



Mr Graham Ford

President Surf Life Saving Australia

Locked Bag 1010, Rosebery

NSW 2018

Australia

Dear Graham

ASRL SUBMISSION ON BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION AND THE AUSTRALIAN CHAMPIONSHIPS

As you are aware, the ASRL hosted a Forum of over 30 key Boat leaders and Officials on Saturday 20 May 2017. Attachment 1 details the ASRL's credentials in undertaking this Forum and resultant submission to the Board of SLSA.

The recent Australian Titles (Aussies) largely generated the main issues discussed at the Forum. The ASRL (like SLSA no doubt) received many messages after the cancelled Aussies asking us to stand up and do something. Our approach was to seek out a diverse group of Boat Sweeps that would represent not only elite rowers, but also the general participation end of the sport. We then set up open group meetings in each State and invited anyone interested to attend these meetings and take part in identifying the issues and making suggestions for solutions.

When we came together at the Forum last weekend we knew we were hearing the voices of the masses and that gave us the licence and direction to deliver the itemised list of problems and our positive approach to providing solutions. Many of these issues that are at the top of the list of agenda items requiring urgent remedial action, as we believe they affect participation levels in surfboats.

To summarise, the issues discussed at the Forum can be broken down into two main categories:

1 Surf Sport Barriers to Participation

As identified in the National Sports Review, there are too many barriers to entry, and ongoing hoops to jump through, for the average participant.



2 Conduct of Events

Our member feedback tells us that our members love our sport and their Surf Club, but too often they are frustrated by competition events being poorly conducted.

In summary, the problem is that our competitors are frustrated by having to travel too far, too late in the season, too often, to locations which, in the cyclone season are without reliable back up options. Our hard core will always be there, but the subpar overall experience for our average competitor results in a dropout rate of 30% and the current barriers make this too hard to replace. The result is structural long term decline.

The Forum raised the following points and made the outlined recommendations in relation to the above categories:

1. Barriers to Participation:

A. *National Review of Surf Sports – SLSA must move to Implementation*

- a. The ASRL played a strong role in suggesting the need for this review
- b. The ASRL were big contributors to the Review process
- c. The ASRL strongly supported the finding and planned outcomes from the Review

The Forum strongly requests that the SLSA Board commence to enact the recommendation from the review

B. *Probationary Bronze (copy attached) – be Implemented for the 2017 – 2018 Season*

- a. The ASRL developed this suggestion to make change easy as this ticks many of the National Review boxes.
- b. We developed the Probationary Bronze idea because it teaches people on the job with a heavy emphasis on the actual surf and rescue skills required.
- c. It allows new potential members to get to know and love Surf Lifesaving in a non-intimidating process.
- d. It saves club trainers and systems from spending a lot of time and effort turning out a new Bronze holder who may find the space isn't for them, so they quickly leave
- e. Like the new Sweep Accreditation system, it is simple, easy to deliver by clubs and will be the most effective recruitment tool introduced into surf lifesaving in decades.

The Forum unanimously commends and recommends the immediate adoption of the Probationary Bronze



TEAM NAVY ASRL SERIES



C. 31 December Cut Off for Requalification and Patrol Hours – Remove this Barrier date to Close of State Championships entries

- a. The ASRL previously sought from SLSA, through the SBC, that the final date for Requalification and New Bronze be close of State entries. This was agreed for implementation but either not enacted or later removed.
- b. It is a nonsense to advertise that a returning member can't patrol or compete unless given special dispensation if they rejoin after the 31 Dec - only half way through the season. Injuries occur and to keep people in the sport and teams operational, any date that prohibits replacements before the close of State nomination is a barrier

The Forum recommends the removal of the 31 Dec date restriction

2. Conduct of Events:

As will be understood much research and discussion went into the topic of the failed Aussies and in particular all future Aussies, if we don't want to continue to repeat the same errors of delivery.

The key elements for any successful Championship event for Surfboats are **LOCATION** and **SUITABLE** (and real) backup beaches coupled with favourable **SEASONAL CONDITIONS** and the ability to deliver the correct **SAFETY RESULT**.

- a. SLSA must decide is the running of Aussies about Money or Membership
- b. If it is about money, we will continue to see future Aussies conducted in very restricted host locations that will continue to deliver member disappointment - a fact backed by history
- c. If it is about membership, we will once again see Aussies roam the country going to beaches best suited to host each event

Breaking down the issues

A. Time of Year – a unanimous voice was that the surfboat Aussies be completed no later than the end of March each year.

While the ASRL did support the SLSA a few year ago in shifting back later into April when on the Gold Coast, we instantly had the membership telling us it is too late for all involved in winter team sports





B. Location

- i. A majority do support being in the same general location on the same weekend as the balance of the events.
- ii. Specific location then comes into play, so for example if on the Gold Coast (GC) and history repeats, where are you going to send the boats as a backup beach
- iii. Locations like Coomera and Raby Bay have been totally rejected and another cancellation isn't an option, so because we know no suitable GC alternate exists, this dictates that your agreement with the Queensland Government must allow you to identify a suitable beach or beaches in NSW as the alternative.
- iv. If you can't guarantee an acceptable and functioning backup beach, then the only option has to be that boats are at a different time in an entirely different location, which may be well interstate

So the recommendation to the Board from A & B is:

- Selecting the initial location for a joined event is critical and must provide a fair racing beach for boats with a workable backup location.
- Failing SLSA ability to deliver on point one, then we request a completely different beach and time that can deliver backup.

