

The background of the cover features a photograph of surfers riding waves at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. The surfers are silhouetted against the bright light, and white foam from the waves is visible. The image is partially obscured by a white diagonal shape on the left and a dark blue diagonal shape at the bottom right.

SEPTEMBER 2023

CHARACTERISTICS OF SURFERS AND SURFER RESCUES IN NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA



**UNSW Beach Safety
Research Group**

Report No. 23_04



PREPARED FOR SURFING NSW BY THE
UNSW Beach Safety Research Group

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Enhancing water safety in the coastal environment is a vital component of preventing drowning. This report describes the characteristics of surfers in New South Wales (NSW), Australia and their contribution towards saving lives while surfing. Findings are based on analysis of an online survey developed by researchers from the UNSW Beach Safety Research Group (BSRG) for Surfing NSW.

In total, 773 responses from surfers in NSW were included in the analysis. Of these, 75% were male and the largest proportion were aged 46-55 years (27%). The majority had been surfing for 21 or more years (52%), were shortboard riders (72%) and consider themselves to surf at an advanced level (57%). Most surfers typically surf between 3-4 times (31%) and 1-2 times per week (27%) and most surf locally or within a 30-minute drive from their most common surf spot (90%).

Approximately half (49%) of the surveyed NSW surfers believed that all surfers should complete a basic lifesaving and CPR course and most were overwhelmingly supportive of basic lifesaving and CPR courses providing lifesaving and rescue skills for surfers (such as the Surfers Rescue 24/7 program), with 86% being willing to participate, or had already taken part in a course. Surfers were more supportive of these programs if they were offered free of charge.

Many surfers are rescuing people who find themselves in distress in the ocean. Approximately two-thirds (68%) of surveyed NSW surfers had rescued someone while surfing. Those who had already taken part in a lifesaving and CPR course for surfers were significantly more likely to have performed a rescue while surfing. In addition, surfers who considered themselves to be of an advanced skill level were significantly more likely to have performed a rescue while surfing.

On average NSW surfers are rescuing 3.9 people across their lifetime while surfing, both in NSW and elsewhere, which when applied to the 68% of all NSW surfers who have performed a rescue and the 2019 Surfing State of Play Report (SportAus, 2019) SportAus State of Play estimate of 219,236 surfers in NSW equates to 581,414 people that NSW surfers have rescued across their combined lifetimes. This represents an average of 11,628 people rescued by NSW surfers per year over the last 50 years.

Surfers in NSW conduct rescues on beaches both patrolled and unpatrolled by lifeguards and surf lifesavers. Most of the rescues (61%) occur either before or after lifeguard/lifesaver patrol hours, or when there are no lifeguards/lifesavers present, such as on unpatrolled beaches. Approximately a third (32%) of the rescues occurred when lifeguards or lifesavers were present on the beach. Rip currents were believed to have been a factor in 80% of all rescues.

Surfers who had made a rescue were asked to describe their most recent rescue in detail. In 83% of cases, the surfer themselves saw the person and volunteered to help, as opposed to being asked to assist by family members, lifeguards/lifesavers, or the person in trouble themselves. Surfers report most commonly rescuing young adults 20-30 years of age (37%), 75% of which are male. In 73% of rescues, surfers believed they had saved a life. When these results are extrapolated, we estimate that 2,177 lives are saved by NSW surfers while surfing every year. Using SportAus participation data, this suggests that 10% of NSW surfers save a life each year while surfing, highlighting the significant societal value of surfers as well as the importance of surfer rescue training programs.

In summary, this report has shown that surfers in NSW play a vital role in ensuring safety along the coast, conducting as many rescues per year in NSW as lifeguards and lifesavers conduct around Australia. Of particular importance is that surfers are conducting rescues on unpatrolled beaches. There is also strong evidence to support the effectiveness and expansion of free rescue and CPR courses for surfers, such as the Surfers 24/7 program.

11,628
average number
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rescued by NSW
surfers each year



86% willing to
participate in a
basic lifesaving
& CPR course

*“Saw the person in trouble and
volunteered to help”*

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1.0 BACKGROUND

Coastal and beach safety is a topic of national significance in Australia (Koon et al., 2021) and significant financial investment is devoted to the provision of professional lifeguard services and volunteer surf lifesaving services on many Australian beaches. However, over 95% of the estimated 11,000 beaches in Australia do not have any lifeguard or lifesaving services (SLSA, 2022). Furthermore, most that are patrolled by lifeguards/lifesavers are done so only seasonally and patrols do not extend to early morning and late afternoon/evening hours (Uebelhoer et al., 2022). Patrolled beach areas are also denoted by the presence of a pair, or multiple pairs, of red and yellow flags that denote safer swimming and bathing areas. However, these flagged areas typically only cover a small proportion of the beach.

Lifeguard and lifesaving services thus cannot be present everywhere and at all times on beaches and it is therefore not surprising that a large number of drownings and injuries occur. According to the 2023 National Drowning Report (RLSSA, 2023) 125 coastal drowning deaths occurred in the financial year 2022/23, a 3% increase compared to the 10-year average of 122 per year. In the 2021/22 financial year, 31 unintentional coastal drowning deaths were recorded at beaches New South Wales (NSW), the largest number of any Australian state or territory (RLSSA, 2023). During the 2022/23 summer period, 54 coastal drowning deaths occurred with 28 deaths in NSW, the highest number ever recorded over the summer months in the state (SLSA, 2023).

Enhancing water safety in the coastal environment is a vital component of preventing drowning. In addition to lifeguards and surf lifesavers, it is becoming increasingly recognized that surfers make a significant contribution to the safety of those in the water who find themselves in distress and several high profile rescues conducted by surfers have received media attention (e.g. Meacham, 2021; 7News Australia, 2023). Surfing is a popular recreational activity in Australia, with an estimated 1.2 million active surfers (SLSA, 2022). While ocean wave conditions are generally only suitable for surfing on the southern half of the Australian continent, surfing is particularly common along much of the open ocean coast of NSW. A study by Attard et al. (2015) was the first to document the role played by surfers in conducting informal bystander rescues on Australian beaches. Using conservative estimates based on their results, Attard et al. (2015) showed that the number of rescues conducted each year by Australian surfers was on par, and likely exceeded, the number conducted each year by lifeguards and lifesavers and approximately two-thirds of surfers who had made a rescue felt that they had saved a life. Similar findings have been found in more recent studies on surfer rescues in Europe (Berg et al., 2021; De Olivera et al., 2023) and New Zealand (Mead et al., 2023).

Surfers are particularly well positioned as informal rescuers for a number of important reasons. First, as fiberglass boards are not allowed between the flags, and variable distances either side of the flags, surfing on patrolled beaches occurs well away from the flagged areas and surfers can potentially assist people who find themselves in distress away from lifeguarded areas. Second, surfers often surf on completely unpatrolled beaches, which have been shown to be associated with most beach related drownings (SLSA, 2022; 2023). Third, surfers often surf early in the morning or late in the day and early evening, which are times typically outside of lifeguard and lifesaver patrol times. Fourth, they often surf near headlands, which are typically characterized by boundary rip currents, and near channelised rip currents along beaches, as these locations promote better surfing breaks. This means that surfers are well placed to assist beachgoers who find themselves caught in rip currents. Surfers also use rip currents as a mechanism to assist paddling offshore and can often recognize people in rips in

need of assistance. Finally, most surfers are familiar with their surroundings and ocean conditions, are confident in the water, and perhaps most importantly, have a flotation device with them (their surfboard) that can greatly assist in conducting a rescue (Berg et al, 2021; Attard et al., 2015, Mead De and Moylan, 2023).

However, the vital role that surfers play in drowning prevention is still often overlooked. An exception is the Surfers 24/7 (SR24/7) program developed in 2012 by Surfing New South Wales (SNSW), the leading authority responsible for promoting competitive and recreational surfing throughout NSW. The SR24/7 program is a free board rescue and CPR course specifically tailored for recreational surfers and typically lasts about three hours. The program has received community safety awards and nominations and has received financial support from the NSW Government. The SR24/7 program has since expanded beyond NSW to other Australian states such as Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia as well as to New Zealand. Similar programs teaching basic rescue techniques and CPR to surfers are also available in places in the United States, Chile, Brazil and various parts of Europe.

AusPlay in their 2019 Surfing – State of Play report estimate that there are 219,236 surfers aged 15+ in the state of New South Wales (SportAus, 2019). While this is believed to be an underestimate due to the methodology used (i.e., CATI survey), it remains the best published state-level estimate of surfing participation. According to this report, NSW surfers make up 44.5% of the Australian surfing population aged 15+.

To gain a better understanding of the contribution that surfers make to coastal and beach safety, Surfing New South Wales (SNSW) engaged the UNSW Beach Safety Research Group (UNSW BSRG) to conduct further research into surfer demographics and their experience in conducting rescues. There are two primary aims of this report. The first is to develop a demographic profile of surfers in NSW, including their surfing experience and ability. The second is to further understand the role that surfers in NSW play as informal rescuers for those who find themselves in need of assistance in the water. This report also provides information regarding the opinions of NSW surfers regarding potential surfer rescue courses.

2.0 METHODS

2.1 Survey development and design

Data for this study was obtained from the Global Surfer Survey (GSS) – an online survey developed collaboratively with researchers from the UNSW BSRG, researchers/surfers in France and Portugal, and Surfing NSW. It became apparent early in the development of the survey that there was a valuable opportunity to gain information about surfers that extended beyond their role in conducting rescues and could also be applied globally. The survey was therefore extended to gain demographic information about surfers including age, gender, years surfing, type of surfer, frequency of surfing, their opinions about the importance of surfers completing basic lifesaving and CPR courses, their experiences conducting rescues, and their views on a range of topics such as sharks, environmental issues, and coastal management.

The anonymous online Global Surfer Survey is hosted on the Qualtrics survey platform and was piloted for comprehension and online functionality prior to launch. The survey comprises a mix of closed and open-ended questions and spans a possible 56 questions depending on responses and survey logic. The time taken to complete the survey depended on the nature of the responses given throughout the survey by the respondent(s) and varied from 15 minutes to 30 minutes. The English language survey can be found in Appendix 1 of this report. In addition to the English language version of the survey, the survey tool was translated into French, Portuguese and Spanish. The online link to the survey is hosted on the UNSW BSRG website and can be found at www.beachsafetyresearch.com/gss. In this report, only responses to the English language version of the survey from surfers (respondents) based in NSW have been analysed.

In order to qualify for the survey, respondents had to provide their informed consent, confirm they were aged 18 years or older and identify as a surfer. Those who said 'no' to any of these questions, were not able to complete the survey. Respondents who qualified were encouraged to finish the survey in one attempt, but were given the option to complete within 48 hours. After 48 hours, respondents were advised they would need to start the survey again.

2.2 Survey recruitment and promotion

The survey was launched on 30 November 2021, with a media release via the UNSW Sydney newsroom and supporting media activity. The survey was also promoted on social media via the UNSW BSRG and Surfing NSW social media pages. Example survey promotion and media coverage is shown in Figure 1.

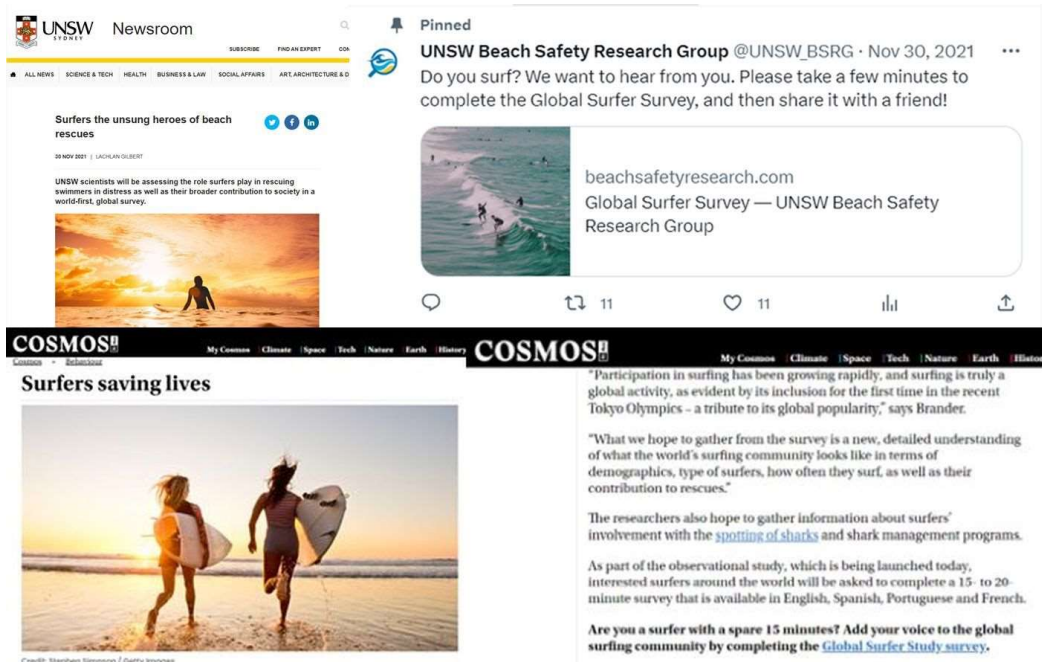


Figure 1: Examples of online promotion of the Global Surfer Survey from (clockwise from top left): the UNSW Sydney Newsroom, UNSW Beach Safety Research Group Twitter page, and COSMOS magazine.

