS (SE)
SE1100-1109	<i>Integrated Coastal Zone Management</i>
SE1100	Coastal public safety – general principles
SE1101	Coastal development public safety
SE1102	Designating the beach
SE1103	Aquatic activity zoning and safety zones
SE1110-1119	<i>Natural Environment</i>
SE1110	Monitoring weather and water conditions
SE1111	Dunes and cliffs safety
SE1120-1129	<i>Coastal Activity</i>
SE1121	Rock fishing safety
SE1122	Minimum safety conditions for Agreements and Leases
SE1123	Minimum conditions for hirers of beach gear
SE1130-1139	<i>Craft and Equipment</i>
SE1130	Recreational watercraft safety management
SE1131	Personal watercraft (PWC) safety management
SE1132	Safety of floating pontoons

The Guidelines will also have a review structure that will allow for the ongoing development to ensure that the guidelines are updated and that industry consultation is maintained. A control protocol is also followed.

Fig 1. Coastal Safety Guidelines – Organisational Interrelationships for Consultation and Review.



STATUS

The *Australian Coastal Public Safety Guidelines* do not replace or supersede any current legislation. SLSA recommends that all authorities and agencies responsible for ownership and/or management of coastal environments comply with all legislation and local laws specific to their coastal areas, facilities and operations.

The *Australian Coastal Public Safety Guidelines* reference a number of best practice Australian Standards produced by Standards Australia (www.standards.com.au) to ensure consistency of information. A list of Australian Standards and legislation referenced in these *Australian Coastal Public Safety Guidelines* is included as an Appendix.

In this document, **guideline**, ‘means the ideal in terms of which something can be judged; a basis for comparison; a reference point against which other things can be evaluated; established or widely recognised as a model of authority or excellence.’

The Australian Coastal Public Safety Guidelines presents the minimum standards for safety of the public and communities when using coastal environments, including ocean coastline and that of saltwater waterways that open to the oceans surrounding Australia.

The Australian Coastal Public Safety Guidelines apply to areas where supervision (lifesavers or lifeguards) may or may not be present or available.

The Australian Coastal Public Safety Guidelines do NOT take into consideration all health and safety issues relating to pollution.

When developing best practice guidelines it is vital that the provider caters for the needs and wants of the end user. The objectives of Customers and Potential Customers in using “best practice guidelines” or in seeking advice, product and services from a best practice guidelines provider can be summed up in the following three key wants. They are seeking:

1. Relevant experts to assist them manage their risk; leading to reduced exposure and improved financial result;
2. Better recognition as a good corporate citizen caring for the environment and the welfare of the community, and
3. In a significant majority of cases, a long term solution over a short term “fix”.

Expert intelligence in this age of knowledge and evidence based can provide the foundation for a tool kit of unique resources that will lead to SLSA being recognised and respected as the recognised authority of coastal public safety services “between and beyond the flags”.. This intelligence, when packaged into discrete business tools that complement the guidelines can also provide a worthwhile tool in reducing drowning numbers.

TAKE HOME MESSAGES

- Risk Management systems are playing an ever increasing role in society. Such systems should be built into an organisations operations
- Guidelines and standards are a key part of a risk management framework and in the reduction of the loss of life
- Appropriate control measures for each area should be determined by the hazard rating of the area, local environmental conditions such as weather and water, and other local conditions such as geography and population demographics
- SLSA has complied and developed a body of knowledge to strengthen this framework
- Consultation with industry is a key part of “buy in” and commitment from any sector
- Development of key intelligence is an important part of a public safety organisations behaviour.

†Corresponding author :
Peter Agnew
Locked Bag 2
Bondi Beach 2029
Phone: 61 2 9300 4000
Facsimile: 61 2 9130 8312
pagnew@slsa.asn.au