

The Surf Emergency Response System evaluated and improved

Surf Life Saving Australia provides an update of the Surf Emergency Response system.



Surf Life Saving staff and volunteers man the response system.

Background

The Surf Emergency Response System (SERS) was established in 2008 by Surf Life Saving (SLS) as a single point of contact within each state for Police and other emergency services organisations to contact and activate lifesaving services. SERS was created in response to the complex and inconsistent system within SLS and used by emergency services organisations to contact SLS aquatic rescue services. The single access point phone number provided effective communication between emergency service agencies and SLS to arrange and coordinate aquatic rescue services along the Australian coastline.

Since its inception, SERS has received over 2000 call outs from Police or State Emergency Services and performed hundreds of rescues in New South Wales alone, the majority being at unpatrolled locations or outside patrol hours. In its first years of operation SERS was not audited or reviewed at a national level.

In 2011, an audit under the National Emergency Management Projects program was developed to conduct a full evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of the SERS and develop an improvement plan focussed on better inter-agency communication and efficiency. The project was scoped to a national scale to capitalise on the benefits particular to each jurisdiction.

Evaluating the response system

In each jurisdiction a full evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing SERS was conducted, which included the communications and dispatch system. Based on those findings a review was completed and feedback from stakeholders added to the final determination. This provided a truly national snapshot of the status of the SERS. With this information, an improvement strategy was drafted in collaboration with SLS and its allied agencies. The strategy identified and documented the improvements needed and the action plan for improvement.

The project achieved some high-level outcomes that underpin the continued effective operation and delivery of the services. The review and audit of the system ensured maximum performance and communication between agencies to facilitate well-coordinated joint rescue operations. The review was also the first comprehensive national audit and gap analysis of the capabilities and capacities of SERS and other non-government organisations coastal aquatic rescue organisations. The process also reinforced the need for continued collaboration within non-government organisations coastal aquatic rescue agencies and between non-government organisations and government emergency management agencies.

Anticipated outcomes and benefits include:

- reduction in drowning deaths and injury along the Australian coastline
- best practice guidelines based on evaluating the learnings from the audit which allowed each jurisdiction to adopt or review existing procedures in order to improve services
- enhanced communication between SLS services, Police and state emergency services and other coastal aquatic rescue agencies
- improved interoperability.

Current state

To enable SLS to actively participate as an integral part of Australia's emergency management network, the SLS infrastructure, services and systems must undergo continuous improvement. The seven SLS state centres are continually reinforcing and improving SERS based on jurisdictional and operational need. SLS Australia is investigating the next generation infrastructure that supports the single point of contact to ensure it meets the changing needs of SLS state centre requirements.

SLS is an integral part of emergency management around Australia and the Surf Emergency Response System ensures SLS and emergency management agencies continue to work collaboratively and effectively to reduce coastal drowning deaths and injury.

SLS promotes Triple Zero (000) as the first point of contact for coastal and aquatic emergencies.

This project was funded under the National Emergency Management Projects in 2011.