To encourage participation from NSW residents, a prize incentive was offered. This incentive was the chance to enter the draw to win a custom surfboard valued up to \$1,000 which was donated by Surfing NSW. Following the initial online promotion in November and December 2021 an additional online promotion was carried out by Surfing NSW during the Australian summer (Dec/Feb of 2022/2023). It is important to note that this surfer survey differed from the previous survey of Australian surfers by Attard et al. (2015) in that it was promoted as a survey about a range of topics relating to surfing, including surfer rescues (Figure 2), whereas the Attard et al. (2015) study was promoted as a survey explicitly about surfer rescues.

Global Surfer Survey

Are you a surfer? And by surfer, we mean boardrider, bodyboarder, bodysurfer and more! If so we'd like you to help us know more about surfers around the world by spending 15 minutes or so filling out this important anonymous survey. This research study is all about understanding who surfers are, how long they've been surfing, how often they surf, and what their opinions are about coastal and environmental issues. We are also very interested in the role surfers play by rescuing people in trouble in the surf. We think surfers have a lot to offer to society and the results of this survey will help us tell their story.

The survey has been created by the Beach Safety Research Group at UNSW Sydney with support from Surfing NSW and we want to make it global. Please help us by spreading the word and sharing this link!

Hit the 'Contact Us' button and get in touch if you'd like to offer a translation of the survey into a language not covered below or to ask any questions. Click on the buttons below to do the survey. Thanks to Surfing NSW, surfers based in New South Wales, Australia can go into a draw to win a custom made surfboard valued at \$1000!

English

Figure 2: The portal for all online access to the Global Surfer Survey on the UNSW BSRG website at www.beachsafetyresearch/gss describing what the survey was about.

2.3 Data cleaning, coding and analysis

To conduct the analysis for this report, data were downloaded from the Qualtrics online survey system on Friday August 11th, 2023 into an Excel spreadsheet, which was then loaded into SPSS analysis software. Responses from those outside of Australia, and who resided outside of the Australian state of NSW were removed. Incomplete responses that lacked basic demographic information were also removed. Other incomplete responses were retained, which is why the total number of respondents (i.e., $n =$) reported for each question in the respective results section (including Table and Figure captions) will vary. Surfing ability was categorized using the following terms and definitions (Table 1) and was given to respondents in Question 8 of the survey (Appendix 1). Analysis comprised descriptive statistics and selected chi square tests of association.

Table 1: Terms and associated definitions used to describe surfing ability. Surfers were asked to self-report their ability based on these definitions (Question 8; Appendix 1).

Term	Definition
Novice/Beginner	Surfing broken waves or unbroken waves straight to the beach
Intermediate	Surfing unbroken waves left and right
Advanced	Surfing unbroken waves left and right, turning on the wave, staying close to the breaking part and controlling bottom and top turns
Expert/Professional	Surfing on a higher level than advanced, compete regularly, big wave surfer, have sponsorship (current or previous)
Other	These categories do not apply to my type of surfing

To extrapolate results from this survey in order to provide an estimate of the total number of people rescued by NSW surfers, we have used the SportAus surfing participation estimate published in the 2019 Surfing State of Play report (SportAus, 2019). To calculate the number of people rescued in a NSW surfers' lifetime, we applied the proportion of respondents to our survey who had performed a rescue to the SportAus surfing participation estimate (SportAus, 2019) and multiplied this by the estimated number of people rescued in a surfers lifetime. We then averaged this value over a 50 year period, which encompassed the surfing experience of our survey respondents. This method is further explained in Section 3.8.

For the number of lives saved by NSW surfers in rescues they conducted in the most recent year, we applied the same proportion of surfers who reported they had performed a rescue while surfing in our survey to the SportAus estimated NSW surfing population (SportAus, 2019) and then apportioned estimated number of lives saved reported by the survey respondents based on the severity of the rescue situation as assessed by surfers. This method is further explained in Section 3.9.2.

2.4 Ethics approvals

Human research ethics approval was granted by the UNSW Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) (Approval number: HC210836).

3.0 RESULTS

A total of 845 responses to the English language survey were received. Once responses from people residing in other countries and states other than NSW were removed, 773 responses remained available for analysis. The following results therefore relate only to surfers who reside in New South Wales, Australia.

3.1 Surfer demographics

In terms of gender, approximately three-quarters of respondents (75%; n = 582) identified as male with a quarter identifying as female (25%; n = 189), 0.1% preferring not to state their gender and 0.1% identifying as non-binary (Figure 3a). As shown in Figure 3b the survey received responses from surfers of all ages > 18 years with the largest proportion of respondents in the 46-55 years age group (27%) followed by the 36-45 years and 25-35 year age groups (22% and 18% respectively). Of note, the proportion of female surfers to this survey (25%) was significantly higher than the 5% reported by the previous study on Australian surfers by Attard et al. (2015).

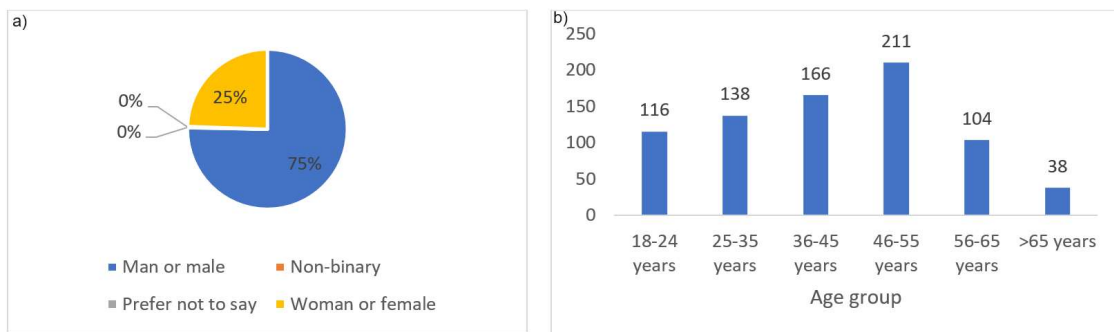


Figure 3: Demographics of NSW resident surfer respondents (n = 733) by: a) gender; and b) age group.

3.2 Surfing experience

The survey received responses from surfers with a range of experience in terms of years surfing (Figure 4a), but most respondents were experienced surfers, having been surfing for 21 years or more (52%; n=404). The surfer survey respondents were asked at what age they had learned, or started to surf, and while responses ranged across all ages (Figure 4b), the vast majority indicated that they had started surfing at the age of 11 years or younger (39%), or during their early teenage years (35%). The surfer survey respondents were asked if they had ever taken formal surfing lessons with only approximately a third (36%; n = 281) saying that they had (Figure 5a). For those who indicated they had taken surfing lessons, there was a wide range in the age at which they first took these lessons (Figure 5b) with the largest proportion having had lessons when they were 11-14 years of age (24%; n=68).

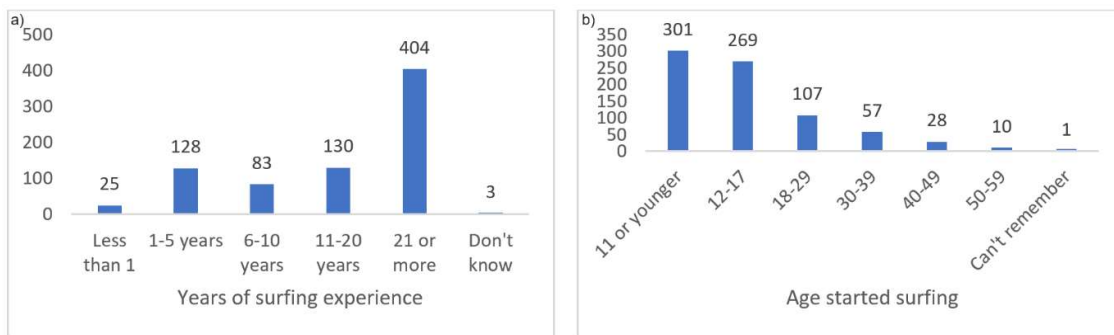


Figure 4: Self-reported years of surfing experience (a) and age at which they started surfing (b) by the survey respondents (n=773). Number of respondents is indicated above each grouping

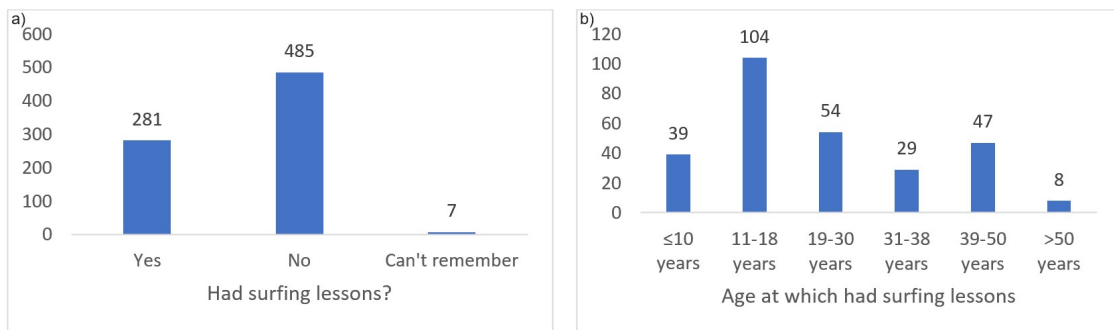


Figure 5: The number of survey respondents (n = 733) who: a) had surfing lessons (n = 281); and b) the age at which they had the surfing lessons. Number of respondents is indicated above each response.

3.3 Type of surfer and surfer ability

Surfers were asked which type of surfer they identified as with most (72%; n = 553) self-reporting to be shortboard riders (Figure 6a), which is similar to the 68% reported by Attard et al. (2015) for Australian surfers. The vast majority of respondents self-reported their surfing ability as being 'Advanced' (57%; n=441) based on the definitions provided in Table 1 (Figure 6b).

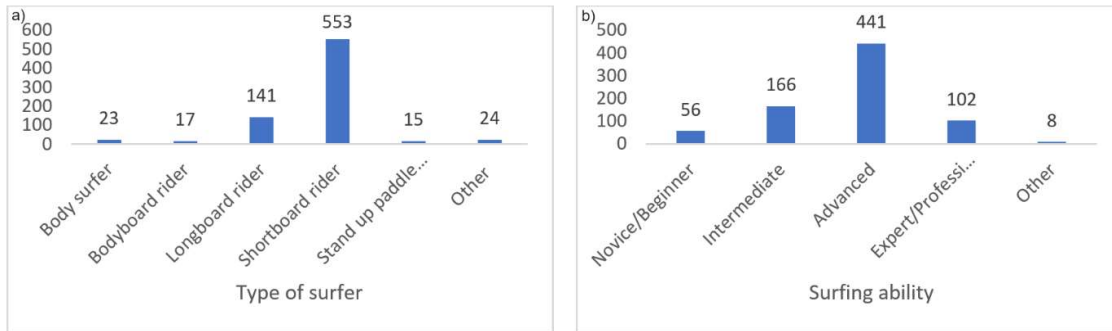


Figure 6: Respondents (n = 773) self-reported: a) type of surfer; and b) self-described surfing ability. Number of respondents is indicated above each category.

3.4 Frequency and duration of surfing participation

When asked how regularly they surfed on average in the last year, most respondents were frequent and regular surfers indicating that they surfed 3-4 times per week (31%), followed by 1-2 times per week (27%; Figure 7a). This suggests that 58% of surfers surf at least once per week, which is lower than the estimate of Attard et al. (2015) of 80%. In terms of how long their typical surfing session was, most respondents reported surfing for 2 hours (45%; n=348) or 1 hour (43%; n=329) each session (Figure 7b).

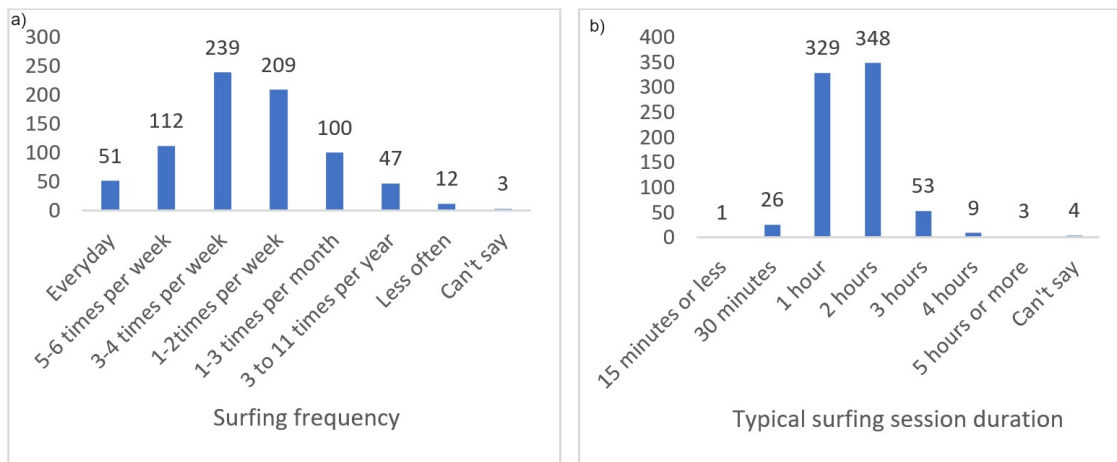


Figure 7: Respondents (n = 773) self-reported: a) frequency of surfing in last year; and b) duration of a typical surfing session. Number of respondents is indicated above each category.

