

# COFFS HARBOUR CITY

## LIFEGUARD SERVICE

STRATEGIC PLAN 2019-2024



**MyCOFFS**

Helping to achieve the MyCoffs Community Vision

### Document Control

Contact: Enzo Accadia – Section Leader Community Programs, Community & Cultural Services, CHCC

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Coffs Harbour’s beaches are recognised as some of the best in Australia and are a magnet not only to residents of the area, but to national and international visitors holidaying in the region. Safe beaches are therefore critical to the lifestyle and economy of the Coffs Coast.

In response to this recognised need, Coffs Harbour City Council delivers an in-house Lifeguard Service that manages foreshore and beach activities within the Coffs Harbour Local Government Area (LGA) for the enjoyment and protection of all visitors. In addition, Surf Life Saving NSW operates volunteer life saving patrols during the surf life saving season, generally from September to April. This combination of services ensures a high degree of protection and education for beach visitors.

## Existing Services

Council's Lifeguard Service delivers three core services as follows:



- Beach and Water Safety: is primarily related to the Lifeguard Service's predominant focus - beach patrols. In completing these services, Council lifeguards work in combination with four local Surf Life Saving Clubs. These services ensure that one patrolled beach is available 365 days of the year (Park Beach in Coffs Harbour), whilst a number of others are seasonally patrolled.
- Emergency Response: The Lifeguard Service responds to in-shore emergency call-outs events within the area of operations, as do local Surf Life Saving Clubs. Together with other responders they provide support to these events on an as needs basis.
- Education: The Lifeguard Service provides one of the most extensive local beach and water safety education programs in the State, with most of the local schools and many from outside our local government area participating in one or more programs. Coupled with additional beach and water safety programs aimed at culturally and linguistically diverse communities, education is a priority for the Lifeguard Service as a preventative measure.

## Demographic and Industry Trends

Whilst the existing services are well regarded, there are also a number of demographic and industry trends which continue to place pressure on current and future service needs. These trends in demographic terms include:

- General population growth over coming years (and historically) suggests that there is likely to be a corresponding increase in visitation to beaches in the area - most predominantly in the Coffs Harbour and Woolgoolga areas, but also around Sawtell / Boambee and more evenly spread across the northern beaches of the local government area

- General intensification will be further exacerbated by the upgrade of certain foreshore areas, with Jetty Beach being the most high-profile, and Woolgoolga also likely to come on line over the Strategic Plan period
- The impacts of intensification will also be exacerbated by increasing tourism - particularly with potential for increases in visitation from South-East Queensland over weekend and holiday periods as a consequence of the opening of the Pacific Highway upgrade
- An increase in the number of new migrants and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, combined with an aging population and increasing numbers of retirees means that traditional beach use, predominantly at surf beaches on weekends, is also likely to change to greater weekday and non-surf beach locations - such as Jetty Beach

In industry terms, the trends associated with the provision lifeguard services include:

- There are a mix of potential service delivery options, with the in-house model used by Council maintaining the greatest level of control, risk avoidance and flexibility in service delivery
- Technology has the potential to radically change the way in which lifeguard / life saving duties are conducted in the medium to long-term. Whilst too early to place complete trust in many of the emerging technologies, being aware of advancements and the potential to integrate technology in the future could see significant benefits over the longer-term
- Maintaining equivalent services across all patrol periods (both volunteer and Council) is paramount to visitor safety and Council's liabilities in providing the service. Of particular note is ensuring that volunteer Surf Life Saving Clubs are able to maintain sufficient patrolling members to meet Surf Life Saving NSW and *Practice Note 15 - Water Safety* standards
- Opportunities for alternative delivery models, including observation without flags, may provide additional safety measures without "endorsing" the area as a swimming destination

Each of these trends and implications is considered within this Strategic Plan to develop service level directions and operational requirements over the five-year plan period and beyond.

### Future Requirements

To meet the future directions of the Lifeguard Service there are five core future business requirements that are sought during the Strategic Plan period.

- 1** Firstly, to sustain high quality beach patrol services commensurate with the increasing demands being placed on the services. Growth in service provision will need to be carefully monitored with recognised hot spots - particularly around the Jetty Beach to Park Beach area - to be prioritised in the short-term.
- 2** Secondly, a clearer hierarchy of service provision would be beneficial - including a stronger correlation of service provision between Council Lifeguards and volunteer Surf Life Saving Clubs. This would see Park Beach remaining as the top Tier 1 facility, with services in Woolgoolga (with a greater population growth and extensive foreshore improvement plans in place) being increased over time to match Sawtell as Tier 2 service locations. Other localities would be patrolled on a holiday period basis – typically being over the peak Christmas holiday period at a minimum or school holidays during the surf season.
- 3** Thirdly, and in support of both patrol and emergency response needs, the level of supporting infrastructure would need to be comparable with these hierarchical needs. Storage facilities and key infrastructure such as personal watercraft (e.g. jet-skis), safe elevated viewing areas and storage facilities, would be available in Woolgoolga, Park Beach and Sawtell, whilst other localities would be more akin to their relative demands over the peak period, typically utilising mobile equipment or dedicated storage where necessary.

- 4 Fourthly, in support of prevention rather than reaction, education services will become all the more critical. Of particular importance will be maintaining the successful schools-based programs whilst continuing to identify opportunities to engage with at-risk communities, in particular cultural and linguistically diverse communities which have high levels of representation in drowning deaths over recent years.
- 5

Finally, to enable effective delivery of services, there is a need for the ongoing improvement of relationships and understanding between Council's Lifeguard Service and volunteer Surf Life Saving Clubs and respective peak bodies. Together, both life savers and lifeguards have a core role that is public safety. Working together provides greater sharing of resources, expertise and provides a basis for even greater outcomes for the community. These relationships need to be both day to day, as well as at higher levels where Council's formal agreements and delegations need to be clearly understood from a risk management and legal perspective.

These directions are considered to be relatively low-cost when compared to the services provided and their importance to the community and the tourist economy. Ensuring that sufficient financial resources are available and most effectively allocated is key to ensuring ongoing success of the Lifeguard Service.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of the Strategic Plan

Coffs Harbour's beaches are recognised as some of the best in Australia and are a magnet not only to residents of the area, but to national and international visitors holidaying in the region. Safe beaches are therefore critical to the lifestyle and economy of the Coffs Coast.

The Coffs Harbour City Council Lifeguard Service (**Lifeguard Service**) manages foreshore and beach activities for the enjoyment and protection of all visitors. In addition, Surf Life Saving NSW operates volunteer life saving patrols during the surf life saving season from September to April. This combination of services has ensured a high degree of protection and education for beach visitors with fewer incidents in the past five years than the previous five-year period.

Coffs Harbour City Council's (**Council**) commitment to the ongoing safety of beach visitors includes this *Lifeguard Service Plan for 2019 - 2024 (Strategic Plan)*, which has been developed to guide operational activities for the coming five-year period. The need for the Strategic Plan is identified by Council's Delivery Program and Operational Plan and aims to provide:

- Clear direction for staff and the community on the Lifeguard Service's strategic priorities
- The strategies and actions required to achieve stated goals
- The basis for resource planning and funding applications
- Alignment with Council's Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework and other related strategies

In developing the Strategic Plan, the importance of engaging with Council, Lifeguard Services staff, key user groups and volunteer surf life saving clubs (**SLSC**) is recognised. This assists Council to consider perspectives on the Lifeguard Service's operations, delivery model and infrastructure, and to receive and consider input regarding the its current strengths, challenges and opportunities.

## 1.2 Strategic Plan Structure

The Strategic Plan is structured as follows:

- Section 1 (this section) provides an overview of the Strategic Plan and the context of the industry more broadly
- Section 2 provides an overview of the Lifeguard Service and its context within the broader structure of Council and the local area
- Section 3 provides a review of the current services and applicable trends impacting on the Lifeguard Service
- Section 4 identifies the future direction and capacity of the service within the context of Council's desired directions to be created over the next 5 years
- Section 5 provides a review of the key issues that need to be addressed to enable the future position to be realised

An Executive Summary has been provided as an overview of the direction over the Strategic Plan timeframe and should be read in conjunction with the main document.



### 1.3 Strategic Context

In the context of Council, the Lifeguard Service is a significant service provider within the Community & Cultural Services Group. In addition, the Lifeguard Service supports a range of other council strategies and plans, including the MyCoffs Community Strategic Plan, specifically the strategy to “cultivate a safe community” (A2.4).

Council’s overarching vision is the guiding principle behind the delivery of Lifeguard Services:

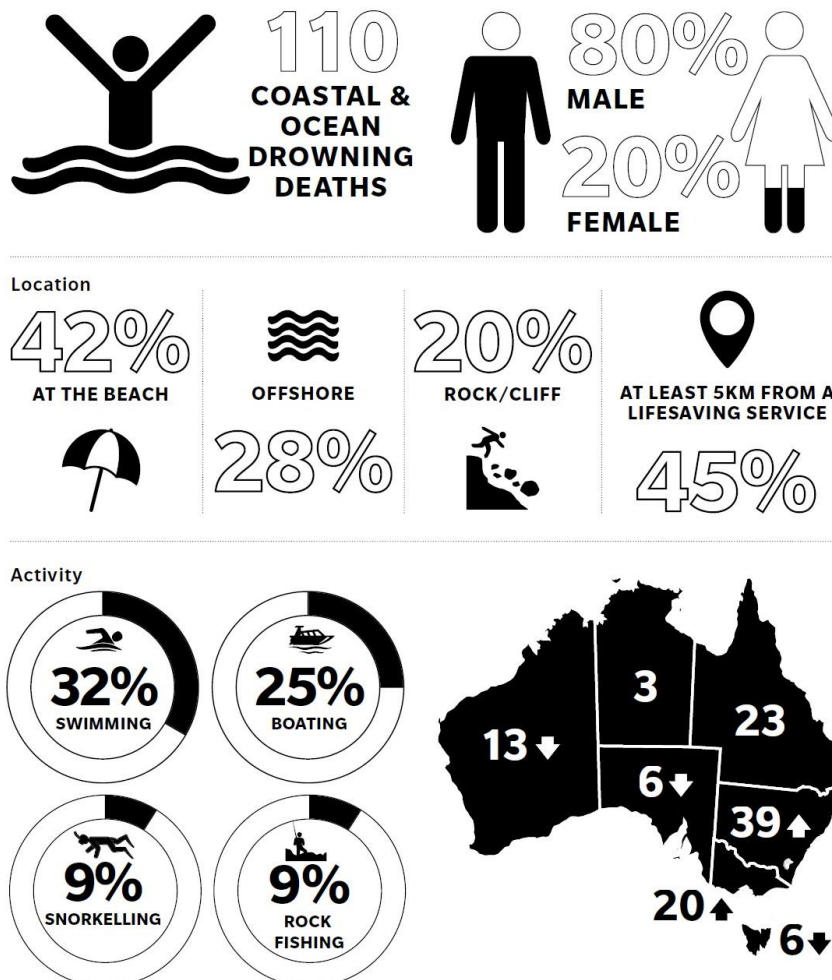
*“Committed to the Pursuit of Excellence” - “to deliver excellent services that are desired and valued by our community, now and into the future”*

