

GOING GLOBAL: EXPORTING AUSTRALIAN SURF LIFESAVING



People have been to South Africa; they have been to South America ... and really started lifesaving in Peru. Over the last few years, developing teams from Australia have gone to Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, other parts of Asia. I think that has been fantastic, because it shows that we are not just living in our own backyard — we are prepared to get out there.

Phil McGibbon, surf lifesaving commentator and member of Portland SLSC

Photo: Dragi Markovic, National Museum of Australia

In Australia today, surf lifesavers are an everyday part of the summer landscape, but Australian surf lifesaving also has a long history of making its mark around the world. The movement leads the way in rescue, resuscitation and first aid techniques, and has gained international recognition in some remarkable places.

Early days

The First World War decimated many newly formed surf lifesaving clubs but, after the war, administrators travelled overseas looking for the newest methods and equipment to help develop the Australian service. By then, Australia was already taking the lead and was sought after to help establish associations and train lifesavers around the world. Australia's first representative surf lifesaving team went to New Zealand in 1937. Hawaiian surfers were a major influence on lifesaving practice and the first international competition, the Pacific Games, was held in Honolulu in 1939.

International twist of fate

When war broke out in 1939, about 50 per cent of lifesaving members signed up in the first year and they found opportunities to use their skills in unexpected places. After several British drownings in Palestine, beach patrols were formed in Tel Aviv and Haifa. Training continued even while bullets whizzed overhead and, in 1941, a surf carnival was held on Gaza beach complete with flags, caps and a march-past. Surf lifesaving also became important for recreation and morale. Diggers set up a surf club in the Changi prisoner-of-war camp, under the leadership of SLSA's longest serving president, Adrian Curlewis. POWs trained in secret for the bronze medallion and conducted exams in the mud with a makeshift reel made from a stolen clothes line. Eight clubs were also established at Aitape, New Guinea, and sailors on the HMAS *Sydney* established nine squads, all of whom passed their bronze medallion exam. The HMAS *Sydney* squads hoped to adapt Australian rescue and resuscitation methods for sea rescues and showcase them among their international naval colleagues. Several United States military police stationed in Queensland also completed their bronze medallion training.

Discussion points: Why do you think there is such a strong association between surf lifesaving and the armed forces?

Going global

After the Second World War, Australian support helped establish the Surf Life Saving Association of Great Britain, and Australia also took a leading role in establishing international standards and competition. In 1956, an international surf carnival was held at Torquay, Victoria, to coincide with the Olympic Games. Teams attended from Great Britain, the United States (USA), New Zealand, South Africa and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and, following the event, formed the International Council of Surf Lifesaving (ICSL). The USA did not have a national association but sent teams from California and Hawai'i. After seeing the Australian model, the group from the USA decided to establish their own national organisation, based on the Australian structure, which was eventually formed in 1965. In 1971, Australia was a foundation member of World Life Saving (WLS) with Great Britain, New Zealand, South Africa and the USA. Australians have also assisted in developing surf lifesaving associations in the Solomon Islands, East Timor, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa and South America to name just a few places. WLS joined a European organisation to become the International Life Saving Federation, which today includes more than 60 member organisations. SLSA continues to have a leading role.

Into the twenty-first century

In the 1980s, Australia began to focus on international training and development in Asia. Today, SLSA plays a significant role with the Japan Lifesaving Association. Many individual Australian clubs also arrange international exchanges. Examples of exchange partners include Nova Scotia, Canada (which launched Canada's first lifesaving competition series, based on Australia's Kellogg's Nutri-Grain Surf League); South Africa (where Australian members are working to establish clubs, train lifesavers and educate people in villages along the remote Wild Coast); and Japan (which hosted the Sanyo Bussan International Surf Challenge in 2006 and participates in annual exchange programs).

Discussion point: What sort of things do you think Australian surf lifesavers learn from sharing their expertise overseas?

Australian lifesavers continue to establish clubs far from home, and in 2003 the Baghdad Surf Life Saving Club was formed by members of the Australian Defence Force in Iraq. Australian surf lifesaving leads the world in coastal research on aquatic animals, marine hazards, resuscitation and first aid techniques. Australians are also still at the forefront in training and international competition. In 2006, Australians took first place in the seventh World Lifesaving Championships in Lorne, Victoria.

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ACTIVITIES



Lifescavers practising resuscitation, Queensland, 1930. Photo: Harold Meares. Redcliffe City Library

Activity 1

International rescue

Ask students to work in groups to research Australian contributions to international surf lifesaving. Ask each group to look at one decade, from the beginnings of the movement in the early twentieth century. Ask students to create a poster, highlighting one significant place or partnership. The posters can then form a visual timeline of surf lifesaving's international outreach.

Activity 2

Heroes at home and abroad

Ask students to research the experiences of surf lifesavers during wartime. Then ask them to imagine themselves stationed in a war zone, far from home. Ask them to write a series of journal entries, including some entries that relate to a rescue. They may take the role of a surf lifesaver or someone without lifesaving experience, to write the journal.

Activity 3

Community consciousness

Ask students to work in groups to research a community organisation and give a presentation to the class. Ask groups to find out about the organisation's history, aims, core activities, membership and important achievements.

Extension: Find a community organisation in your area and arrange to do some volunteer work (fundraising, tree planting, a clean-up, etc.) as a class.

Activity 4

Laughing in the face of danger

Ask students to read the poem 'The Surfers' March' by Leslie Greener. Discuss the elements of the poem, the language, tone, structure and its purpose. Ask students: Why did the poet write this poem? What was he trying to achieve? Do you think he was successful? Ask students to work in groups to tell a story using verse, drama and humour.

Activity 5

Coastal research

Ask students to search the internet to find out what kind of research is being done on Australia's coastal environment. The CSIRO website www.csiro.au and CSIRO Marine and Atmospheric Research website www.cmar.csiro.au are good places to start. Ask students to choose one area of current research to explore in greater depth and give a 10-minute report to the class.

Activity 6

Surf lifesaving goes global

Ask students to develop a symbol or logo that represents Australian surf lifesaving expertise overseas. Ask them to search the internet for places where there are links with Australia, and to create a world map, identifying each place using the logo.