3.5 Surfing locations and surf tourism

The survey asked respondents how far their most common surfing location was from where they lived and the largest number of respondents indicated that they surf at beaches within 10 minutes drive of their home (42%; n=324; Figure 8a). The majority of respondents surfed locally or less than a 30 minutes drive away (90%). The survey then asked respondents if they had ever participated in a dedicated surf trip and 83% (n=639) indicated that they had. Of those, 53% took a trip within NSW, while 37% went internationally (Figure 8b).

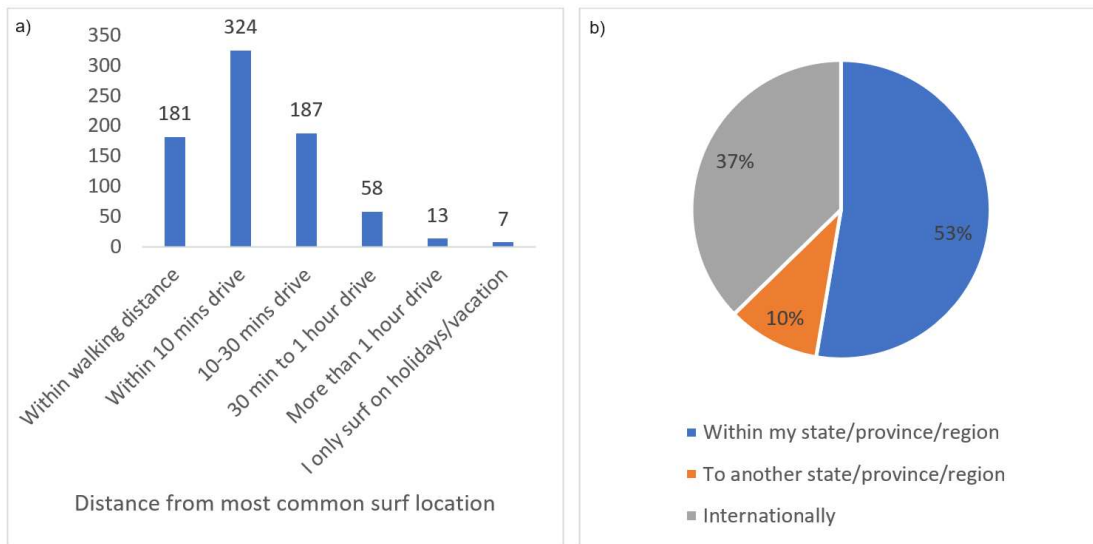


Figure 8: a) Distance from home of respondents (n = 770) most common surfing location. Number of respondents is indicated above each category; and b) proportion of surfer respondents who had taken a dedicated surf trip (82.7%) by destination location (n=638).

3.6 Surfing companions

When asked who they most often surf with, respondents indicated they generally surfed alone (n=372; 48%), but there were usually other people in the water. A further 274 respondents (35%) surfed with friends (Figure 9).

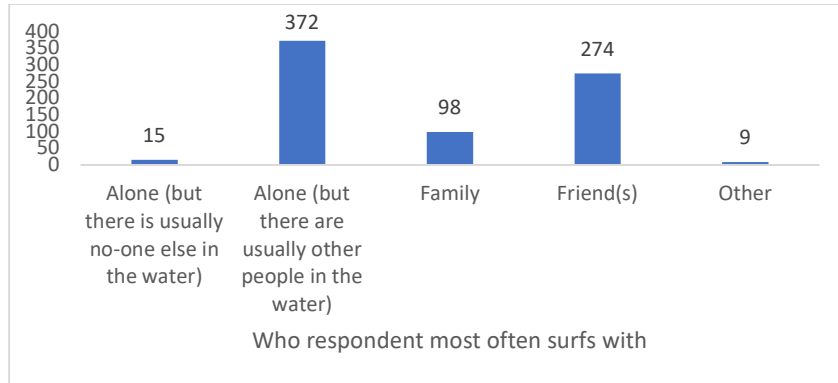


Figure 9: Who respondents most often surf with (n=768). Number of respondents is indicated above each category.

3.7 Safety training

Survey participants were asked if they believed that all surfers should complete a basic lifesaving and CPR course. Approximately three-quarters of all respondents (76%; n = 541) either strongly agreed, agreed or somewhat agreed with this statement (Figure 10a) and only 9% disagreed. When asked if they would be interested in taking part in a basic lifesaving and CPR course aimed at lifesaving and rescue skills for surfers, the response was overwhelming positive, with 86% of respondents (n=652) either being willing to participate or having already taken part in a course. For the respondents who had previously taken part in a course, 95% (n=204) said they would recommend the course they took to others. Of the 212 surfers who responded to this question who had participated in a course, 28% (n = 59) indicated it was the Surfers Rescue 24/7 program they had participated in. For those who hadn't yet taken part, the strong preference was for a course that was free or charge (75%; n=323; Figure 10b).

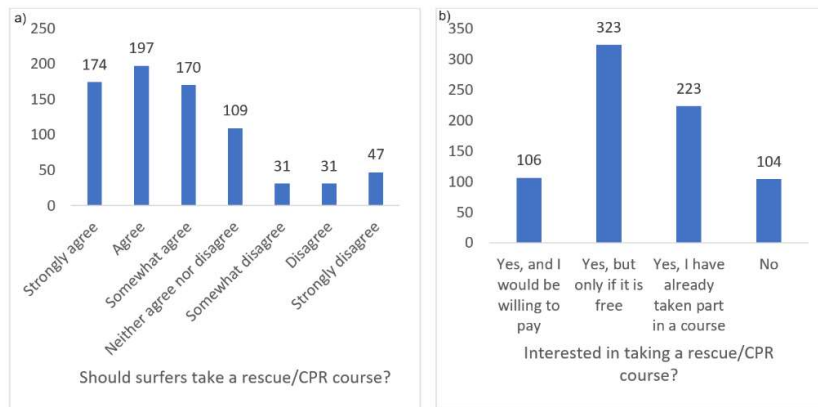


Figure 10: a): Surfer survey respondents (n = 759) response to whether they thought all surfers should complete a basic lifesaving and CPR training course; and b) surfers interest in participating in a basic lifesaving and CPR course aimed at lifesaving and rescue skills for surfers (n=756). Number of respondents is indicated above each category/answer.

3.8 Surfer rescues – historical

A major theme of the survey involved asking the surfer respondents about their experiences rescuing someone while surfing. Sixty-eight percent of all the surfer respondents (n=507) indicated that they had rescued someone else while surfing. Chi square statistical tests of association showed that those who had already taken part in a lifesaving and CPR course for surfers were significantly more likely to have performed a rescue while surfing ($X^2=43.081$; $p<0.001$). In addition, those surfers who self-reported being of advanced skill level were significantly more likely to have performed a rescue while surfing ($X^2=167.455$; $p<0.001$).

These respondents were asked to indicate how many people they estimated they had ever rescued while not in a paid or volunteer lifeguard/lifesaver capacity. Respondents could indicate how many people they had rescued while: i) surfing; ii) while not surfing, but at the coast; and iii) while not surfing, but at another location (e.g. a pool); and were given numerical ranges to choose from (0, 1, 2-5, 6-9 and 10+). The results are summarized in Figure 11 and suggest that, on average, NSW-based surfers rescue 3.9 people across their lifetime while surfing, not including when not surfing on the coast or away from the coast.

Extrapolating the 68% of respondents in this study who reported having performed a rescue to the SportAus (2019) estimate of 219,236 surfers in NSW equates to a total of 149,080 surfers in NSW who have performed a rescue while surfing, both in NSW and elsewhere. Using this value and the estimate of 3.9 people rescued by a surfer in their lifetime from our study, we conservatively estimate that surfers in NSW have rescued 581,414 people in their lifetimes. To put this number in perspective, if this had occurred over the last 50 years, this equates to a total of 11,628 people rescued per year by NSW surfers.

Respondents were asked if they had ever taken part in a mass rescue involving rescuing a large group of people associated with the same incident (such as multiple people caught in a rip current) and 42% of respondents (n=156) indicated that they had. These surfer respondents were invited to provide a brief description of the incident and their free text responses are captured verbatim (i.e., uncorrected) in Appendix 2.

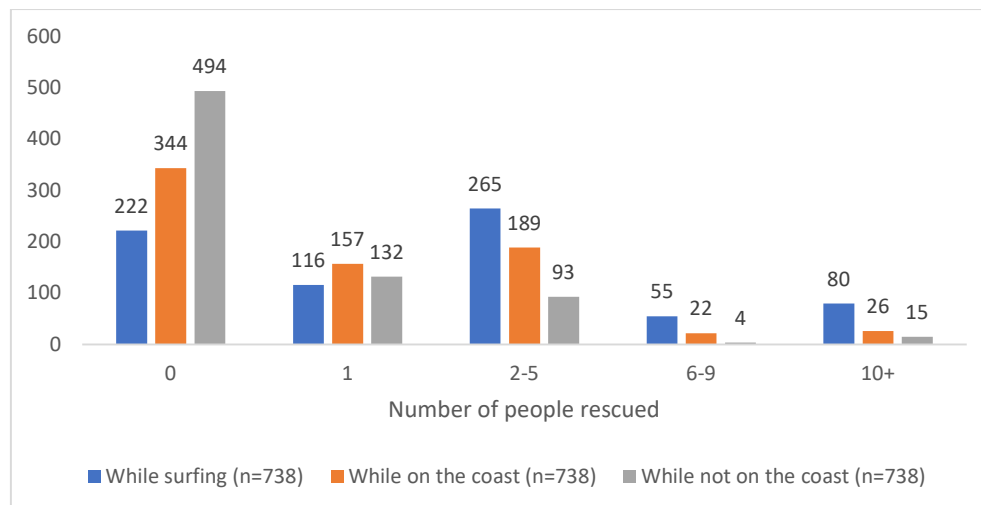


Figure 11: Number of people estimated to have been rescued by the surfer respondents while surfing, or at other locations. Number of respondents is indicated above each category.

Respondents were asked how many rescues they had made at the coast (defined as surf, beach, rocks, etc.) in the year prior to completing the survey. Most surfer respondents reported having performed one rescue (n=117; 49.4%). In total, on average a NSW-based surfer is conducting 2.5 rescues per year. (Figure 12)

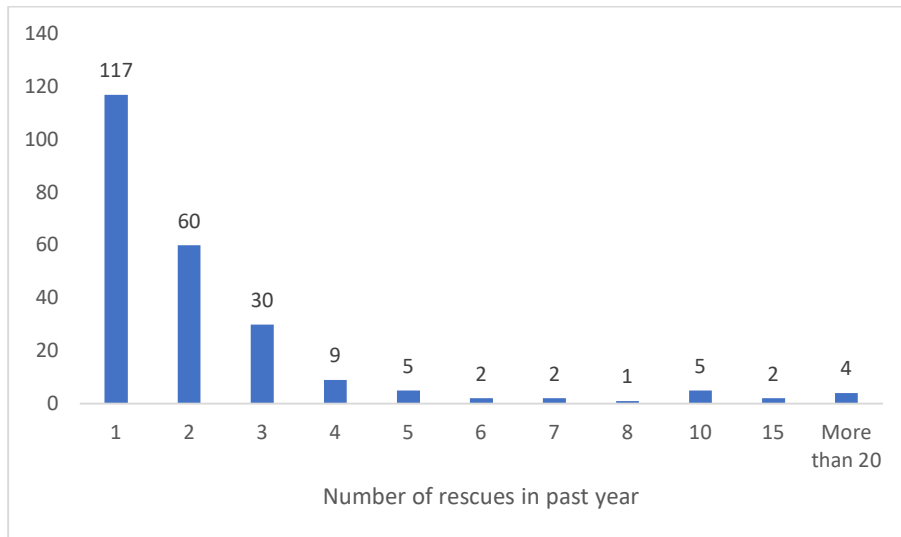


Figure 12: Number of rescues made at the coast by surfer respondents in the past year (n=237). Number of respondents is indicated above each category.

3.9 Surfer rescues – most recent rescue

The next section of the survey asked surfer respondents a series of questions in relation to the most recent rescue they had performed while surfing. Respondents described rescues that had occurred from the 1970s through to 2022. The majority had come to the aid of a single person (81%; n=395), while 16% of the rescues involved helping two people (Figure 13). Approximately three-quarters of the surfer rescuers (74%; n = 361) were the only surfer involved in the rescue, whereas 25.8% (n = 126) conducted the rescue with other surfers.