This is underpinned by the Values of:

- Innovation - We deliver excellence in our services through innovation
- Customer Centric - Our customers are at the heart of everything we do
- Collaboration - We work together to seek solutions both internally and externally
- Empowerment - We support our people and provide them the scope to deliver outcomes
- Accountability - We are transparent and responsible in all that we do

Within the context of beach safety, the core premise of providing Lifeguard services is to avoid the loss of life. The *National Coastal Safety Report 2018* (Surf Life Saving Australia) highlights the key statistics around coastal and ocean deaths as shown in

Figure 1.



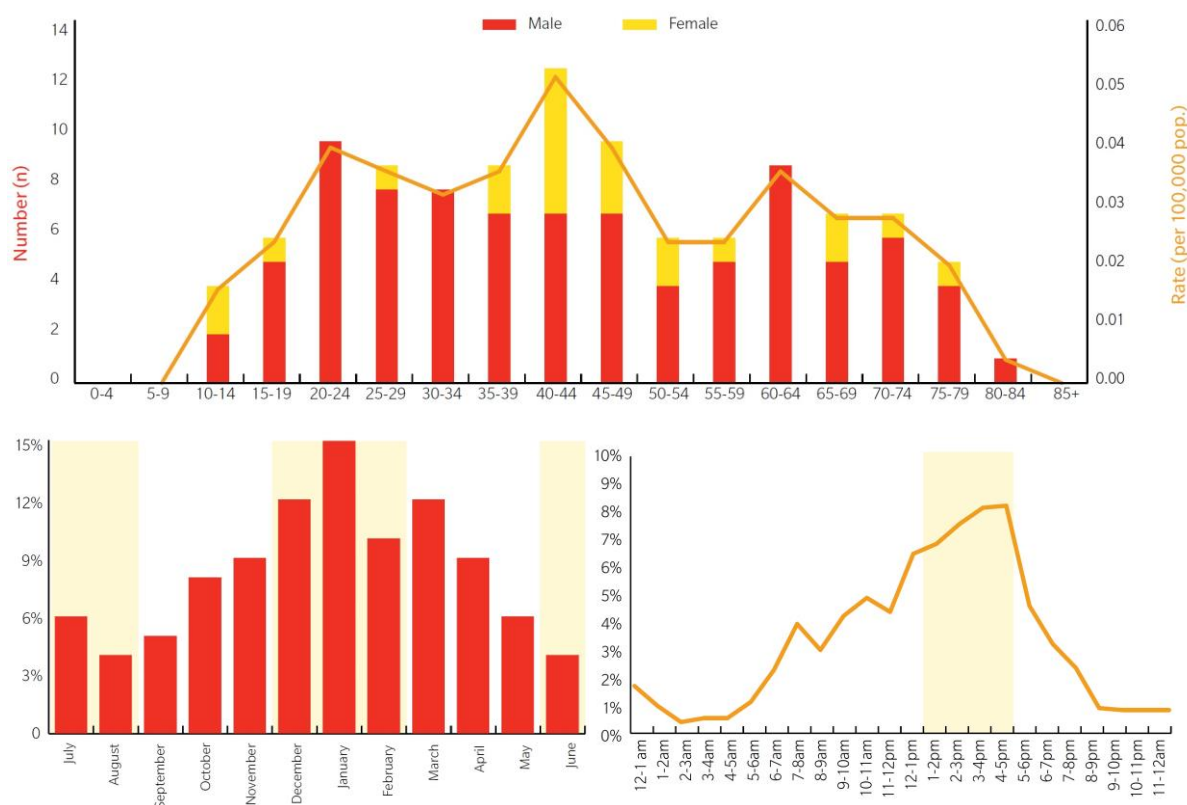


**Figure 1: National Drowning Snapshot** (Surf Life Saving Australia - National Coastal Safety Report 2018)

Over the long-term, the same report highlights three key areas:

- Time of year of drownings
- Time of day of drownings
- Age and gender of drownings

These show that in general terms, drownings have a strong correlation to males, particularly within younger adult age groups, and that these events often occur in late afternoon, particularly during the summer months. An overview of these statistics is shown in the three charts shown in **Figure 2**.



**Figure 2: Key Drowning Statistics** (Surf Life Saving Australia - National Coastal Safety Report 2018)

At the State level, the 39 recorded coastal / ocean drowning deaths in NSW in 2017/2018 was just over the average of the previous 14 years. NSW accounted for the highest number of national drownings, at 35% of the Australian total. The percentage of these drowning deaths related to swimming / wading was 2% higher than the previous 14-year average. Of these, males account for the vast majority - almost 90% in NSW, with the 20 to 29 year-old age cohort being the most at risk age group.

When considering the location and activities that are generally relevant to the Lifeguard Service, there are other key statistics of note including:

- 62% of drownings occurred less than 1km from a surf life saving service
- 49% occurred in a beach location
- 36% occurred when participating in swimming or wading activities

These figures further highlight that drowning events are occurring when swimming at beach locations, often in relatively close proximity to patrolled beaches - meaning that not only patrols, but education is critically important.

Another important factor is the influx of visitors and increase in beach activity over the summer period. In particular, the Royal Life Saving Australia *NSW Summer Drowning Report 2017/2018* highlights similar conditions. It goes on however, to highlight two further areas of interest - that almost 60% of drownings occur on weekend (when beaches are at their busiest), and that afternoon and evening are the prominent times of drownings occurring - 67% between 12pm and 6pm, and 17% between 6pm and 12am - compared with only 11% in the morning period.

At the local level, there has been a number of drowning events in recent years, including five over the 2018/2019 summer season, and 10 from July 2016 to February 2019. Of these, the vast majority have been international visitors and migrant families, often new to the area and potentially not having a strong understanding of beach / surf conditions.

The importance of the Lifeguard Service, and the challenges that it faces, are highlighted by this range of statistics.

#### **1.4 Consultation**

In preparing this Strategic Plan a range of targeted consultation activities have been undertaken including:

- Discussion and survey of existing Lifeguard Service staff
- Discussion with SLSC's regarding existing services and interactions with Council
- Survey of schools regarding education programs and activities
- Workshop with various Council staff to understand the inter-relationships between the Lifeguard Service and others
- Workshop with members of Council's:
  - Disability Inclusion and Access Advisory Committee
  - Multicultural Advisory Committee
  - Yandaarra Aboriginal Advisory Committee

Consultation has informed the remainder of the document and more specific issues have been captured in respective sections.

## 2. Coffs Harbour City Council Lifeguard Service Overview

This section provides an overview of the history, service context and resourcing of the Lifeguard Service. This section should be read in conjunction with Section 3.1 which provides further detailed information with respect to current service delivery.

### 2.1 History of the Service

Council's involvement in beach safety started with funding in the 1980's to support the existing volunteer life saving services. Increasingly the Coffs Harbour area became a popular tourist destination and weekend volunteer surf life saving patrols were no longer sufficient for the numbers of people using the beach.

Professional "Beach Inspectors" (Lifeguards) commenced at Park Beach initially, with Sawtell and Woolgoolga beaches following soon after. In the ensuing decades, Council progressively increased professional lifeguard services to operate up to seven days a week to ensure continuity of services in some areas, whilst continuing to supplement the voluntary weekend patrols undertaken by Surf Life Saving NSW.

Whilst Council has long provided an in-house lifeguard service, their amalgamation with part of the former Council of Pristine Waters to their north saw Council inherit Red Rock & Corindi patrols which were then provided by Australian Lifeguard Services (**ALS**) (the professional arm of Surf Life Saving NSW). The Red Rock and Corindi service has now been combined to the Red Rock area and is provided by both Council and the Red Rock / Corindi SLSC.

### 2.2 Service Context within the Local Area

The primary role of the Lifeguard Service is to ensure beach safety by firstly preventing incidents, and secondly to be able to respond when incidents do occur. Tragic occurrences on our beaches are relatively infrequent given a relatively high level of coverage at our more highly utilised beaches. Staff are highly trained and have a high focus on conducting preventative actions.

In 2017-18, Coffs Harbour lifeguard patrols estimated there were almost 800,000 visitations to beaches under guard. Only a very small number of these visitors required rescue, with more requiring non-contact assistance by Lifeguards or first aid treatment, mostly for minor marine stings or minor cuts or abrasions.

In total, 17 people have drowned on Coffs Harbour beaches since 2004 whilst swimming or surfing, and a further six people have drowned whilst participating in rock fishing, boating or other causes. All of these drowning events have occurred outside patrolled areas or patrol hours, with all but three of the victims being Australian residents.

In the past three years (from July 2016), 10 people have drowned at Coffs Harbour beaches while surfing or swimming, one-person rock fishing, and one person undertaking boating activities. None of these occurred between the flags at a patrolled beach.

While providing high standards of service provision and professionalism to what is a high profile, high importance service for the local and wider community, the Lifeguard Service is constantly evolving as the communities' needs change according to population, demographics and usage patterns. As such, there is constant pressure to expand service times and locations that need to be balanced with available resources.

In addition, it should be noted that Coffs Harbour's Park Beach is the only beach between Newcastle and Byron Bay to be patrolled for the full 12 months of the year.