C. Event Delivery

- i. A strong call for the boat representatives to be heavily involved in the delivery program.
- ii. Need to match people with specific skills to delivery rolls.
- iii. No one person can deliver such a big event and be across all the issues without the correct skill support.
- iv. The ASRL has developed a **Major Event Matrix** (as attached) which has all the tools to identify and manage the best people into the correct roles.

So the recommendation to the Board on item C is:

- **That the attached Major Event Matrix be adopted for 2018 and beyond.**



D. Surfboat Safety Committee

- i. The ASRL has, over many events, clearly shown its responsibility and ability to deliver a good safe event to members by following a set of knowledge based guidelines.
- ii. SLSA has had delivery problems, and possibly because of external pressure, allowed the pendulum to swing too far across into the Risk Averse spectrum.
- iii. The suggestions included within the Major Event Matrix are exactly those that have successfully delivered years of safely run ASRL events that for the record, now total equal number of crews to Aussies.

So the recommendation to the Board on item D is:

- **That the attached Major Event Matrix including Safety Committee for Boats be adopted for 2018 and beyond.**

E. Alternate Opportunity for Crews Disillusioned with Aussies

- i. Much general discussion centred around what happens if SLSA don't make the required changes.
- ii. Membership frustration should not be discounted (the emotion and feeling in the Forum was palpable and displayed a united level of frustration rarely seen in such a large, diverse group).
- iii. There was a passionate suggestion that proposed an alternate end of season event (not running across the Aussie event) to give competitors a choice.
- iv. When this proposal went to the vote it lost by only about 5 votes to 7 which indicated that the majority don't want to step away from Aussies, but equally were sitting on their hands. If nothing changes they may well make a different decision in the near future.
- v. This suggestion wasn't and isn't delivered as a threat to continuing membership in Surf Clubs and that was never part of the debate.
- vi. People are loyal to their Surf Club and will remain so, but are watching closely for significant change as is being recommended to the Board in this document.

So the recommendation to the Board on item E is:

- **That the SLSA Board make clear and decisive decisions on the future and make these recommendation known to the membership generally within a month of the May Board meeting.**



F. Items for General Change

- i. We had unanimous acceptance to reducing the minimum Championship rowing distance from 400 to 350M and request the Surf Sports Manual be changed to reflect this. This will allow the Referee flexibility to shorten the course in cases of difficult conditions and when time is critical.
- ii. We request the age division for surfboats revert to include 15YO in racing boats be made by SLSA. This was successfully trialled in SA this past season with no issue and was the SLSA norm for many years in the past. It will allow the uninterrupted transition of the youth members of a surf club and not see many drop away never to return, because one of the key team SLS sports isn't currently available to them.
- iii. There was a strong suggestion that SLSA could make a \$20,000 grant available after this failed Aussies to the ASRL to deliver travel support to our youth crews travelling for National team selection events and the Trans-Tasman Development team.
- iv. Australian Championship events should revert to a rotational process where we travel to SA every 4 or 5 years, WA each alternate 4 or 5 years and the years between spread between the three east coast States.

It is very clear from the discussion that the membership wants and intends to only support the best-run events. If we (SLSA & ASRL) as a collective can offer better run events, it will lead to increased participation. If we don't, it will lead more people away from the sport or to independent events that are already recognisable as causing issues and not supporting growth in the sport. The ASRL wants to work with SLSA to achieve these deliverables. We have the tool in the SBC if every State buys into this agreement and respects the ASRL as the responsible rowing representative body it is. This is not only about Aussies, but so much more that is influenced by each State's event program and format and we have the knowledge and ability to be the product expert. However that will require complete trust from all levels of SLS and an openness to use us as a working partner.

Yours Sincerely

Bert Hunt

President ASRL

23 May 2017

Copy: Melissa King, Andrew Buhk



Attachments:

- Full Signature Page in attendance
- The ASRL Role
- Probationary Bronze
- Major Surfboat Carnival key Role Matrix





The ASRL Role

The ASRL has a well recorded history of standing strong and delivering on some of the toughest issues, and we are disappointed that our request to address this coming Board meeting at such a critical time has not been seen as important enough to implement.

Let us not forget it was the ASRL who provided the solution to the impending membership impasse over the introduction of Helmets into surfboats. It was the ASRL who were invited to address the SLSA Board to deliver our proposal and to answer questions that the Board finally adopted in full. It is the ASRL that has been positioned by SLSA as the Surf Boat Committee, but at times has been ignored or brushed aside from being part of solving and delivering solutions.

We again stand ready to offer the opinions of the Boat Rowing community and assist in solving the key issues that are hurting us all, a boat community that is 100% united in delivering this support. You will note at the end of this document the signature block is inclusive of over 30 names that include the ASRL/SBC, leading Sweeps from across Australia and key SLS Officials who sought an invitation to be included, as well as the National Boat Referee who attended on our invitation because we wanted him to hear firsthand what was being said. It also has to be noted that your own Beach Officials are extremely frustrated as they, like the competitors, are volunteering their time and money to a currently flawed system.

The SLSA did not help the cause by making public speeches and press statements quoting the success of Aussies, where only 60% of the program was complete. A full explanation of the circumstances of the cancellation and a simple "we are sorry and we truly understand" would have gone a long way to appeasing young people who had just devoted 9 months of their life, hours of voluntary patrols, taken time off work and study plus the massive personal cost, all for a no result. It is easy to brush aside just what this meant to young people if you're not close to how hard some struggle to get the time off and to scrape and borrow to raise the money to attend. To them it was a massive disappointment that some won't recover from. We know last time we cancelled Aussies we lost over 20% of our crews.

We know of no National Sporting body anywhere in the world that would risk such a detriment to a major event such as the SLS Australian Championships.