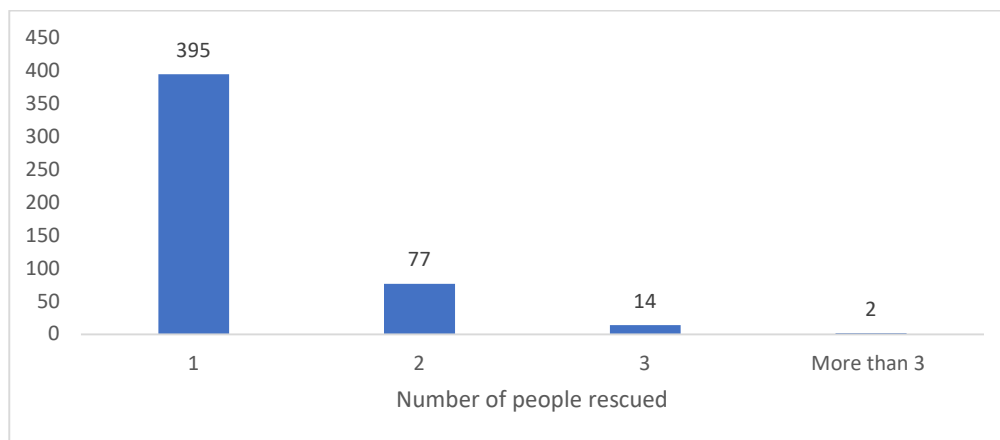


Figure 13: Number of people rescued during most recent rescue performed while surfing (n=488). Number of respondents is indicated above each category.

3.9.1 Environmental and social conditions

The surfer respondents were asked to describe the weather, wave and surf conditions when their rescue took place. The weather on the day the most recent rescue while surfing took place was most commonly a sunny and fine day in 66% (n = 314) of the incidents, or overcast and warm in 18% (n = 87) of the incidents (Figure 14a). Swell conditions were most commonly described as being moderate (3-4 feet/1.2 metres; Figure 14b). These results are consistent with the surfer rescue study by Attard et al. (2015) and previous beach safety research literature examining the environmental conditions most associated with lifeguard rescues and surf zone injuries (Scott et al., 2014; Castelle et al., 2019), which also found that most incidents occurred on fine, sunny days with below average, or average, wave conditions.

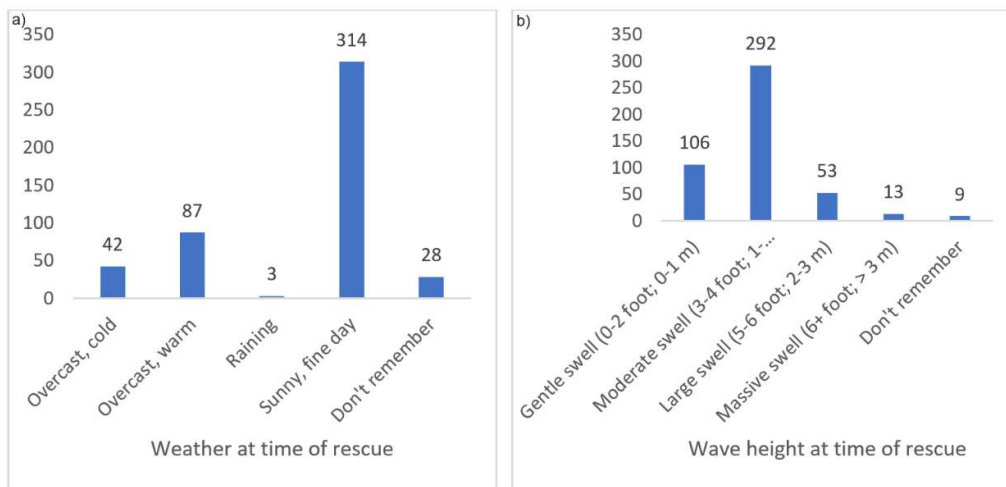


Figure 14: Environmental conditions associated with the surfer respondents most recent rescue while surfing: a) weather on the day (n=474); b) swell conditions (n=473). Number of respondents is indicated above each category.

The survey asked if there were many people at the beach when the rescue took place and the most common response from the surfer respondents was that the beach was 'quiet, very few people around' (33%; n=154; Figure 15a) However, almost half of the rescues occurred when the beach was busy (47%; n = 221). Over half (61%) of the rescues either happened before or after lifeguard/lifesaver patrol hours, or when there were no lifeguards/lifesavers present, but 32% (n=150) of the rescues occurred while lifeguards/lifesavers were present on the beach (Figure 15b). The respondents were asked if the rescue was rip current related and the majority 80% (n = 378) indicated that it was, which is similar to the 75% reported by Attard et al. (2015) in their survey of surfers most serious rescue.

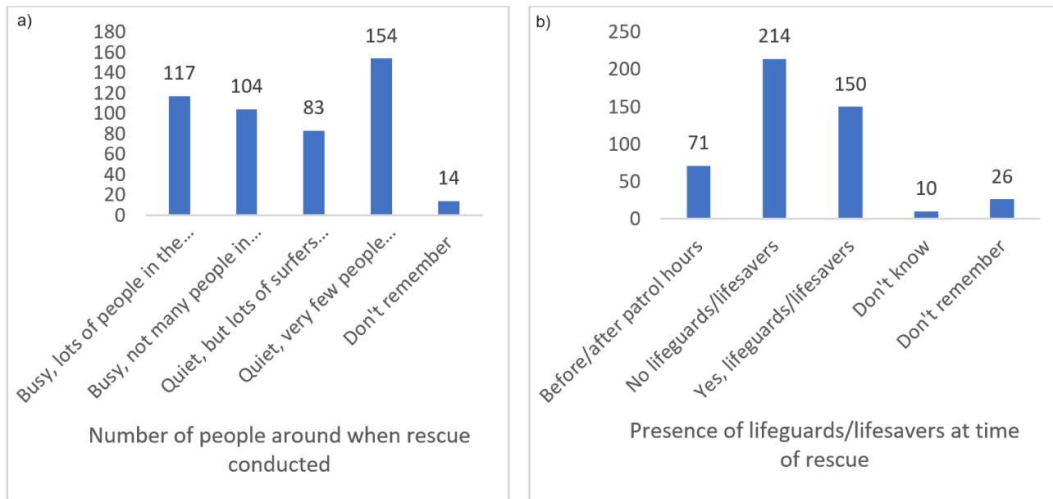


Figure 15: Self-reported responses by surfers about their most recent rescue conducted while surfing in terms of: a) the number of people surfing and on the beach (n = 472); and b) the presence of lifeguards/lifesavers when performing most recent rescue while surfing (n=471). Number of respondents is indicated above each category.

3.9.2 Rescue characteristics

Respondents were then asked about how they came to be involved in the rescue and in most cases (83%; n=389), the surfer saw the person and volunteered to help. In just four instances did a lifeguard or lifesaver ask the surfer to assist (Figure 16). The survey then asked the respondents a series of questions about the person they rescued. In the case of multiple rescuees, surfers were asked to provide details about each person. However, given that 80.9% of surfers only rescued one person (Figure 11), this report will focus on the first reported rescuee for each respondent.

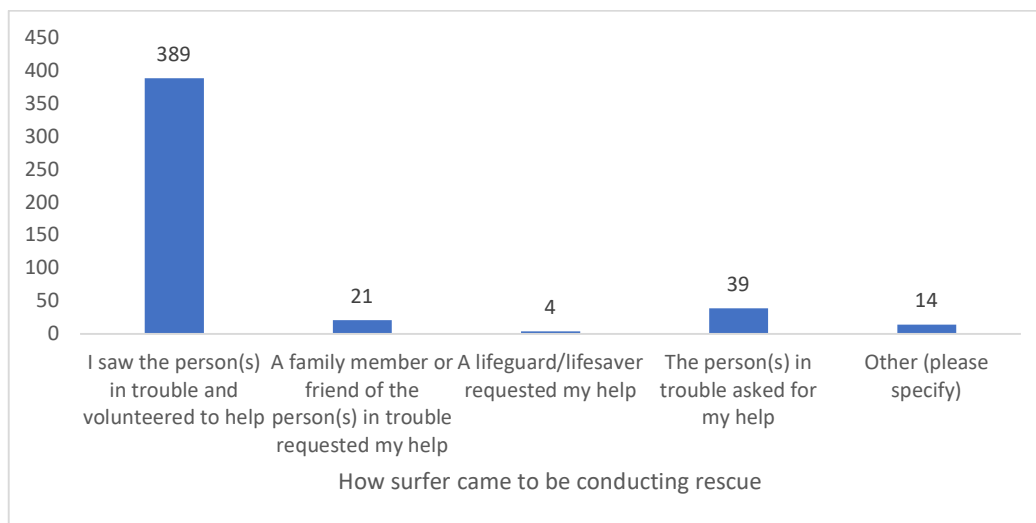


Figure 16: How respondent came to be involved in their most recent rescue while surfing (n=467). Number of respondents is indicated above each category.

In most cases the estimated age of the person the respondent rescued in their most recent rescue was a young adult approximately between the ages of 20-30 (37%; n=136) and 73% (n = 270) of the rescuees were estimated to be under the age of 30 (Figure 17). In 72% of cases, the person who was rescued was male. Attard et al. (2015) also found that most of the people rescued by surfers were males aged 18-29. The most recent Australian National Drowning Report (RLSSA, 2023) found that 82% of all coastal drowning deaths were male.

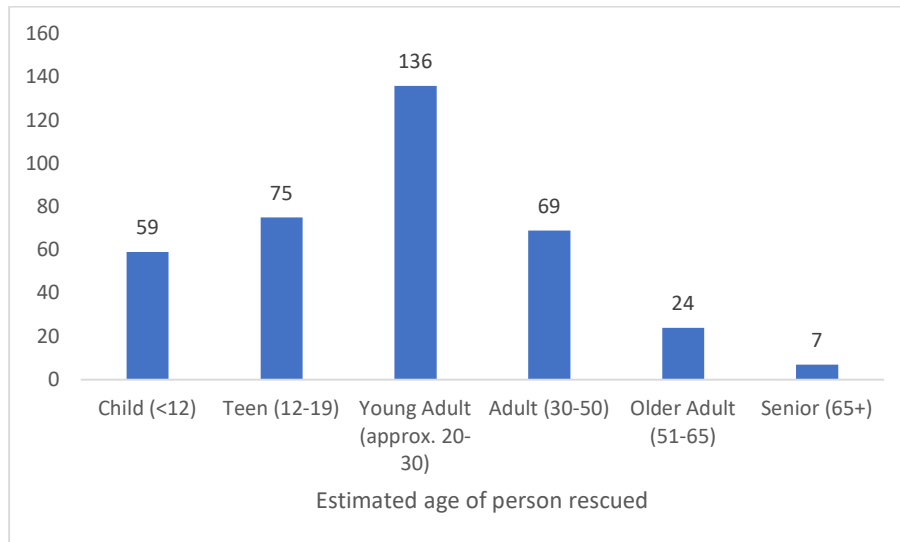


Figure 17: Approximate age of the person surfers rescued in their most recent rescue (n=370). Number of respondents is indicated above each category.

The surfer respondents were asked what the person was doing before requiring rescue and the most common response that they were *swimming - could not touch the bottom* (54%; n=198), but 35% (n = 128) of those rescued were either surfing or bodyboarding (Figure 18). These results are similar to the study of surfers by Attard et al. (2015) where most surfers reported their rescuees as swimming (63%) or board riding (25%) prior to being rescued. In terms of how the surfer respondent carried out the rescue, most commonly the surfer paddled the rescuee back to shore (53%; n=195). This is also similar to the 55% reported by Attard et al. (2015). Other methods are shown in Figure 19.

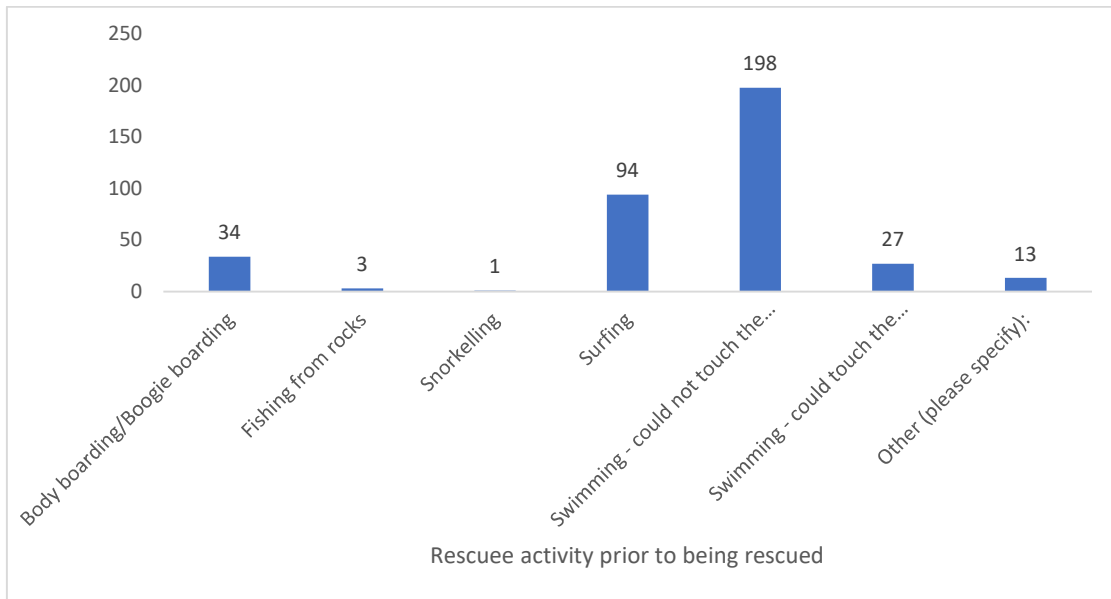


Figure 18: Activity person was doing when they were rescued (n=370). Number of respondents is indicated above each category.