### 2.3 Policy and Legislative Setting

Council makes decisions to carry out its various recreation services and provide associated facilities using its general powers under the Local Government Act 1993. Council is responsible for the care and control most, but not all, beach facilities in the local government area.

The Local Government Act 1993 does not prescribe minimum water safety standards for local government, however the Office of Local Governance has published a guidance in the form of "Practice Note 15 – Water Safety" (October 2017). This Practice notes guides councils to carry out water safety functions using a risk management approach. As such, Practice Note 15 is a core reference document for the Lifeguard Service.

In addition, Council's Lifeguard Service is also authorised to undertake rescues in disaster situations under the NSW Emergency Management Arrangements.

### 2.4 Core Services

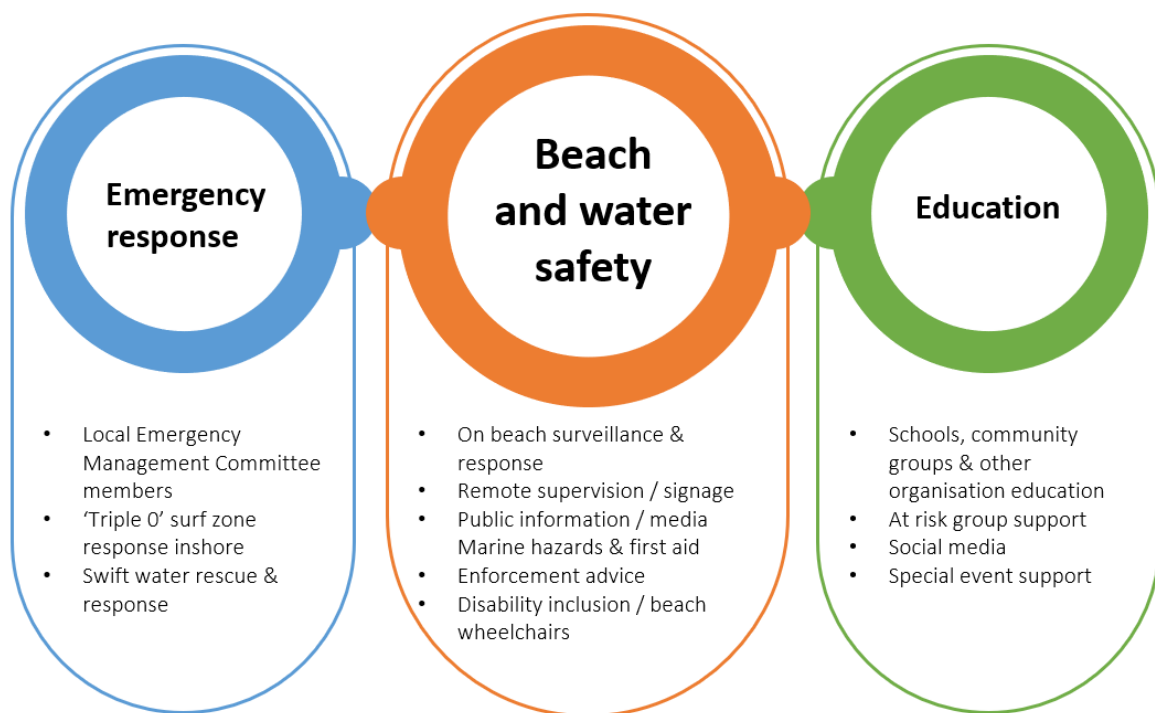
Council's Lifeguards are dedicated to saving lives, preventing injuries and maintaining the beaches as a place of enjoyment for locals and tourists alike. They provide three core services to the community as summarised below and further detailed in Section 3.1:

- Beach and Water Safety: is primarily related to the Lifeguard Service's predominant focus - beach patrol. In completing these services, working in combination with four local Surf Life Saving Clubs (**SLSCs**). These services ensure that one patrolling area is available 365 days of the year (Park Beach in Coffs Harbour), whilst a number of others are seasonally patrolled.
- Emergency Response: The Lifeguard Service responds to in-shore emergency call-out events within the area of operations, as do local SLSCs. Together with other responders they provide support to these events on an as needs basis. This is in addition to swift water rescue and response during flood events.
- Education: The Lifeguard Service provides one of the most extensive local beach and water safety education programs in the State, with most of the local schools and many from outside our local government area (**LGA**) participating in one or more programs. Coupled with additional beach and water safety programs aimed at culturally and linguistically diverse (**CALD**) communities, education is a priority for the Lifeguard Service as a preventative measure.

In this context, the following definitions apply:

- **In-shore** refers to emergency call outs within 2 nautical miles of the shoreline
- **Patrolling area** refers to the main flagged patrolling area outlined in the Clubs Patrol Operation Manual, or generally speaking, the area within the red and yellow flags

The three core services and their related components are shown in **Figure 3**.



**Figure 3: Core services provided by Council's Lifeguards**

These core services are interlinked and contribute to Council's overall commitment and responsibility to beach safety and access. Maintaining the safety and accessibility of beaches has been identified as not only being important and valued by locals, but crucial to the support of the tourism industry.

It is further noted that the core services that are delivered would not be possible without an important range of relationships and partnerships. Working collaboratively with other Council services, community organisations, local business and volunteers, as well as key bodies such as Surf Life Saving NSW (**SLSNSW**) and Australian Professional Ocean Lifeguard Association (**APOLA**), help the Lifeguard Service to be provide more effective and efficient services to all beach users.

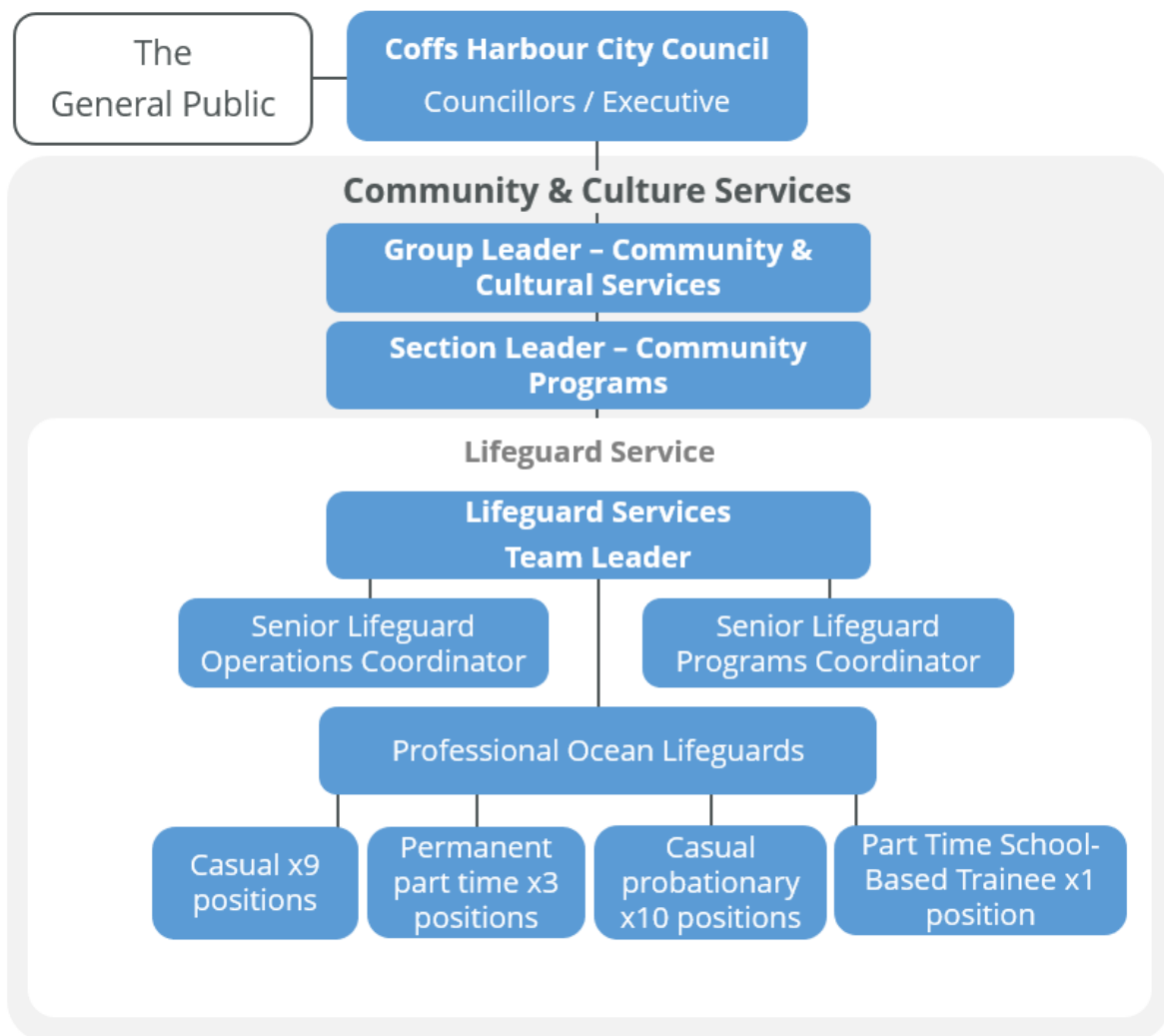
## 2.5 Staffing

Council currently employs six permanent lifeguards, three of which work part-time over the 7-month surf season. Up to 19 casual lifeguards are also employed in peak periods to provide services on a total of seven beaches. All lifeguards are trained according to the Australian Qualifications Framework and minimum standards set out by Practice Note 15 - Water Safety. This involves training in public safety, search and rescue techniques, first aid, advanced resuscitation including use of oxygen, spinal and analgesic gases, use of defibrillators and medical soft packs, as well as use of life saving procedures utilising up to date life saving equipment such as Personal Water Craft (**PWC**). Much of this is assessed annually with surf skills, fitness levels and rescue techniques also regularly assessed. In light of this regular training requirement, the Service has a number of qualified trainers and assessors which ensures quality training of Lifeguard Service staff and other staff within Council.