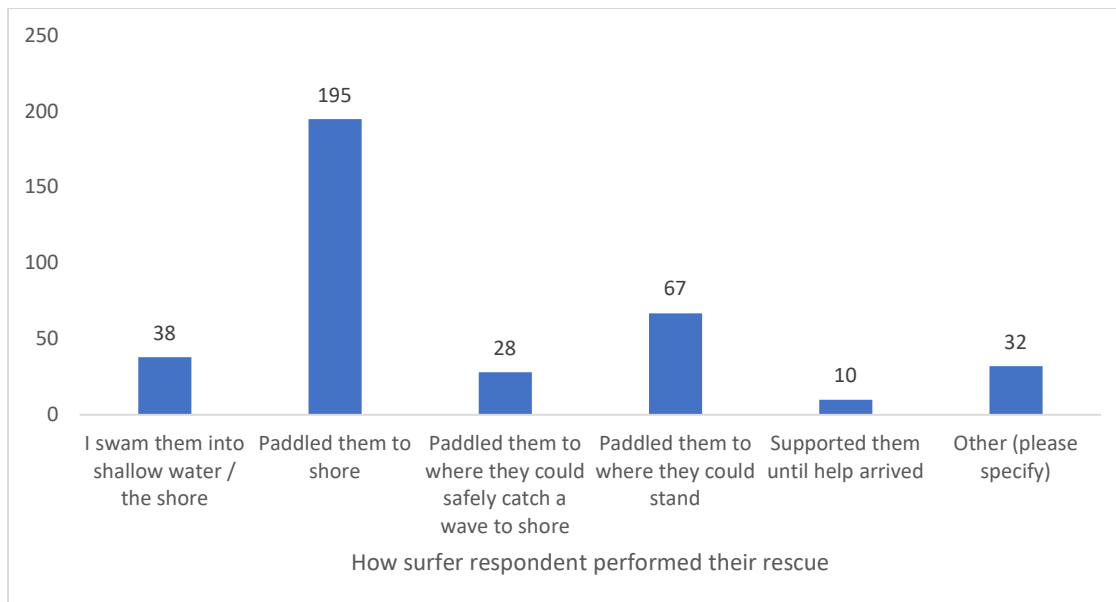


Figure 19: How rescue was performed (n=370). Number of respondents is indicated above each category.

The surfer survey respondents were asked to describe how they felt after the experience of conducting the rescue, noting respondents could respond with more than one feeling. *'Happy to have helped'* was the prevailing feeling for 362 respondents (97.8%; Figure 20) However, a number of surfer respondents (8.3%; n = 42) did report feeling annoyed or inconvenienced by the experience although this value is considerably less than the 28% of Australian surfers surveyed by Attard et al. (2015) who expressed feelings of annoyance or inconvenience associated with having to make a rescue.

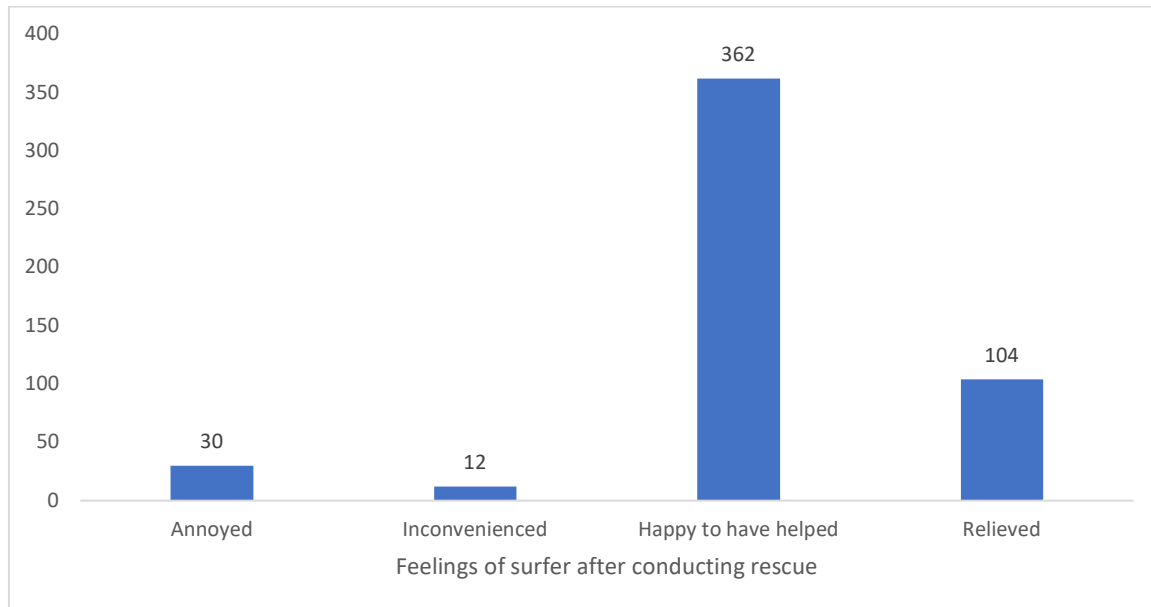


Figure 20: Surfers feelings after having completed the rescue (n=370). Number of respondents is indicated above each category.

Finally, respondents were asked about how critical they thought the situation was for their most recent rescue. In the majority of cases (73%; n=328), the surfer felt that the situation was either critical or extremely critical and that the person would have drowned without their intervention (Figure 21). This value is higher than the 63% of surveyed surfers by Attard et al. (2015) who were asked a similar question, but in relation to their most serious rescue.

When extrapolated, we estimate that there have been 108,828 lives saved by NSW surfers while surfing, both in NSW and elsewhere. When averaged out across 50 years, this equates to 2,177 lives saved by surfers while surfing every year. Using SportAus participation data, this suggests that 10% of NSW surfers save a life each year while surfing.

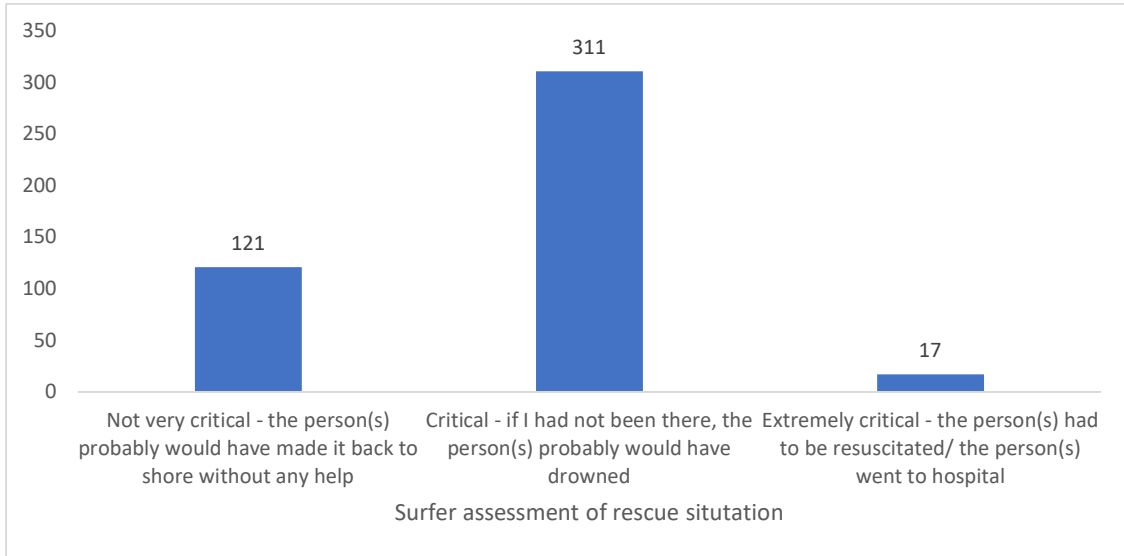


Figure 21: Perceptions regarding how critical the situation was (n=449). Number of respondents is indicated above each category.

3.10 Surfers general perception of their role in beach safety

The survey asked the surfer respondents their opinion about the statement ‘As a surfer, I have a responsibility to look after the safety of others (both surfers and swimmers) in the water while I am surfing’. The majority of respondents (82.2%; n = 561) either somewhat agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed with this statement (Figure 22).

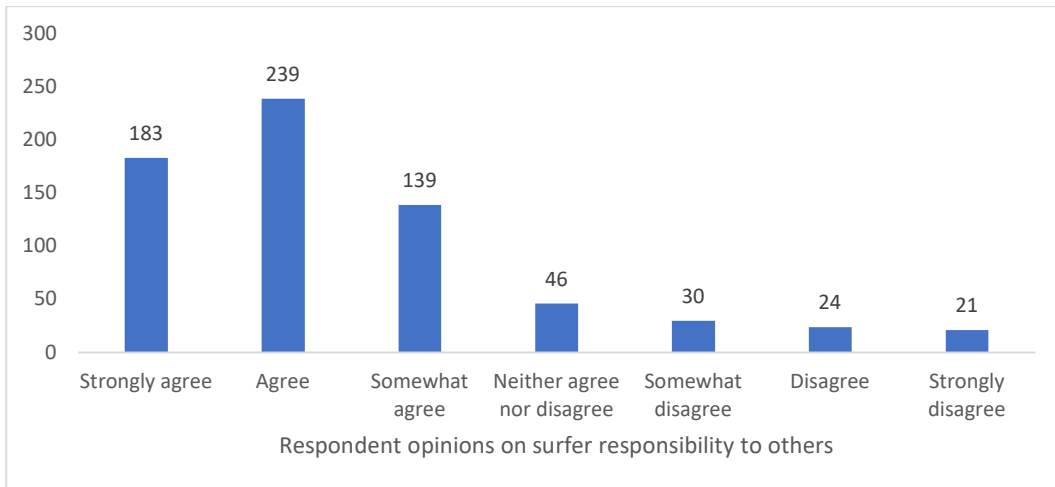


Figure 22: Responses from surfer survey respondents in regards to whether they thought that surfers have a responsibility to look after the safety of others (both surfers and swimmers) in the water while surfing (n=682). Number of respondents is indicated above each category.

4.0 KEY FINDINGS

This report aimed to improve existing understanding of surfer demographics and characteristics in New South Wales, Australia as well as their role in conducting rescues of those who find themselves in distress in the ocean. Analyses of NSW surfer respondents to the online Global Surfer Survey has identified several important findings with respect to the role of surfers in coastal safety and drowning prevention, including their experience and opinions regarding surfer rescue and CPR training opportunities.

4.1 NSW Surfers

The NSW surfers who responded to this survey were mostly male (75%), but the 25% female respondents were a significant increase compared to the 5% who responded to the Attard et al. (2015) survey. While this difference may reflect an increase in the number of female surfers, it may also be related to the promotion of the survey, which reached out to female surfing groups and was also a general survey about surfing rather than a survey explicitly focused on surfer rescues, like the Attard et al. (2015) survey. However, the report by SportAus (2019) also reported that 25% of Australian surfers were female.

This study has shown that surfers in NSW span all ages and the majority started surfing as a child or during their teenage years. Just over a third of NSW surfers have taken surfing lessons and while this mostly occurred at younger ages, surfers of all ages have taken surfing lessons. Many surfers in NSW have over 20 years surfing experience and are frequent surfers, with over half surfing at least once per week. The majority of surfers identify as being shortboard surfers at an advanced level and approximately half typically surf alone (although there are usually other surfers in the water). Most surfers surf locally or within a 30-minute drive from their most common surf spot.

4.2 Surfer Lifesaving and CPR courses

Among the NSW surfer respondents there was very strong support for basic lifesaving and CPR courses being made available for surfers. For those who had already participated in a course, almost all (95%) would recommend it to others. Approximately one-quarter of those who had participated in a course had taken the Surfing NSW Surfers Rescue 24/7 program. Surfers who had already taken part in a lifesaving and CPR course for surfers were significantly more likely to have performed a rescue while surfing, indicating the value of courses such as Surfers Rescue 24/7.

For those surfers who had not yet participated in a course, there was also strong support to do so, however the overwhelming view was that such a course should be made available free of charge. Given the significant role surfers are playing in the saving of lives in the coastal environment in NSW, there is likely significant cost-benefit to the provision of these courses suggesting that the availability of these courses should be increased and promoted more widely amongst the surfing community.

4.3 Surfer Rescues

The results of our survey reinforce the findings of Attard et al. (2015) that Australian surfers play an important role in performing rescues in the coastal environment, with most surfers who have conducted a rescue feeling that they have likely saved a life. These rescues most commonly occur at unpatrolled beaches, indicating surfers play an important role as proxy supervision and rescue services in the absence of professionals. Given that the majority of beaches in NSW remain unpatrolled, surfers provide an invaluable and unofficial role as informal lifeguards. Surfers also conduct a significant amount of rescues on beaches being patrolled by lifeguards/lifesavers illustrating that they can also be of value on busy days and outside of flagged swimming areas when lifeguard/lifesaver services may be stretched.

When it comes to performing rescues while surfing, there was a statistical link between those surfers who indicated they were of advanced skill level and the likelihood of having performed a rescue while surfing. This is logical, as those who see themselves as more skilled may be more willing to put themselves at risk in a rescue situation due to high competence levels in the water, even under challenging conditions. Similarly, it is likely that frequent participation in surfing improves skill level, and this frequent participation means higher potential exposure to people in trouble in the water. However, we postulate that surfers who believe themselves to be of advanced skill level may be less likely to attend a basic lifesaving and CPR course for surfers. Given the increased likelihood of this group performing rescues, it is important that they receive this training and are made aware of these courses. Future research should explore the link between self-assessed ability level and participation in courses and work to ensure surfers of all abilities, including advanced skill, are participating in such training.

Survey responses indicate that rip currents continue to be the main contributing factor to people getting into trouble at beaches. The most common scenario reported by surfers were rip currents sweeping people into deeper water where they could not stand up. This indicates the need to continue to improve rip current education among the general public including how to spot a rip and what to do if caught in one. Given that surfers often surf near rip currents and use them to paddle out the back, surfers should also be made aware that swimmers often need assistance in rip currents.

Responses provided by NSW surfers about their most recent rescue indicate that it is most commonly young people of working age that are being rescued. As such, there are significant economic implications regarding the value of a life saved that warrant further investigation.

Estimating the total number of people rescued and lives saved by surfers in New South Wales is difficult. However, in this report we have extrapolated survey responses to estimate that NSW surfers are rescuing 11,628 people while surfing each year, both in NSW and elsewhere. To put this in perspective, in the 2021/2022 financial year volunteer surf lifesavers and lifeguards from the Australian Lifeguard Service (ALS) made 8,916 rescues nationally (SLSA, 2022). This suggests that surfers are making considerably more rescues than lifesaver and lifeguard services, particularly given that this report used the conservative estimate of the number of surfers obtained from the 2019 Surfing State of Play Report (SportAus, 2019).

With respect to the severity of the situation, we estimate that NSW surfers save on average 2,177 lives per year. When considering the estimated NSW surfer participant population, this equates to 10% of NSW surfers saving a life each year while surfing. This represents a profound contribution to coastal safety and a significant economic contribution which should be further quantified (see Section 4.5).

4.4 Strengths and Limitations

This study forms the largest ever survey of NSW Surfers experiences conducting rescues. It provides valuable insights into surfers' role in maintaining coastal safety that can inform future training efforts for this important group. However, the results presented in this report should be considered in light of some limitations. The survey was promoted through Surfing NSW networks as well as other surfing online community networks which may introduce bias towards respondent demographics and profiles.

Survey responses are also subject to recall bias. In particular, there may be some recall bias around respondents' description of their most recent rescue, as in some cases it may have occurred many years ago. However, performing a rescue is likely to be a very memorable experience, including for those for whom it occurred some years ago. We have also tried to minimize this recall bias by asking surfers to recall the events of their most recent rescue. We have extrapolated the number of rescues performed by surfers in the most recent year, to be the number of rescues surfers are performing on an average year, noting we do not know if their most recent year was average for them or not.

Surveys are also subject to social desirability bias with the potential for respondents to provide the answers they think researchers want to hear. We have attempted to minimize this by ensuring the survey is anonymous in nature. It is also likely that those surfers who are more interested in safety were more inclined to respond, thus potentially biasing the sample, however given the focus of the survey and report, this sub-group are a very relevant one when thinking about surfers' roles in water safety and coastal drowning prevention.

4.5 Future Opportunities

The analyses of survey data presented in this report has identified several future research opportunities that are worthy of further exploration in relation to surfers:

- This report did not examine the self-reported injury data among surfers. Analyzing this data would provide valuable insights in how to improve surfer safety, as well as injury prevention and first aid information most relevant to be provided via a course such as Surfers Rescue 24/7;
- The rescue data provided in this survey, including number of people rescued, and age of the person who was rescued, could be used to conduct an economic evaluation of surfers' role in saving lives in the coastal environment in NSW;
- Given the support for basic lifesaving and CPR courses for surfers, it is worth examining optimal format, content and delivery modes to ensure maximum reach and message retention. It is also valuable to explore the use of skills taught in courses.

In conclusion, analyses of NSW surfer responses to the Global Surfer Survey has provided valuable insights into surfing participation in NSW, as well as the important and significant role that surfers play in maintaining water safety and saving lives in the coastal environment, making NSW beaches safer for everyone.

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Appendix One – Global Surfer Survey (English Language Version)

Qualifying Questions Please read the Participant Information Statement (below) before deciding whether to participate. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact Professor Rob Brander at UNSW Sydney: rbrander@unsw.edu.au

Global Surfer Survey Online Participant Information Statement

1. What is the research study about?

You are invited to take part in this research study about surfers.

The research study aims to gain a global understanding of the types of surfers, how often surfers make rescues and surfers opinions and perceptions about various physical, social and environmental issues. You have been invited because you identify as a surfer and have surfing experience.

2. Who is conducting this research?

The study is being carried out by the following researchers: Professor Rob Brander and Dr Amy Peden from the UNSW Beach Safety Research Group at UNSW Sydney. Research Funder: This research is being funded by Surfing NSW.

3. Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Before you decide to participate in this research study, we need to ensure that it is ok for you to take part.

The research study is looking to recruit people who meet the following criteria:

- i) You are 18 years of age or older;
- ii) You consider yourself to be a surfer and/or have surfing experience.

4. Do I have to take part in this research study?

Participation in any research study is voluntary. If you do not want to take part, you do not have to. If you decide you want to take part in the research study, you will be asked to: i) Read the information carefully; ii) Complete the online questionnaire.

5. What does participation in this research require, and are there any risks involved?

If you decide to take part in the research study, we will ask you to complete an online questionnaire. The questionnaire will ask you some basic demographic questions, questions about your surfing experience, any experience you have had with rescuing someone while surfing, on your opinions on a range of issues such as sharks, water quality, beach erosion and management and climate change impacts on surfing. It should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. We don't expect the online questionnaire to cause you any harm or discomfort, however if you experience feelings of distress as a result of participation in this study you should not participate. If you do participate and experience these feelings, you should withdraw from the research. If you continue to experience these feelings after completing the survey, we encourage you to contact the organisation listed below to assist you, if necessary:

Contact for feelings of distress - Name/Organisation: Beyond Blue; Telephone: 1300 22 4636

You are free to withdraw from the research at any time. If you have any questions about the research you can contact Professor Robert Brander (rbrander@unsw.edu.au). If you have any complaints or concerns about the research please contact the UNSW Sydney Human Research Ethics Coordinator (humanethics@unsw.edu.au). The data will be used by researchers from the UNSW Beach Safety Research Group and the University of New South Wales to better understand surfers, surfers needs and rescues performed by surfers.

Qualifying Questions Do you provide informed consent to complete this survey?

Yes

No

Qualifying Questions Are you older than 18 years of age?

Yes

No

Qualifying Questions Are you a surfer?

Yes

No a surfer? = No

Skip to end of survey if 'No' to any of above qualifying questions.

Note While it's best to finish the survey in one attempt, you can come back to it to complete for a period of 48 hours. After that, you'll need to start again.

Q1. What is your country of residence?

▼ Australia ... United States of America

Q1a. Please specify your state/province:

- NSW
- QLD
- WA
- VIC
- TAS
- NT
- SA
- ACT

Q1b. Please enter your post/zip code

Q2. What is your gender?

- Man or male
- Woman or female
- Non-binary
- Different term (please specify):

- Prefer not to say

Q3. What age group do you belong to?

- 18-24 years
- 25-35 years
- 36-45 years
- 46-55 years
- 56-65 years
- >65 years

Q4. How many years have you been surfing?

- Less than 1
- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-20 years
- 21 or more
- Don't know

Q5. At what age did you start surfing?

- 11 or younger
- 12-17
- 18-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59

- 60 or older
- Can't remember

Q6. Have you ever taken formal surfing lessons?

- Yes
- No
- Can't remember

Q6a. If yes, how old were you when you had surfing lessons?

Please select your age group from drop down list

▼ Under 3 years ... Over 50 years

Q7. Do you identify **mostly** as?

- Shortboard rider
- Longboard rider
- Bodyboard rider
- Stand up paddle boarder
- Body surfer
- Other

(please specify):

Q8. How would you describe your surfing ability?

- Novice/Beginner: surfing broken waves or unbroken waves straight to the beach
- Intermediate: surfing unbroken waves left and right
- Advanced: surfing unbroken waves left and right, turning on the wave, staying close to the breaking part and controlling bottom and top turns

Expert/Professional: surfing on a higher level than advanced, compete regularly, big wave surfer, have sponsorship (current or previous)

These categories do not apply to my type of surfing

Q9. In the last year, approximately how often did you go surfing?

Everyday

5-6 times per week

3-4 times per week

1-2times per week

1-3 times per month

3 to 11 times per year

Less often

Can't say

Q10. When you do go surfing, how long is a typical session?

15 minutes or less

30 minutes

1 hour

2 hours

3 hours

4 hours

5 hours or more

Can't say

Q11. Most of the time, I surf at beaches that are the following distance from my home:

- Within walking distance
- Within 10 mins drive
- 10-30 mins drive
- 30 min to 1 hour drive
- More than 1 hour drive
- I only surf on holidays/vacation

Q12. Have you ever participated in a dedicated surf trip?

- Yes
- No

Q12a. If yes, where do you most commonly go for surf trips?

- Within my state/province/region
- To another state/province/region
- Internationally

Q13. When you go surfing, who do you **most often** surf with?

- Alone (but there are usually other people in the water)
- Alone (but there is usually no-one else in the water)
- Friend(s)
- Family

Other

Q14. Right now, approximately how many surfboards (of any kind) do you own?

Number of surfboards

▼ 0 ... More than 20

Q15. Please select all of the following statements that apply to you:

- I have completed training to be a volunteer ocean lifeguard/lifesaver
- I have completed training and have work experience as a professional (paid) ocean lifeguard/lifesaver
- I have completed a training class/seminar in surfer rescue (e.g. Surfers 24/7; Surfer Awareness in Lifesaving Techniques [S.A.L.T]; Surf Life Support Courses)
- I am CPR certified or have completed CPR training class in the past
- I am a medical professional (Paramedic, Nurse, Doctor etc.)
- I have other relevant water rescue training:
-
- None apply to me

Q15a. If you have completed CPR training, is your certification current?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Q16. As a surfer, have you ever suffered an injury while surfing?

- Yes - major injury (had to visit a doctor or seek medical attention)

- Yes - minor injury (no doctor involved; self treated)
- No

Q17. As a surfer, have you ever injured someone else while surfing?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Q17a. Please describe what happened when you injured someone else:

Q18. I believe that all surfers should complete a basic lifesaving and CPR course

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Do you agree with the statement?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q19. Would you be interested in taking part in a basic lifesaving and CPR course aimed at lifesaving and rescue skills for surfers?

- Yes, I have already taken part in a course
- Yes, but only if it is free
- Yes, and I would be willing to pay
- No

Q19a. When did you take part in a course?

Year

Month

Q19b. Where did you take part in this course?

Q19c. Do you remember the name of the course/program? If yes, please write the name in the text box.

Q19d. What was the name of the organisation that ran it?

Q19e. Would you recommend others to take the course you took?

Yes

No

Q20. As a surfer, have you ever rescued someone while surfing?

Yes

No

Q21. How many people do you estimate you have **EVER** rescued while **NOT** in a paid or volunteer professional capacity? Please exclude any rescues you have performed in any professional capacity e.g., as a lifesaver, lifeguard etc.

	0	1	2-5	6-9	10+
While surfing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
While not surfing (you were out of the	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

water) - **On the coast (e.g. on the beach)**

While not surfing (you were out of the water) - **At another location (e.g. pool etc.)**

Q22. Have you ever taken part in a 'mass rescue'? (i.e. worked with others to assist a large group of people caught in a rip)

Yes (If yes, please provide a brief description of the incident in the text box)

No

Q23. In the **past year**, how many rescues have you made at the coast (surf, beach, rocks, etc.)?

Number of rescues

▼ 0 ... More than 20

Note The following questions are about the most recent rescue you performed while surfing!

Q24. Thinking about the most recent rescue you performed while surfing:

How many people did you rescue?

1

2

3

more than 3 (please specify):

Q25. Were you the only surfer involved in the rescue?

- Yes
- No, there were other surfers who helped

Q26. When did your **most recent rescue** take place?

Year

Month

▼ 1950 ... 2022 ~ December

Q27. Where did the rescue take place? Please enter the location of where the rescue took place in the search bar and/or move the red pin to the exact location on the beach.

Q28. What was the weather like when the rescue took place?

- Sunny, fine day
- Overcast, warm
- Overcast, cold
- Raining
- Don't remember

Q29. What was the wave height when the rescue took place?

- Gentle swell (0-2 foot; 0-1 m)
- Moderate swell (3-4 foot; 1-2 m)
- Large swell (5-6 foot; 2-3 m)
- Massive swell (6+ foot; > 3 m)
- Don't remember

Q30. What were the surf conditions like when the rescue took place? (please select all that apply)

- Smooth and glassy waves
- Choppy/messy waves
- Offshore wind
- Onshore wind
- No wind
- Don't remember

Q31. Were there many people at the beach when the rescue took place?

- Busy, lots of people in the water
- Busy, not many people in the water
- Quiet, but lots of surfers out
- Quiet, very few people around
- Don't remember

Q32. Were there lifeguards/lifesavers on the beach when the rescue took place?