The seasonal nature of the Lifeguard Service contributes to challenges with recruitment of qualified casual staff to work each year. However, seasonal work can be attractive to younger people, including university students and those seeking part-time work over peak holiday periods. The service also has a number of long term permanent and permanent part-time employees with the potential for addressing future workforce succession.

The scale of Council’s Lifeguard Service also allows it to develop expertise and systems for effective operations. The backing by the industry body, APOLA, as well as relationships formed with SLSNSW, are able to keep the service up to date with emerging issues, technology and advancements.

Over the past three years some changes have been introduced to the Lifeguard Service operations. These include the reallocation of Senior Lifeguard positions to a "Programs Coordinator" and "Operations Coordinator" and the addition of administrative requirements within the service. The current structure of the Lifeguard Service is provided in **Figure 4**.



**Figure 4: Current Lifeguard Service organisational structure**

## 2.6 Assets

The Lifeguard Service is resourced with facilities and equipment to meet service requirements. This currently includes:

### Facilities

- Established Lifeguard Towers at:
  - Park Beach
  - Sawtell
  - Red Rock



- Established Lifeguard Storage at:
  - Park Beach
  - Diggers Beach
  - Sawtell Beach

#### Fleet equipment

- 3 x Personal Water Craft with rescue sleds
- 4 x 4WD Vehicles
- 2 x ATV's (2WD John Deer Gators)

#### Additional equipment

- 4 shared Defibrillators (with local SLS Clubs)
- 6 Defibrillators (Council Lifeguards)
- 10 Resuscitation Kits (First aid/spinal)
- Approximately 14 Rescue Boards
- Education equipment

However, there are several additional assets and facilities that have been previously identified and intended to be established within the next three years to meet ongoing demands. These include:

- Lifeguard storage at Emerald Beach (planned)
- Lifeguard storage at Woolgoolga Beach (planned)

## **2.7 Current budget and income streams**

The Lifeguard Service is wholly funded by Council with the Education programs being run as a cost recovery service. The major cost of the service is the frontline or 'feet in the sand' component of staffing, with wages accounting for approximately 95% of the budget. Wage funding for the Lifeguard Service is unique for Council as the 365 days per year patrol at Park Beach and seasonal coverage on others, means that staff must be replaced on the roster when taking leave for beaches to remain open.

## 3. Existing Services and Trends

This section provides a more detailed review of the existing operations of the Lifeguard Service and identifies the trends that are likely to impact on the service into the future. It is split into three key areas being:

- Core services that are currently delivered and how these are meeting the current needs of beach users
- Demographics trends that will impact on the future demands of the service
- Industry trends that will impact on how the services are delivered into the future

The implications for the future are identified within each of these sections, with an overarching SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and treats) analysis summarised thereafter.

### 3.1 Core Services

This section provides a more detailed review of each of the three core services that were provided in the overview at Section 2.4. This review is based on the following:

- Why the service is delivered
- How it is delivered
- What resources are required for its delivery
- How the service is performing

The Implications for the Lifeguard Service are highlighted after each section.

#### 3.1.1 Beach and Water Safety



##### ***Why is the service delivered?***

Council is authorised for the care and control of most foreshore reserves in the LGA and also controls bathing reserves at a local level, through a local policy. With an increase in tourism and investment being made by Council in volunteer services over previous years, the provision of a Council led Lifeguard Service was identified as being desirable in the 1980's.

Today, the provision of beach-based patrols by the Lifeguard Service is an important component of Council's commitment to both the local community and visitors to the area. It provides an added level of security and safety when accessing the area's beaches, which is a positive advertisement to the area.

Provision of these front-line services in order to provide "safe venues" is also in line with the main drowning prevention pillars from the Australian Water Safety Council. The service aims to meet the requirements of the NSW Office of Local Government's Practice Note 15 - Water Safety.

##### ***How is the service delivered?***

The Lifeguard Service primarily provides this aspect of its service through beach patrols, including surveillance within the flags but also the wider visible beach area. This is complemented by remote supervision in the form of signage as understood by Australian Standard *AS 2461:2010 Water Safety Signs and Beach Safety Flags* and in accordance with advice from Council's insurers.

This on beach presence is also where the majority of the other elements are delivered. Council's Lifeguards are, and see themselves as, tourism ambassadors for the region and have a visible role

liaising with the public and providing information, not just on beach and water safety. Where and when required Lifeguards also provide first aid and advanced care in emergency or rescue situations. These elements are also combined in the management of marine hazards including sharks.

Lifeguard Service staff are authorised, if necessary, to impound watercraft (surfboards) however are more likely to provide enforcement advice or refer to a ranger on other issues such as dogs or vehicles on beaches. Lifeguards also manage wheelchair bookings for the two Council owned beach wheelchairs located at Park Beach and Woolgoolga, assisted in Woolgoolga by the Woolgoolga Beach Holiday Park staff (refer further details on this in Section 5.4.1).

As mentioned, the focus of the Lifeguard Service's beach and water safety activities is on beach patrols, the extent of which are laid out in the following table. In this context:

- **Surf season** refers to the period from September to April
- **School Holidays** refers to all the NSW September/ October, Christmas and April School holidays unless otherwise specified. This also includes the Easter weekend if it falls outside of the April School Holidays.
- **Peak Summer** refers to the period from the 27th December until 26th January in the following year
- **EST** is Eastern Standard Time
- **EDST** is Eastern Daylight Savings Time.

**Table 5: Current Coffs Harbour LGA beach patrols**

Beach	Time of Year	Service provider	When	Patrol times
Park Beach	Surf Season	Council Lifeguards	Monday- Friday	9am - 4pm EST 9am - 5pm EDST
		Coffs Harbour SLSC	Weekends and Public Holidays	9am - 4pm EST 9am - 5pm EDST
	Remainder of year	Council Lifeguards	7 days per week	9am - 4pm EST 9am - 5pm EDST
Sawtell	Surf Season	Council Lifeguards	Monday- Friday	9am - 4pm EST 9am - 5pm EDST
		Sawtell SLSC	Weekends and Public Holidays	9am - 4pm
Woolgoolga	Surf Season	Council Lifeguards	Monday- Friday	10am - 3pm
		Woolgoolga SLSC	Weekends and Public Holidays	9am - 2pm
	School Holidays	Council Lifeguards	Monday- Friday	9am - 4pm 9am - 5pm (Christmas)
		Woolgoolga SLSC	Weekends and Public Holidays	9am - 3pm 9am - 5pm (Christmas)
Red Rock	Christmas School Holidays	Council Lifeguards	Monday - Friday	9am - 3pm

Beach	Time of Year	Service provider	When	Patrol times
	School Holidays	Red Rock/ Corindi SLSC	Weekends and Public Holidays	9am - 1pm 9am - 3pm (Christmas)
	Surf Season	Red Rock/ Corindi SLSC	Sundays only	9am - 1pm
Diggers Beach	School Holidays	Council Lifeguards	7 days per week	9am - 4pm 9am - 5pm (Christmas)
Emerald Beach	Peak Summer	Council Lifeguards	7 days per week	9am - 5pm
Darlington/ Lorikeet (near Corindi)	Peak Summer	Council Lifeguards	7 days per week	As per paid agreement

### ***What resources are required for its delivery (human, financial and infrastructure)?***

#### **Staffing:**

Where Council Lifeguards are patrolling the beach there are a minimum of two staff on duty in line with industry recommendations on risk management and best practice. Currently, additional lifeguards are only rostered on according to educational requirements. Increases in usage at popular beaches over the peak periods have also warranted an additional lifeguard on duty from a safety perspective at Park Beach, particularly with respect to the management of ongoing issues at North Wall and Coffs Creek. An additional lifeguard has also been rostered on at Sawtell at times to assist during peak periods. This has been restricted from a budgetary perspective to five hours per day and this is generally related to tides.

#### **Infrastructure:**

The "Prime Time Concept" was developed by Vince Moorehouse and Sheridan Bailey and is a system of patrolling which focuses on elevation and the strategic placement of manpower and equipment to minimise the response times to incidents.

As an essential part of any beach patrolling strategy, towers are key infrastructure which place lifeguards in elevated positions where they can scan the beach and surf. By providing elevated observation, protected from the sun, wind and rain, they also house vital rescue and communication equipment and eliminate line of sight issues while being reference points/service locations for beach users. The Lifeguard Service currently have the use of towers at Sawtell Beach, Park Beach and Red Rock. The raised surf club platform at Woolgoolga also assists in providing this form of elevation in that location.

Other infrastructure includes physical rescue equipment, first aid equipment and associated needs, primarily including storage and access.

#### **Remote Supervision:**

Public understanding of the messages used to convey beach conditions and safety information is critical to providing a safe beach environment. Use of signage as 'Remote Supervision' is an accepted and recommended risk management practice. Council works with Statewide Mutual (Council insurer) and follow their guidelines according to the *Best Practice Manual for Signs as Remote Supervision - Version 8.1: August 2014* in an effort to increase consistency of signage both locally and with domestic and international standards. Working with Council's insurer also ensures that Council is cognisant of their liabilities from a legal perspective. This is particularly important for

residents and visitors from outside the region and those with different cultures who are unfamiliar with the coastal environment.

There are some inconsistencies across the service delivery area as other responsible stakeholders have taken the advice and recommendations of the SLSNSW Coastal Public Safety Risk Assessment (2013) which has been applied within the Crown controlled State Parks.

Financial costs:

The beach patrol and related equipment costs are the primary cost driver from the service. Staff wages account for the major portion of these costs each year. Whilst specialised equipment can be expensive to purchase and needs to be maintained in good working order, this is a relatively minor cost in comparison to annual wages costs.

Council also makes an annual financial contribution to each of the four SLSCs with which it shares beaches and patrols.

### ***How is the Service performing?***

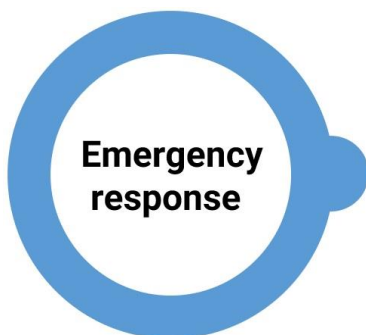
The patrol hours for each of the beaches have to this point evolved based on those historically conducted by volunteer SLSCs on weekends, with the Council Lifeguard Service generally matching them on weekdays. This has been done for the dual reasons of providing consistency of patrol times for the community / visitors and to ensure that undue pressure is not placed on volunteer services.