- Yes, lifeguards/lifesavers
- No lifeguards/lifesavers
- Before/after patrol hours
- Don't remember
- Don't know

Q33. Was this rescue rip current related?

- Yes
- No
- Don't remember
- Don't know

Please answer the following questions for each person you have rescued in your most recent rescue. If you have rescued more than 3, you will be asked to answer to repeat Questions 34 – 41 for each of the 3 people.

Q34. How did you come to be involved in this rescue?

- The person(s) in trouble asked for my help
- I saw the person(s) in trouble and volunteered to help
- A lifeguard/lifesaver requested my help
- A family member or friend of the person(s) in trouble requested my help
- Other (please specify) _____

Q35. What was the approximate age of the person you rescued?

- Child (< 11)
- Teen (12-19)
- Young Adult (approx. 20-30)
- Adult (30-50)
- Older Adult (51-65)
- Senior (65+)

Q36. What was the gender of the person you rescued?

- Man or male
- Woman or female
- Non-binary
- Different _____ term _____ (please _____ specify)
- Don't know
- Can't remember

Q37. Please describe how the person got into trouble (e.g. caught in a rip, dumped by waves, hit by a person or watercraft, poor swimmer, person out of depth etc.)?

Q38. What was the person doing when you rescued them?

- Swimming - could **not** touch the bottom
- Swimming - could touch the bottom
- Surfing
- Body boarding/Boogie boarding
- Snorkelling
- Fishing from rocks
- Fishing from the beach (8)
- Other _____ (please _____ specify): _____ (6)

Q39. How was the person when you reached them? (please select all that apply)

- Calm
 - Unaware of the danger
 - Embarrassed
 - Panicked
 - Exhausted
 - Unconscious
 - Other (please _____ specify)
-

Q40. How did you perform the rescue?

- Paddled them to shore
- Paddled them to where they could stand
- Paddled them to where they could safely catch a wave to shore
- Supported them until help arrived
- I swam them into shallow water / the shore
- Other (please specify) _____

Q41. How was the person after the rescue? (please select all that apply)

- Ok, could walk away
- Required medical attention
- Thankful
- Unaware of the danger they were in

- Not thankful
- Other (please specify)

Q42. How did you feel after the experience? (please select all that apply)

- Happy to have helped
- Relieved
- Inconvenienced
- Annoyed
- Other (please specify)

Q43. How critical do you think this situation was?

- Not very critical - the person(s) probably would have made it back to shore without any help
- Critical - if I had not been there, the person(s) probably would have drowned
- Extremely critical - the person(s) had to be resuscitated/ the person(s) went to hospital

Now we would like to ask your opinion on a range of topics such as environmental issues, coastal engineering and your personal surf experience.

Q44. As a surfer, I have a responsibility to look after the safety of others (both surfers and swimmers) in the water while I am surfing.

Do you agree with the statement?	<input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/> Disagree	<input type="radio"/> Somewhat disagree	<input type="radio"/> Neither agree nor	<input type="radio"/> Somewhat agree	<input type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Strongly agree
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Q45. Being a surfer has made me more concerned about environmental issues (e.g. pollution, climate change, waste, coastal erosion).

Do you agree with the statement?	<input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/> Disagree	<input type="radio"/> Somewhat disagree	<input type="radio"/> Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="radio"/> Somewhat agree	<input type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Strongly agree
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Q46. How often do you do the following activities to behave in an environmentally friendly way?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Recycle	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pick up litter from the sand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participate in organised beach clean-ups	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Use public transport/bike instead of car (in general)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reduce waste and not buying single use plastic (e.g. disposable coffee cups, plastic bags etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being politically active (e.g. participate in protests, join organisations etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Buy carbon offsets to reduce footprint	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Buy environmentally friendly/sustainable sourced products	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Vegetarian/Vegan diet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q47. Do you think surfers are as engaged with the environment and environmental protection as they should be?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Q48. Please rank the following issues in order of importance/concern to you with **1** being the **most important** and **6** being the **least**. Please drag and drop options to rank.

- _____ Water quality and water pollution
- _____ Climate change
- _____ Coastal erosion
- _____ Coral bleaching
- _____ Overfishing
- _____ Unexperienced people in the water posing a risk to themselves and others

Q49. On a scale of 1 - 7 with **1** being **not at all worried** and **7** being **extremely worried**, when you surf, how worried are you about getting bitten by shark?

	1. Not at all worried	2. Not very worried	3. Slightly worried	4. Somewhat worried	5. Moderately worried	6. Very worried	7. Extremely worried
Please rank your opinion towards sharks:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q50. In my opinion there should be more funding for... (please select the answer that applies the **most**)

- Shark detection and management programs
- Surfer rescue programs and training courses
- Beach safety education
- Projects fighting for clean oceans (e.g. The Ocean Cleanup, Surfers against Sewage etc.)
- Artificial surfing reefs
- Other (please specify) _____

Q51. In general, have coastal engineering practices (e.g. structures such as groynes, jetties, beach nourishment, etc.) impacted your surfing experience? (please select all that apply)

- Yes, they have improved my surf experience (please specify)

- Yes, they have had a negative impact on my surf experience (please specify)

- No, they have had no impact on my surfing
- Don't know

Q52. At the moment, do you think surfers are involved enough in consultation for coastal management related issues?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Q53. What does surfing mean to you personally? (e.g. What role does surfing play in your life? Why do you surf? What are the positives of participating in surfing?)

Q54. While surfing, have you ever experienced something that has had a negative impact on your mental health?

Yes (please describe the situation if you are comfortable to do so):

No

Don't know

Q55. Would you be willing to discuss the issues identified in this survey with us further? (e.g. we are interested in discussing experiences about surfer rescue training, performing a rescue, environmental considerations etc.)

Yes

No Display This Question:

If Would you be willing to discuss the issues identified in this survey with us further? (e.g. we ar... = Yes

Q55a. Please enter your contact details:

Name: _____

Email address: _____

Phone number (including country code):

Q56. Thank you for participating in this survey. Would you like to enter your contact details to win a custom surf board valued up to \$1,000?

Yes

No

Q56a. Please enter your contact details:

Name _____

Email address _____

Home address _____

Phone number _____

Appendix Two – Free text responses describing involvement in mass rescue

These responses were received in relation to Q22 of the Survey (Appendix 1) which asked respondents “Have you ever taken part in a ‘mass rescue’? (i.e. worked with others to assist a large group of people caught in a rip)”

12 children 12 to 15 years old 1 female adult.swimming in lake entrance.outgoing tide pulled them out to sea. 4 boardriders, 3 boogyboard riders in water 100m away paddled to help. I was on a mal I had the woman and her daughter.others had 2 people.all swept to south side.30 minutes till everyone on shore.5 taken to hospital.
2 Girls caught in a rip - France - 1980s Family caught in a rip - Bali - 1990s Family caught in a rip - Pretty Beach - Australia - 1990s
4 teenage girls caught in a strong rip. 3 young kids caught in a strong rip (same beach and same rip, on a different day)
6 university students were caught in a strong rip at my local beach. I was the first responder as most other surfers were far out the back and were not aware they f the situation. I assisted 3 of the 6 who could not swim. They were going under and I used my board to float the people and washed in on the rocks to safety where they were away from the rip and deep water.
a boat overturned near where we were surfing with a number of people in it and we were able to get those from the boat to the beach
A friend and I rescued 3 kids with multiple trips to shore on our surfboards
A large group of swimmers were washed off a bank and I assisted the paid lifeguards in rescuing them
An ocean swim was undertaken with large surf and strong rips. Several members of public and comletitors were rescued by myself and a number of other surfers.
As a paid and volunteer lifesaver/guard. Usullay people in a rip or washed off rocks
As a paid lifeguard with other lifeguards
As a surf club patrol member. Numerous people carried out in a rip.
As a surf instructor I have had a few kids get sucked out the back even though we were swimming between the flags
As a volunteer life saver, on a crowded summer day, a large number of swimmers were caught in a rip when the sandbank collapsed.
As a volunteer lifesaver

As Lange number of people caught in a rip
Assisted 2 people who were in distress with 3 friends when we were on the beach.
At a surf carnival
At my job kids sometimes drift with the rip and therefore we direct them back to the sand bar. (Not sure if this is rescue but it's very common to direct these large groups away from rips)
Big blow up toy the girls jumped on and straight out the back in 3 minutes 6 foot plus swell took us 20 minutes to get the three of them back to the beach safely.....
Busy day at the beach with a strong rip
Coolangatta SLSC 2018
Couple times. As a surfer you see the rips and see people about to do stupid things near it. Most rescues we saw happening before it happens. You try shout or tell them. Sometimes to far away or just don't understand us. But by time they in trouble we already had a plan to get them to safety. I always throw my board at them as have had in past people grab me and take me down. So now give them board, calm them down and explain what we gonna do and that they safe now as I won't let anything happen to them.
During a bronze and cadet training course and A family in a rip
Family caught in a rip
Family caught in a rip. Parents trying to save kids but parents could not swim
Group of 6 non swimmers entered water near rip on unpatrolled beach. I got 3 who had just fallen off the bank and another one who had been swept off the back of the bank and was under water. Another guy I called to as I ran out got the other two
Have seen multiple people in a rip and paddled to them so they could hold on to the surfboard until further help arrived
He's working as a paid lifeguard at Austinmer beach
Helped with rescuing a group of about 10 kids swimming at unpatrolled Beach near Forster NSW. A big rip suddenly formed and started dragging them out to the impact zone, lots of water started moving.
Helping volunteer lifesavers while surfing
I have helped with the rescuing of a number of people who have been caught in rips.

<p>I have only directed people caught in a rip where to go when 3 Chinese students jumped in front of the creek mouth at Kingy. I was ready to go in after them if they didn't understand as they were on boogie boards with no idea. They managed to make it in to the beach outside the rip.</p>
<p>I was at south Bondi, and the current got two tourists. I went to them and put both on my board till bondi rescue came and got them out of the water.</p>
<p>I was part of a mass rescue at Bronte beach where 10+ people were caught in a rip and we used our surfboards to assist and bring them back to shore. Everyone was accounted for and returned safely to the beach. At least 5 surfers were involved in the rescue.</p>
<p>I worked with others to assist a family that were stuck in a rip and screaming and crying I put them on my board and I kicked my feet at the back because my board was to small for 2 of us</p>
<p>I've rescued 3 surfers being pushed up against the cliff on my own. They were panicking and I guided them past the cliffs.</p>
<p>IN Nov 2020 I was at the beach and saw a large islander guy in trouble in a rip, his 2 sons, and 2 daughters were also struggling. I grabbed my board, paddled out and held the guy (deceased) until others got to me; we then paddled over and saved the sons.</p>
<p>IRB flipped and the clubbies couldn't swim in and freaked out so me and my dad rescued about 4 of them</p>
<p>Just at Stanwell Park helped with getting life guards out to rescue</p>
<p>Just surfers working together at local beach to keep swimmers calm and heads above water in rip. Worked across beach to sandbar, enabled swimmers to stand and walk in.</p>
<p>Large family caught in rip</p>
<p>Large group caught in rip</p>
<p>Large school group rescue in a rip. Also, overturned dragon boat in the river mouth</p>
<p>Local beach very strong rip in the corner we surf board riders would often rescue groups of 3 to 4 people.</p>
<p>Many times as a SLSC member and IRB driver</p>
<p>Multiple people caught in a rip at south curl curl beach sucked multiple people out past the pool. Multiple surfers assisted to save inexperienced 5 people who should NOT have been out there.</p>
<p>NA always individuals or a couple</p>

New Year day, inexperienced swimmers at beach ignorant of rips/ risks
No but my son (14 years old) saved a person during a surf comp and was paddling out and noticed a lady on sea bed. Dove down and grab her and took her to shore for the life guards. She survived
Numerous people caught in rip. Whilst on surf club patrol.
Old guy hit young girl with his mal, she came up floating and bloody, I grabbed hold of her, put her on my board, and paddled her in while another guy brought her board. The other guy ran her up the beach to lifeguards, while I took her board to her family and let them knowwhat happened
On an umber of occasions I have led or assisted others with rescuing surfers or swimmers who had either drowned or were in distress and unable to get back to shore without assistance. This has occurred on patrolled and non-patrolled beaches.
Only 2 people. My son and I noticed 2 girls in trouble. Grabbed 9' boards that were handy, paddled out and rescued one each. Conditions were tricky and one was very desperate when we got to her.
Paddle Board lesson at the Narrabeen lake. Bday party with 16 kids, blown out by the strong wind and we had to rescue them with kayaks, driving to the other side of the lake and myself, on a paddle board towing a couple of kids using the leg ropes and at the same time pushing a third kid while paddling on my stomach.
Palm beach SLSC
Pulled a family of swimmers onto rocks at one mile beach in the corner
Rescued three people from rip with help of other surfers and off duty life guards
Sand bank collapse
Sand bar collapse at Unpatrolled, family in a rip
Several time while on patrol at Warriewood Beach NSW
Soldiers the slsc packed up a group of swimmers entered the water on a rapid rising swell. Kids from Surf Club attempted to get to the swimmers but they too got in trouble. A group of local surfers who were onto the rising swell assisted and ferried them all in. This could have gone horribly wrong if the experienced surfers were not chasing that swell.
South Maroubra is notorious for rips. There were 3-4 children aged 10-12 clearly in trouble and some other parents and myself went into the water to assist, along with surfers who paddled over to help them into shore.
Surfer lost their board and got stuck in a rip in large surf. I went to her aid but couldn't get her to shore due the strength of the rip and size of the waves. I got her out the back past

the breaking waves and we both floated on my board till the rescue helicopter came to our assistance.

Ten foot surf at North Avoca Beach. I could see it was too dangerous and as an patrol captain I wanted it closed but was overruled by higher club officials. The situation was compounded by a group of young men drinking alcohol on the beach. I managed to save out of five. Another patrol member saved one, one made it back to the beach by himself. The final one was swept 200 metres out to sea and was supported by two SLSC members who who were Australian Champions in belt swims and open swimming. A jet boat was organised but took 3/4 hour to arrive. There were no fatalities. The second mass rescue was at Evans Head when a Triathlon was being run. The SLSC was contracted to be on duty, but they were very tardy. Having been out in the surf in surf contest heat (which was suspended for half an hour to allow the ocean swim to occur), I came in and just knew that the situation was going to go downhill fast - and it did. I harangued two my sons to jump in the water with their boards and we paddled straight out past the leading swimmers, but wishing a couple of minutes were dragging them onto our boards and getting them back to shore, probably 3 each before the surf club rubber Duckie arrived to assist. I think about twenty people were assisted. The event was abandoned.

The local SLSC packed up Sunday and left people swimming beside a large rip during a rapidly increasing swell. Approximately 20 people were pulled out the rip, luckily the surf was pumping and a lot of competent surfers assisted.

Watching surf from home and saw 5 people, all from the same family, in trouble. Told my 10 year old daughter to grab her board, we ran across the road and paddled out and was able to bring them in. Their parents saw the commotion and we told them to seek medical attention as they had taken in a lot of water. All were aged between 17 and 24.

We hold monthly contests with our boardrider club down Malua bay, Our March event saw myself, jack and Mike rescue 5 men from the Middle East who had been sucked out by a rip along the rocks into overhead waves. An ambulance was called for one of the young men who had taken in a serious amount of water incase of secondry drowning.

While we we were surfing a boat capsized returning from a fishing trip and 5 occupants of the boat were thrown into the water. Myself and 4 other surfers helped them to shore.

Whilst I was walking along the beach after my surf I noticed that a girl was going to be washed out to see through a river mouth that was draining into the ocean. I started running towards the girl as I new this wasn't to end well. As I saw the girl go past the point of no return I started running as fast as I could to get to her. As I jumped into the ocean I grabbed her straight away and put her onto my board. This is when things turned really bad, due the mum and grandma jumping to try and help out. As they came into the water they pulled the little girl off my board. Luckily I grabbed the girl and put her on the board. Now I had 3 people to rescue which wasn't good as we were being washed up against the rocks and fighting the current. A local man who saw this unfold has jumped in by this time to grab the girl and grandma. Which I only had the mum. This rescue became challenging as i was trying to fight the current and from smashed on the rocks. The mum was just in shock and was dead weight. It got to a stage were I was really starting to fatigue and knew that I needed to get this mum in. I was using my board to push us into a small gap between the rocks. Eventually we all got in and everyone survived. The local man told me after the rescue that just 2 days earlier that someone had drowned In this same location. So I

<p>Whilst on the beach , many ppl 12 , dragged out in a rip . Grabbed a rescue board from volunteer life savers and made my way out to drag 5 ppl on the board and motioned towards shore , mass rescue . Called over other surfers to help</p>
<p>Worked as a lifeguard and still do slsa beach patrols. Have done mass rescues on a number of occasions.</p>
<p>Worked with others to assist a people caught in a rip</p>
<p>yes</p>
<p>Yes I used to be a lifeguard at a theme park and recused a family And on superset occasion a group of friends at one time</p>
<p>Yes - Flash Rip at Redhead Beach behind the shark tower. >10-20 people swept from little beach (just outside of where the swimming flags were set up) requiring more individuals than were on duty / lifeguarding at the time. Worked with others to assist bringing people in, or providing temporary flotation until someone could come and bring them in.</p>
<p>Yes - one time recently at Maroubra beach, flash rip dragged out people on edge of flag area, I got to some to keep them afloat while lifeguards raced out and assisted with others.</p>
<p>Yes a few times at surfing comps have seen swimmers in serious danger and sent out rescue teams.</p>
<p>yes a number of times at different beaches</p>
<p>Yes as a life guard</p>
<p>Yes as a life saver using an IRB picking up 3 swimmers caught in a rip</p>
<p>Yes as a paid lifeguard a rescue of 5 intoxicated males in a rip</p>
<p>Yes as a volunteer lifeguard</p>
<p>Yes at local beach on a few occasions, mainly co ordination from beach</p>
<p>Yes at maroubra on summers day the clubbiest were to busy on their phones and helped with the paid council lifeguards</p>
<p>Yes at Sth Matoubra , Swimmers often get caught in the rip in the southern corner.... 2 many 2 log</p>
<p>Yes but as a life saver we had 5 people swept of a sand bar and all needed rescuing.</p>
<p>Yes but in my capacity as a volunteer surf lifesaver.</p>

Yes but was working in a paid capacity as an Ocean Lifeguard. There were 2 surfers who had responded during the rescue.
Yes Family caught in rip
Yes group of swimmers caught in a rip and had 2 holding onto my board while we waited for surf life savers in their boat
Yes I worked with lifeguards in France to save 6+ people in rip
Yes iv help multiple people back into shore while stuck in a rip.
Yes many times. Last record was 5 girls, middle eastern approx 15 years old, caught in a big rip at a Wollongong beach approx 7.30pm of a Sunday. An with out another guy there all may not have been so lucky. Another Canadian 60 yo female swimming at a quieter beach 50 mtrs from shore under estimated the water movement and rescue d her without equipment. No time for the rest
Yes people caught in rip
Yes rescued multiple people caught in a rip
Yes Sandbank collapsed, 30 people needing support
Yes very often, people getting caught in rips and not being able to swim is a regular thing
Yes while on patrol for the surf club with the use of various craft.
Yes while on sls patrol
Yes Woonona beach family of 5. One deceased and 4 other family's members saved.
Yes, several Polynesian people washed off rocks
Yes, 3 men capsized a 'tinny' boat and floated in the lake entrance where my husband and I were sup surfing. The helicopter winched 1 man to safety and we paddled over to the other 2 clinging onto the boat. The boat was heading towards the rocks so we put them onto our sup boards and paddled them to the police boat that had arrived.
Yes, 5 people caught in a rip off Wamberal beach. All needed to be rescued. 3 surfers invoked in the rescue. 1 person rescued advised to go to hospital as was suffering shock and had taken on water.
Yes, a couple of times. I've been at the surf club out of patrol hours and people have alerted us to the fact that some foreign tourists were caught in a rip. Separately I was surfing early with my brother and a group of schoolies were drunk and caught in a rip in solid surf - had been up on the beach all night.

Yes, a group of young inexperienced surfers caught in a rip at maroubra beach with a large swell, a friend and I helped get them to the shore safely
Yes, assisted group of tourists caught in a rip
Yes, during a patrol during my life saving years
Yes, group of children caught in rip at back beach Crescent Head 20 years ago. Parents didn't notice, conditions were tricky. Strong current, decent size surf. Me and 2 friends arrived for surf and ran to gather 4 children approx 8-9
Yes, I was catching waves on a lifesaving board while nippers was on at the beach. A large set of waves came in to the shore and washed some nippers and their parents out, so i paddled back in towards the beach and and picked up a few people with the help of some lifesavers that were on duty.
Yes, lifeguard knee board surfing after patrol hours. Around 2ft swell with fresh offshore. Group of foreign swimmers entered a hole and got blown further out
Yes, mainly helped by other surfers or occasionally lifeguards
Yes, multiple people were stuck in a rip behind rocks
Yes, multiple swimmers (approx 10) were caught inside a rip section. Conditions were terrible and the lifeguards had just finished duties. Luckily they were still on the beach (although had begun packing up). I paddled out from the beach to assist (longboard), I grabbed one person onto my board and paddled out past the breaking waves, the lifeguards thankfully had the jetski/PWC so they were able to collect people quickly. The person with me waited on my board until the PWC got out to us. If this had occurred 10mins later and lifeguards weren't there it likely would have been a lot worse.
Yes, multiple times have assisted swimmers in a flash rip off the back of a bank after a set. Both professionally and as a member of the public. Generally in the flags on a rough day. Helping them float until it dissipates enough to return or until they could be taken on a board or ski. Often fulfilling the board/ski role if in a professional capacity. Less commonly but multiple incidents of mass rescues involving members of the public or volunteers water safety/lifesavers which have attempted a rescue beyond their ability level.
Yes, multiple trips to the beach when a group of swimmers were stuck in a rip and couldn't get in and started to panick.
Yes, non swimmers caught in a rip
Yes, on a hot Sunday afternoon when I was at south bondi on patrol
Yes, on patrol at south maroubra, flash rip occured, took lifesaving boards out

Yes, participated in a group rescue of a family caught in a rip near a rivermouth. I assisted a female onto my board and swam in pushing her to the beach
Yes, played a minor part to help calm swimmers and navigate them to shore safely as they were stuck in a rip.
Yes, sand bank collapsed. Boardriders comp was on and we all just grabbed boards and ran out to help people. Later life savers came and helped.
Yes, though not sure if this will give away my identity. One night off Newcastle Beach around 2000 involved in a rescue where a group of girls had been caught in a rip. Two lost at sea. Found one with the help of a rescue helicopter. Got her to the beach then went back to assist an ambulance officer who had swam to another girl at the other end of the beach. Got to them well before the helicopter could launch a winchman. Probably think I am full of shit. I do after the Ambulance Officer received all sorts of bravery awards and got to carry the Olympics Flag. As shitty as when some other prick I swam out to save around 1990 succeeded in killing himself and I was warned the police were starting to think it was some sort of publicity stunt. So want to know why most people are sensible letting someone drown? I get that people who have genuinely been close to drowning are not in a state to thank you. However, like the publicity stunt allegation, actually going out of your way to help others can backfire and cause more drama than it is worth. Glad they found that guys body and the autopsy showed he had filled up on pills. Who knows what might have otherwise happened to me?
Yes, three people caught in a rip. Got them to hold onto surfboard and swim in.
Yes, we rescued 3 people
Yes, while lifeguarding a mass rescue occurred. Surfers and lifeguards made sure swimmers made it back into shore safely.
Yes, Whilst on beach patrol, several swimmers were caught in a rip, all volunteers were in the water performing rescues, equipment used, rescue boards tubes, IRB and jet ski, patrol captain remained on beach giving directions.
Yes, whilst patrolling our local beach as a surf lifesaver
Yes; it was when I did lifesaving and the patrol captain put the flags where they shouldn't of been, and 4 people got caught in a rip. A majority of the surf lifesavers have less surf knowledge then surfers and it was frustrating .
Yes! Not a patrolled beach, swimmers fell off the sand bank and got carried into a rip. I saved 2 people and another surfer helped save another. It was heavy and I gave them a talking to after!
Yes. 7 unsupervised children caught in a rip. Used rescue board to support them in the water then attracted IRB to assist in returning patients to shore

<p>Yes. 7:30pm Bronte beach One summer evening a church group from western Sydney went for a swim, surf was massive and dangerous at the time but it was super hot outside. The entire group of 15 ish jumped in the calm looking water (the rip) next to the rocks and were immediately taken offshore about 10-20m into deep water where all 15 instantaneously were drowning. I was walking home from a 14 hr day lifeguarding and unlocked the lifeguard shed at Bronte with my work key, grabbed a board and ran in rescuing a few people before people came out of everywhere to assist with the rescues.</p>
<p>Yes. A group of surfers pulled a bunch of tourists out of the rip at South Bondi</p>
<p>Yes. As a qualified surf coach working in a busy beach, we're often in the water before the Life Guard arrives, we then hand over to them once everyone is out of trouble. Large groups in flash rips are the biggest issues on long, popular city beaches.</p>
<p>Yes. As a surf coach I have rescued many single and multiple individual rescues. Unfortunately it is part of the current beach lifestyle as people forget where they are in the water and currents take them into dangerous areas that they do not have the skills to get away from and rely on help from the community- whether that be paid or volunteer lifesavers or surfers</p>
<p>Yes. Assisted pro lifeguards</p>
<p>Yes. Four swimmers caught in a rip and scared. We paddled out and got them in.</p>
<p>Yes. Has to jump in with a couple of r other surfers to recuse 3 people caught in a rip.</p>
<p>Yes. Helped in a rescue at I patrolled beach in NSW north coast</p>
<p>Yes. One of the last days before school broke up, during a solid swell, a large group of school boys were caught in a strong rip at STH Maroubra. Young surfers started laughing as a line of kids started streaming past but older surfers realised the danger and paddled over to provide support. There were over 30 boys being supported by surfers until the beach lifeguards arrived to take them into shore.</p>
<p>Yes...group of weaker swimmers pushed off a bank by set waves and worked with friends and lifeguards to save 7 swimmers</p>
<p>Young children Stuck in a rip, whilst out surfing I assisted the local clubbies to bring children to the beach</p>



**UNSW Beach Safety
Research Group**