In more recent times, a number of SLSC's have identified difficulties in sustaining the levels of service and inconsistencies in patrol hours have become more frequent. This is further complicated by patrol times potentially becoming more out of step with beach usage patterns and core messaging around issues such as sun safety. In some areas, this situation may no longer be meeting community needs and there remains risks associated with high usage of popular beaches being undertaken outside of current patrol times - particularly during peak summer periods.

Additionally, a number of requests have been made for new or additional patrols. For example, the Jetty Beach area is frequently identified as a location for potential patrols, whilst the Corindi community have more recently requested the reinstatement of patrols over the peak period.

Nonetheless, the Lifeguard Service (and by inference the volunteer services) regularly receive very positive responses to general community surveys, being highlighted as a well performing and important service to residents of the area.

### **3.1.2 Emergency Response**



#### ***Why is the service delivered?***

Given the mix of skills and the availability of appropriate equipment for emergency response tasks, it is natural that Council's Lifeguard Service would provide not only standard beach patrol services, but have a role in other emergency situations. In fact, the vast majority of emergencies occur outside of patrol locations and times (a positive reflection of the effectiveness of patrol services).

The emergency response role is also a shared responsibility, and includes SLSC's and other emergency services such as Police, Ambulance and State Emergency Services.

### ***How is the service delivered?***

The Lifeguard Service is represented on the Local Emergency Management Committee by the Lifeguard Services Team Leader to ensure coordination and cooperation with other emergency services and responders in the area.

The Lifeguard Service is on call and responds to Triple 0 emergencies that occur in the surf zone both during patrol hours and after hours. The Lifeguard Service maintains an on-call roster with equipment and a vehicle amongst staff outside of patrol hours and over weekends in order to be responsive to these potential emergency situations.

While a staff member is rostered on call, depending on the location of the emergency, other staff will often be contacted if they are likely to be able to respond more quickly. This ability to respond relies in part on a strong team culture and convenient home base locations of staff spread along the coastline.

A number of staff are also trained in swift water (flood) rescue and the Service also responds to call outs in those emergency situations following a similar response model.

### ***What resources are required for its delivery (human, financial and infrastructure)?***

The resources required to deliver this core service are in line and overlap with those for beach and water safety. Staffing is the main requirement with training of staff and maintenance of specialist skill levels also being required, although this is mainly resourced and managed in-house and in conjunction with the beach patrol services requirements.

Access to equipment at strategic locations is an important part of the Lifeguard Service's ability to respond to emergency situations in a timely manner - with core locations at Woolgoolga, Park Beach and Sawtell being primary equipment access locations (including for example, adequate storage and beach access).

On call costs for staff are paid at the Local Government Award (rather than emergency services) with a minimum four hours "shift" paid if responding to a call out. Given the relatively small number of call outs each year, this is not a significant amount in relation to the overall Service budget.

### ***How is the Service performing?***

The response processes and Council's systems are generally considered to be appropriate and acceptable. The key issues arising from this aspect of the Lifeguard Service is the level of available infrastructure to support effective response times.

For example, communication with other emergency services and responders is an important component and requires specialist equipment. At present this is not an issue, however the changeover from analogue to digital radios will require both the Lifeguard Service and the volunteer SLS Clubs to upgrade their systems. To ensure ongoing effective communication, this will require a coordinated and agreed approach between the parties to ensure systems in use are compatible (i.e. through changeover period may require both digital and analogue services). This will require a total of seven radios, one for each car and Jet Ski, to ensure effective communication in emergency scenarios.

Over the peak summer period, there would typically be around 12 call outs. Outside of these periods, call-outs are minimal. Response to flood rescue is naturally variable however there hasn't been any such events in recent times.



### 3.1.3 Education



#### ***Why is the service delivered?***

Supporting education programs and providing information to beach users on the hazards that they may encounter is an important pre-emptive aspect of the Lifeguard Service. This aspect of the core services also provides input into Council's more general hazard management approach to water safety and is a means of reducing risks to local and visitor's health and safety.

Education as a preventative measure is one of the core Drowning Prevention Pillars identified by the Australian Water Safety Council. The Lifeguard Service has identified their education programs as

being of high importance as only a small proportion of the local community participate in related sport and recreation activities such as surf life saving or surfing activities. However, many of these people still visit our beaches and Council actively encourages visitors to do the same.

Beach/water safety education is therefore an important means to try and educate all members of the community for their own safety and with the hope that they in turn pass this information on to visitors to our area. This model of improved 'local advice' is often used across the industry as a form of public engagement with beach and water safety.

#### ***How is the service delivered?***

The Service's approach to education is in line with the life stage approach recommended by the Australian Water Safety Council as well as targeting at risk groups. The Schools programs target students from year 3 through to year 12 with programs outside of that targeting CALD communities and clubs such as Rotary, Lions etc.

The Lifeguard Service's education programs are delivered by Lifeguard Service staff in schools, through TAFE or with community groups. The programs are predominantly APOLA Certifications and generally take the form of one of the courses as outlined in **Table 1**.

**Table 1: Coffs Harbour City Lifeguard Service Education programs**

<b>Program Name</b>	<b>Target Audience / Format</b>
Beach & Water Safety Awards (BAWSA)	Year 3 & 4 beach safety in school presentation
Ocean Safety Awareness Awards (OSAA)	Primary school on the sand program which leads into OSSA
Ocean Safety Surfer Awards (OSSA)	Department of Education requirement for students to take surfing for sport
School Surfing Supervisor Awards (SSSA)	Requirement for teachers in order to take surfing for sport
Ocean Safety Surf Coach Award (OSSCA)	Requirement for learn to surf coaches
Tailored Ocean Awareness & Surfing programs	Developed and delivered for specific groups such as international university students as well as rural and CALD communities

This is complimented by events such as such as Gratitude Day, Harmony in Health Expo, Emergency Services Expo and programs and presentations with various clubs and groups, including those identified as being at risk such as backpackers and those in fruit picking industry.

The Lifeguard Service has also implemented the Council Lifeguard Service Facebook page in order to increase public understanding and access to information digitally. An example of this is a recent

summer education campaign with targeted messages regarding beach safety and available areas through location specific sponsored advertising on Facebook.

Beach safety brochures in key languages have also been distributed to a large blueberry farm cooperative and lifeguards have delivered beach safety briefings to the Costa blueberry group's workers during the period due to seasonal CALD workers being identified as a key risk group.

***What resources are required for its delivery (human, financial and infrastructure)?***

Currently, the resources required are mainly associated with staffing. The Senior Lifeguard - Programs Coordinator currently spends on average 20 hours per week, outside of Peak Summer, coordinating and delivering educational programs. This is mostly conducted concurrently with patrol duties and is supplemented by an additional staff member for the on-beach programs or to cover the absence from patrols for delivery of in-classroom programs. Administration of the program also requires at least one day per month off patrols for invoicing and creation of certificates for participants.

As with any education program that is focused on safety and risk prevention, the material requires regular review and update to ensure currency and relevance or content. Ongoing professional development for trainers and educators is also an area of ongoing need.

Education programs are currently generally conducted on a cost recovery basis and integrated into beach patrols with additional staff rostered on only as required to ensure appropriate coverage.

Current costs to Schools are:

- 1-hour Classroom program – Free
- All-day OSAA program - \$12.50 per student
- All-day OSSA program - \$14.50 per student

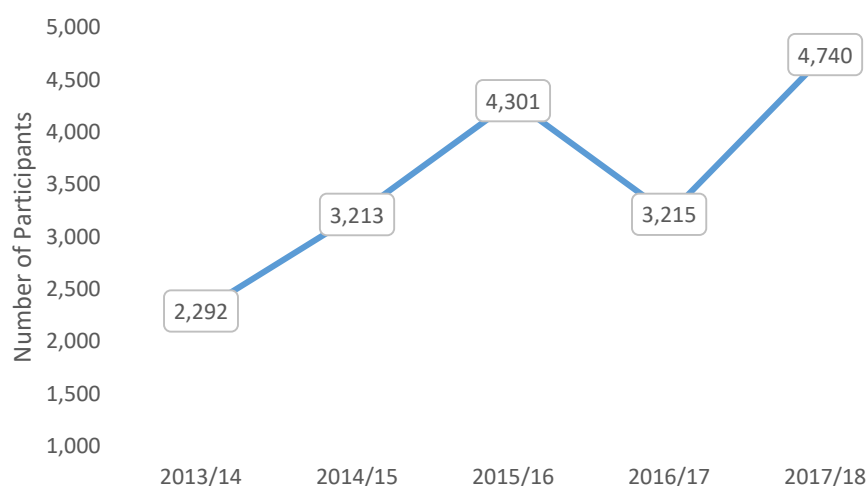
The funds generated through the Education programs cover wages for any off-beach activities and for additional staff for on-beach activities. Any additional funds are used for maintenance and equipment of educational material such as learn to surf boards, appropriate PPE for staff, etc. As a result, these education programs are generally cost neutral.

Conversely, social media and advertising campaigns have limited opportunities for the recoupment of costs. Given the difficulty in targeting at-risk groups that may regularly move into and out of the area, platforms such as Facebook do however provide more direct access than may otherwise be possible for a relatively small cost. Council has also submitted joint funding applications in the past with APOLA for black spot funding to run CALD targeted education programs, which have not been successful in gaining funding.

***How is the Service performing?***

Almost every primary and secondary school in the Council area participates, or has participated, in Lifeguard education programs. Numbers for recent years of participation are highlighted in **Figure 6**. A number of regional schools from localities that regularly holiday in the Coffs Harbour area have also become involved in the program. Programs are also conducted with the local PCYC, Southern Cross University for their international students.

In addition to schools, there are a number of other important partners including non-government organisations (**NGOs**) such as Settlement Services International (**SSI**) and Anglicare, as well as the fruit picking industry, as conduits to connect with at risk community members such as new migrants, refugees and backpackers. The first multicultural surf awareness event held in April 2019 at Jetty Beach was seen by the groups involved, including SSI, as a significant opportunity to encourage at-risk groups to reengage with beach and water safety following recent tragic events within specific CALD communities - in this way the event was seen as a great success.



**Figure 6: School program student attendance from 2013-2018**

A proactive and flexible approach to education delivery is important to be able to respond to impacts of poor weather, beach erosion or perceptions of danger due to shark sightings. This led a number of school programs to be cancelled and not rescheduled in 2016/2017 (also due in part to conflicting curriculum requirements and other programs being offered internally). The effectiveness and efficiency of programs could also be improved through economies of scale should the program be expanded to additional areas outside of the LGA.

Lifeguard Service education programs are considered to be of high quality and receive positive feedback from participants and schools. Many schools surveyed appreciated the local knowledge, ease of organisation and high level of training of the lifeguards delivering the programs. Further engagement with CALD students was however identified as a future opportunity.

## 3.2 Demographic Trends

### 3.2.1 Overview

The Coffs Harbour City population is estimated in 2019 as being close to 77,000 people. By 2036, this population is forecast to grow to more than 96,000. Investigations undertaken by the State Government to inform the Coffs Harbour bypass, which have also been used to inform the Coffs Harbour Local Growth Management Strategy<sup>1</sup>, have been extrapolated to give a more recent population estimate that is around 6,000 more than previously thought - to just over 100,000 by 2036. This overall projected increase of around 30% will be distributed differently between areas of the Council area, being generally driven by migration patterns rather than natural increase - as seen in many coastal areas on the east coast.

New residents are likely to be attracted by the coastal lifestyle and it is likely that beach visitation will increase in line with population growth. The importance of the Coffs Harbour City Council area as a destination for retirees and families from areas further south is expected to continue over the forecast period. The number of people over the age of 65 is predicted to increase significantly in coming years, while the number of people under the age of 19 is also likely to increase, albeit at a greatly reduced rate by comparison. While this structural ageing of the population is a national phenomenon, the impacts are experienced earlier and more profoundly in sea change communities like the Coffs Coast.

<sup>1</sup>Coffs Harbour Local Growth Management Strategy Chapters 1-4 (draft) <https://www.coffsharbour.nsw.gov.au/Building-and-Planning/Growth-Strategies/Pages/growth-strategies.aspx>

In addition, the area also has a growing population of international immigrants and refugees, which combined with retirees and families are important user groups for the Lifeguard Service - further details of which are provided in 0 below.

### 3.2.2 Trends by Locality

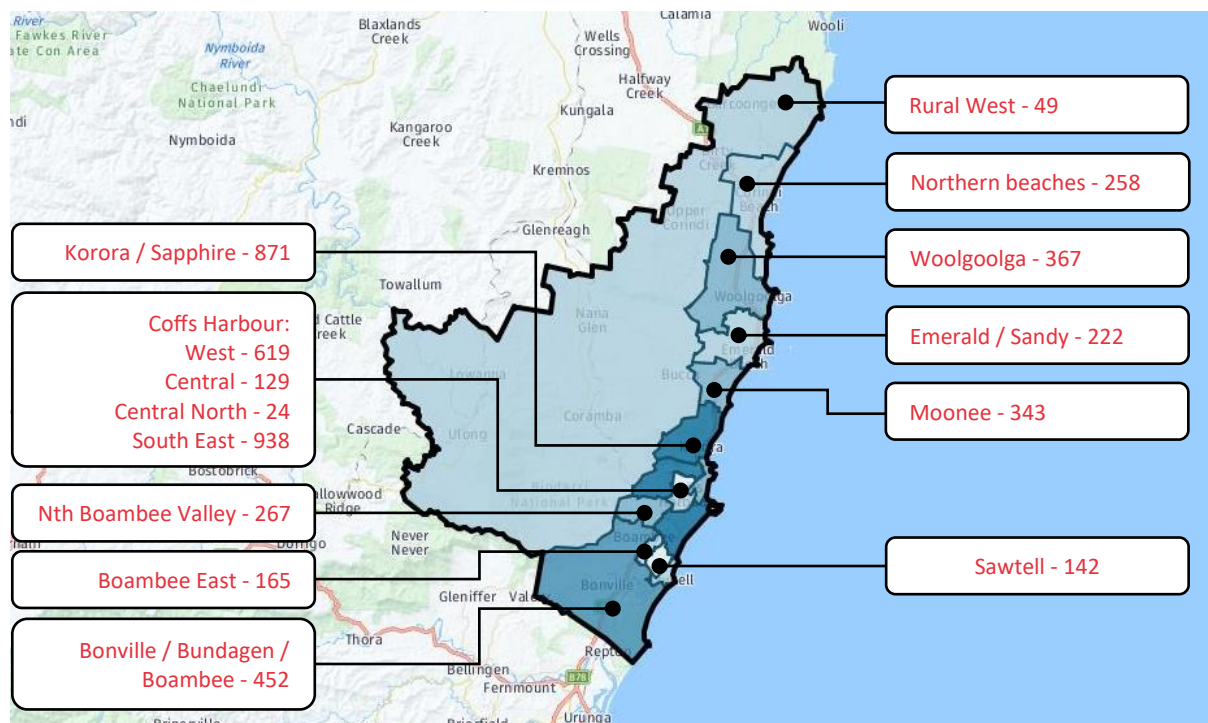
Beach usage on the Coffs Coast will continue to increase in response to both the growing population, as well as increasing improvements to foreshores and associated beach access. This, coupled with demand from tourism, will continue to place increased demand on beach usage.

Across the three broader areas of the Council area the following changes are expected:

- Coffs Harbour and surrounds: Will have the greatest increase in population, rising by more than 2,500 over the next five years in the Coffs Harbour beach catchments. This area is also likely to see the greatest increase in urban density, with more medium and high-density living attracting larger proportions of retirees and young adults, but also placing greater onus on public spaces rather than "backyards" for recreation. Coffs Harbour is also known to be the favoured location for new migrant arrivals and refugees given access to available services.
- Northern beaches and surrounds: Will see population increase by around 1,200 people over the next five years, particularly around the Woolgoolga but also including Corindi, Emerald and Moonee areas, largely associated with greenfield / detached housing development.
- Sawtell / Boambee and surrounds: Will see population increase by around 1,000 people over the next five years, largely associated with the expansion of the Bonville / Bundagen / Boambee area as well as Boambee East and North Boambee Valley.

This increase in population and associated demand is also likely to be facilitated by planned upgrade works and redevelopment of foreshore areas - particularly associated with the Coffs Harbour Jetty precinct, as well as at Woolgoolga. These foreshore improvements will also make those associated beaches more attractive to visitors from outside the immediate catchment.

Trends in population over the next five years are presented in **Figure 7**.



**Figure 7: Projected areas of net population increase (2019 - 2024) (Source: ID Forecast)**

### 3.2.3 Trends by At-Risk Groups

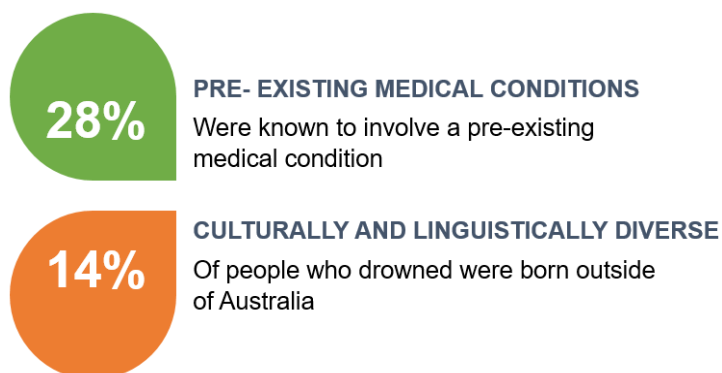
#### *Ageing and diverse demographics*

The Coffs Coast has an older age demographic which reflects the high number of retirees who have moved to the region, and the high number of young adults migrating away for employment and educational opportunities. This trend is projected to continue - between 2016 and 2026, the age structure forecasts for Coffs Harbour City indicate close to 30% increase in population of retirement age (compared to a 16% increase in those under working age and a 7% increase to those of a working age).

The increased proportion of retirees and older people are likely to impact on beach usage patterns. For example, retirees have more leisure time and their leisure activities frequently incorporate beach activities including swimming and walking. This will potentially increase the numbers of people visiting the beach during off-peak times, so as visiting the beach in traditionally quieter weekday periods.

While the highest risk associated with drowning is associated with young men (often involving alcohol), pre-existing medical conditions (which increase with age) are also a significant risk factor. This also impacts on instances of provision of assistance which rise in relation to complications with existing health issues with some of the common medical conditions including cardiac and respiratory conditions as well as epilepsy.

At the local level, there is also a known trend in recent drowning deaths, frequently involving people from CALD community members. Whilst only 14% of the 2017-2018 summer period in NSW more generally, this proportion in more recent times in the local area is closer to 80% (as further described in sections below).



**Figure 8: Factors in drownings in NSW over summer 2017-2018**

#### *Tourism*

On a yearly basis the Coffs Coast currently attracts approximately 3.09 million domestic visitor nights and 843,000 international overnight visitor nights as well as over 915,800 day trippers. Tourism Australia statistics show that 61% of all people visiting the Coffs Harbour area are here purely for holiday or leisure. It is also acknowledged that the primary reason for 49% of the total visitors coming to our area are our beaches.

The role of the area's beaches in recreation is significant, with the most popular recreation venues and activities for locals and tourists alike including foreshore beaches and reserves. These natural assets are repeatedly identified as important with the *North Coast Regional Plan* noting the need to identify opportunities to expand nature based, adventure and cultural tourism assets including Solitary Islands. The *Coffs Coast Tourism Strategic Plan 2020* also identifies the Marine Park, Jetty Foreshore and coastal assets as areas to be utilised in order to grow the tourism industry.

The Coffs Coast area's connectivity and accessibility is also set to increase as the Pacific Highway upgrade progresses, enabling easy access from the South-East Queensland population base, as well as usage of the airport bringing the area closer to the rest of Australia. These factors alone are likely to see significant increases in tourism, which will become increasingly focused on those areas where foreshore improvements are being promoted.

#### *Foreign visitor increase*

As highlighted above there were 843,000 international overnight visitor nights in the area in 2018. While only a small percentage of overall tourism visitation (around 5%), foreign visitors are an identified at-risk user group who are over represented in assistance and drowning statistics.

Over the 2017-2018 summer, people born outside of Australia represented 14% of drownings at a state level with countries of birth including China, India, Nepal and Vietnam. As the Coffs Coast consistently attracts visitors from a range of cultures unfamiliar with the surf environment, including growing markets such as China and India, this may have a continuing impact on Lifeguard Services.

#### *Growing CALD Community*

Coffs Harbour is a Refugee Welcome Zone with a further 500 new refugees expected in the first half of 2019. These numbers are set to be fairly steady on a yearly basis into the future and come with a number of requirements around settlement locations. The need to be within walking distance of, or having access to public transport to, a range of services such as shops, schools, hospitals, English classes and other services is a critical need for these communities. Whilst previous settlements have been facilitated in localities like Woolgoolga and Sawtell, it has been found that these groups have a greatest level of accessibility in Coffs Harbour itself and future settlements are likely to occur in this area more frequently in the future.

The April 2019 Multicultural Surf Awareness Day held at Jetty Beach highlighted that whilst this beach appears safe through the lens of those familiar with beach conditions, for new migrants this presents an opportunity for raising awareness and confidence within the water. Many of the groups arriving locally have not had swim education or any familiarity with surf conditions, with some not knowing how to swim at all or being more used to rivers, still water or calmer seas. Many are unfamiliar with the signage used at unpatrolled beaches (such as Jetty Beach) which suggests to some that it is not a safe swimming area. Having flags, understanding beach conditions and having lifeguards available is important to engaging these communities with the beach environment.

Over and above refugee settlement, there is also a large in-migration from CALD communities to the area linked to industries such fruit picking and connections with established communities - particularly with the Indian Sikh community. These communities all bring challenges to the more traditional forms of patrol and education.

### **3.2.4 Implications for the Service**

The demographic trends associated with the locality establish a number of implications for the Lifeguard Service. These are summarised below and further considered in Section 5.

- General population growth over coming years (and historically) suggests that there is likely to be a corresponding increase in visitation to beaches in the area - most predominantly in the Coffs Harbour area, but also around Sawtell / Boambee beaches and more evenly spread across the northern beaches of the LGA
- General intensification will be further exacerbated by the upgrade of certain foreshore areas, with Jetty Beach being the most high-profile, and Woolgoolga also likely to come on line over the Strategic Plan period



- The impacts of intensification will also be exacerbated by increasing tourism - particularly with potential for increases in visitation from South-East Queensland over weekend and holiday periods
- An increase in the number of CALD community members, combined with an aging population and increasing numbers of retirees means that traditional beach use, predominantly at surf beaches on weekends, is also likely to change to greater weekday and non-surf beach activities

These implications will require consideration of service levels and education activities in coming years.

### 3.3 Industry Trends

#### 3.3.1 Overview

The beach patrol and lifeguard industries typically operate under one of the following three models:

- In-house "Lifeguard" services, which provide seven day a week services and do not delegate any functions to volunteer SLS Clubs (albeit those SLS Clubs may supplement and assist Council's services), as is the case at Lake Macquarie City Council and in larger metropolitan centres
- A blended service between the in-house "Lifeguard" model, and the use of delegated functions to SLS Clubs, such as the case with Coffs Harbour City Council
- Externally contracted services, typically undertaken by Australian Lifeguard Services (**ALS**), a commercial arm of Surf Life Saving Australia, although other services providers are also known to exist.

What is becoming apparent within the industry however, is the difficulty of SLS Club's to retain patrolling members over time. Whilst some Clubs are able to achieve this with relative ease, others highlight the difficulties in meeting the SLSNSW operational requirements - needing around 60 patrolling members to achieve a regular weekend / public holiday patrol.

This has led in some instances of council lifeguard services being forced to increase patrols in lieu of volunteers - as has occurred at Lake Macquarie for example. Within the Coffs Harbour area, all Clubs have been known to assist the Red Rock / Corindi Club, despite their service only being provided on a Sunday (i.e. not two or more days per week). Others have struggled to maintain services due to insufficient numbers of available and trained patrolling members.

Conversely, whilst ALS and local SLSC's have an overarching peak body in Surf Life Saving NSW / Australia, the removal of the NSW Water Safety Advisory Council has impacted the influence and funding available to non-voluntary lifeguard service providers and professional peak bodies, such as local councils and APOLA, leaving them without a formal position from which to inform higher level decision making.

A lack of understanding and exposure at a community and Council representative level as to the service provided and Council's obligation to provide that service has also created difficulties for a number of councils. Over and above this, the requirements in terms of emergency response expectations has also increased.

The number of swimmable days (days over 27 degrees Celsius) has been the highest in recent years and is trending to continue to be high and increase with long-term climate change. These days often correspond with holiday periods and long daylight hours / daylight savings time, meaning that people are reaching the beach well after many patrol times have ceased.

### 3.3.2 Trends in Technology

Lifeguard Services have traditionally been human resource intensive operations. However, with the rapid growth in technological innovations across communications, rescue equipment, and a range of aerial, terrestrial and aquatic vehicles amongst others, there is growing potential for efficiencies and improvements which is matched by higher expectation of access and service by both the community and staff. While the Lifeguard Service is essentially a human service, technology continues to play an important role in the ability of lifeguards to effectively undertake their duties.

The potential impact of advances in technology can be seen across the breadth of the Lifeguard Service operations, and Council will need to factor this into future planning for the service. The Lifeguard Service currently utilises one shark buoy / listening station and two staff have remote pilot licenses to enable the use of drones. The Service is in the initial stages of trialling drones for shark response (not spotting) in conjunction with State authorities. Another element of the drone trial is to utilise this technology as part of the risk assessment process when opening beaches.

Use of drones in search and rescue, especially integrated with infrared thermal imaging, as well as conditions monitoring, swimmer identification and general surveillance is progressing rapidly, however at the current time this would require a significant and unrealistic investment by Council. However, these costs are decreasing and are put into perspective when current operations are considered. An example is the progress of the Westpac Little Ripper Lifesaver<sup>2</sup> which is an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) being used as an affordable and more nimble alternative to the use of helicopters in assisting in some rescue situations while also increasing lifeguard and life saving services surf zone management capacity. Trials are still underway to further refine and develop their use to be operationally sound.

There are also various projects and research underway to develop improvements such as the Smart Beaches<sup>3</sup> project being trialled in Lake Macquarie and Northern Beaches LGAs which aims to improve and simplify beach usage and condition reporting. Council is monitoring the progress and outcomes, with the potential for developments arising from this trial to be rolled-out / implemented in the long term across beaches in the Coffs Harbour area.

On a more basic level, alert / notification systems are improving such as emergency text notification with implications for how the Lifeguard Service could communicate with other stakeholders / beach users, not just in emergency situations, but in relation to conditions and hazards.

Developments in rescue equipment such as powered rescue boards<sup>4</sup> or water propulsion devices<sup>5</sup> are innovations that could integrate well into existing operations with minimal training adjustments while potentially shortening response times.

There are also a range of other technological options that continue to be monitored across the surf safety industry include:

- Remote CCTV and PA systems
- Remote rescue devices
- Remote after-hours response systems / isolated beaches
- Shark barriers / clever buoy / smart drum-lines
- Smart phone / mobile device apps and beacon technology
- Communication systems for general operations / emergency response
- Resuscitation and portable emergency medical equipment

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<sup>2</sup> Westpac Little Ripper Lifesaver, see <https://thelittleripper.com.au/>

<sup>3</sup> Smart Beaches, see <https://www.smartbeaches.com.au/>

<sup>4</sup> See <http://jetson.surf/jetson-rescue/> ; <http://www.wavejet.com.au/>

<sup>5</sup> See <https://seabob.com/en/>

### 3.3.3 Trends in Service Delivery

Coffs Harbour City Council is one of eleven local governments in NSW providing lifeguard services in-house rather than contracting them to an external provider. SLNSW through their commercial arm, ALS, is the contracted provider of patrol services for around fifteen other local authorities. One South Coast based council also contracts their services to Lifeguarding Services Australia, a private company who also provide lifeguard services.

It is noted that, with the exception of the Byron Shire, all year round / 12-month services are at locations where they are undertaken in-house, with the majority of these in the major urban areas of Wollongong, Sydney and Newcastle. In the surrounds of the Coffs Harbour area, all other councils utilise the outsourced services of ALS.

Under the *Local Government Act 1993*, Council is able to delegate the water safety functions to local volunteer SLSCs. However, if the undertaking of the life saving function is formally delegated by Council to the individual clubs, a requirement still exists for the club's life saving activities to also meet the minimum requirements of Practice Note No.15.

Essentially, it is the expectation that both the Council's Lifeguard Service and the volunteer SLSCs will provide an equivalent level of service and that the public will be reassured of their safety as a result.

### 3.3.4 Trends in Patrols

There is recognition in the industry that placing a lifeguard at a location does not necessarily encourage people to swim there as people are typically already attracted and directed by the infrastructure available in that location. Beach users will typically go to an available and convenient location with facilities such as a carpark, showers, picnic tables or other amenities which is influenced by available parking or what the weather conditions are like, not necessarily at a patrolled beach location.

Only 4% of beaches in Australia are actually patrolled by life savers and/or Lifeguards. In regional areas such as the Coffs Coast, this percentage is even lower and many beaches are only patrolled for short holiday periods, as shown in **Table 2**. What is notable about this table is that Coffs Harbour Lifeguard Service is the only service that provides seven and 12 month patrols in the broader region.

**Table 2: Beach Patrols in Coffs Harbour and surrounds**

Council Area	Total number of beaches	School Holiday Patrols (excl. July)	7 months Patrols	Year round Patrols
Clarence Valley	35 beaches	6 = 17.14%	Nil = 0%	Nil = 0%
Coffs Harbour	33 beaches	7 = 21.21%	3 = 9.09%	1 = 3.03%
Bellingen	5 beaches	2 = 40%	Nil = 0%	Nil = 0%
Nambucca	11 beaches	3 = 27.27%	Nil = 0%	Nil = 0%
TOTAL	84 Beaches	18 = 21.43%	3 = 3.57%	1 = 1.19%

As highlighted at the 2019 Coastal Council's Conference, infrastructure upgrades and changes in population density and related development do influence beach usage. This raises the question, what level of activity at a beach deems it appropriate for it to be patrolled by Council?

There is still a traditional focus on flagged surveillance however there are other patrolling systems and surveillance strategies which are more flexible and take into account different uses and usage patterns. For example, patrolling a beach does not require red/yellow flags to be erected. Duranbah beach (NSW/QLD Border) and The Pass (Byron Bay) are being patrolled by Lifeguards without using red/yellow flags. Both have high levels of activity, predominantly surfing with a mix of swimmers and water craft. Patrolling these surf spots in this manner acknowledges the increased activity and is a proactive approach by those respective councils making evidence-based decisions.

Conversely, reduced levels of use can be one of the factors in the removal of patrols, as was partly the case in Corindi in 2014/2015. There is also increasing issues in some localities around the provision of volunteer patrols and the attraction of sufficient volunteer patrolling members. In order for an equivalent level of service to be maintained, this is an important consideration for Council moving forward.

### **3.3.5 Implications for the Service**

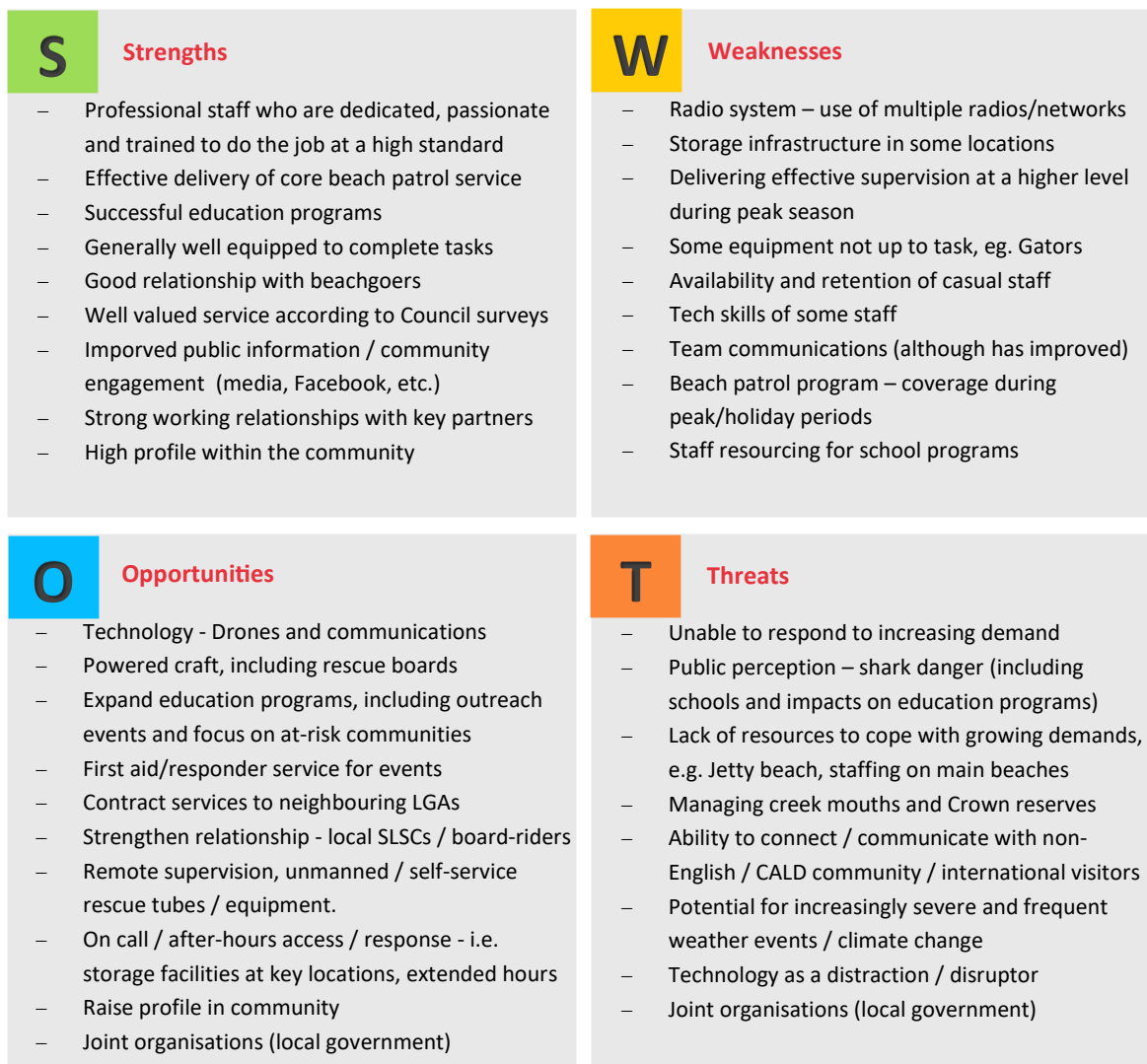
The industry trends associated with the provision of beach patrol services has a number of implications for Council and their own Lifeguard Services. These are summarised below and further considered in Section 5.

- There are a mix of potential service delivery options, with the in-house model used by Council maintaining the greatest level of control, risk avoidance and flexibility in service delivery
- Technology has the potential to radically change the way in which lifeguard / life saving duties are conducted in the medium to long-term. Whilst too early to place complete trust in many of the emerging technologies, being aware of advancements and the potential to integrate technology in the future could see significant benefits over the longer-term
- Maintaining equivalent services across all patrol periods (both volunteer and Council) is paramount to visitor safety and Council's liabilities in providing the service. Of particular note is ensuring that volunteer SLSC are able to maintain sufficient patrolling members to meet SLSNSW and Practice Note 15 - Water Safety standards
- Opportunities for alternative delivery models, including observation without flags, may provide additional safety measures without "endorsing" the area as a swimming destination

These implications will require consideration of service levels and education activities in coming seasons.

## **3.4 SWOT Analysis**

A strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (**SWOT**) analysis has been undertaken to assist in identifying the key elements of the current Lifeguard Service, both positive and negative, which are subsequently used to identify how the Lifeguard Service will change over the initial (1-2 years) and longer-term plan period. A summary SWOT analysis is provided overleaf.



**Figure 9: Coffs Harbour Lifeguard Service SWOT Analysis**

## 4. Desired Future Position

This section provides an overview of the strategic directions that are proposed to be taken for the management of the Coffs Harbour City Lifeguard Service.

### 4.1 Historic directions of the Lifeguard Service

In recent history, Council has generally matched patrol locations and hours to that of local SLSCs, with some exceptions relating to identified needs in peak periods. This direction has been designed around the base premise of ensuring continuity and consistency of services wherever possible between the Council and voluntary services.

Focus has also been made on creating a hierarchy of patrol locations, generally as follows:

- Tier 1: Year-round, full day services / patrols - Park Beach
- Tier 2: Surf Season / 7-month patrols with varying times - Sawtell, Woolgoolga
- Tier 3: School holidays patrols - Diggers Beach, Red Rock
- Tier 4: Peak summer period only patrols - Emerald Beach, Darlington / Lorikeet tourist parks

This hierarchy is however, relatively inconsistent between some patrol locations, as well as between volunteer / Council service times. In relatively recent times, summer holiday services have also been discontinued in Sapphire and Corindi beaches, with the latter being timed with an increase in the patrol period at Woolgoolga.

In the current day, the Lifeguard Service is faced with changing environments and must be in a position to continually review and improve services to remain as effective as possible within resourcing constraints. While this Strategic Plan covers the coming five-year period, Council is also to be cognisant of emerging challenges and opportunities as it prepares for the longer-term.

### 4.2 Desired Future Direction

In the future, there is a clear desire to provide services that are as effective as possible to create safe beaches for the Coffs Harbour community and its visitors. This future direction will need to balance community expectations on service delivery with availability of resources. This translates to a focus for the Service on two key areas:

1. The need to meet expectations of the community and optimise the effectiveness of the lifeguard team structure to suit these expectations – this will be particularly important in moving the Lifeguard Service forward especially in the areas of resource planning, education, decision making and communication
2. Resourcing these expectations through a carefully planned approach to lifeguard services (feet-in-the-sand patrols), educational programs and events focusing on service evaluation, continuous improvement and planning

To achieve this balance, the inclusion of patrols at Jetty Beach is recommended in the short-term, recognising the relative safety of the locality for all (including those that are not confident with surf conditions), potential for inclusive access arrangements and popularity of the area given Council's investment in the foreshore. Incremental increases in service level are also proposed for Woolgoolga and Emerald Beach as well as the inclusion of a third Lifeguard at Park Beach and Sawtell during the Christmas School Holidays over the medium-term.

The proposed changes are recommended to be staged over the five-year Strategic Plan period from financial years 2019-2020 through to 2023-2024. It is noted however, that these changes, if adopted, will require additional resources and are subject to the priorities of Council over coming years. The actions outlined in the Section 5 of this Strategic Plan provide more specific guidance relating to these overarching directions.

#### 4.3 Mission and Vision Statements

The mission for the CHCC Lifeguard Service over the next five-year period is:

To provide best practice lifeguarding in the provision of beach patrols, education and awareness programs, first aid and emergency response, in order to reduce deaths or injuries and enjoy safe use of beaches (and waterways).

With this mission statement in mind, the long term vision for the CHCC Lifeguard Service is:

Zero preventable drownings on Coffs Harbour LGA beaches.

#### 4.4 Principles for Future Direction

The key principles driving the Lifeguard Service to achieve the overarching vision are as follows:

- Principle 1: To provide supervised places where individuals and families feel safe, both in and out of the water
- Principle 2: To be equipped and resourced to enable the delivery of core patrol and emergency response services
- Principle 3: To be a respected and recognised community leader through high quality education that is inclusive, inviting and relevant to the needs of beach users
- Principle 4: To build supportive and strong partnerships with key stakeholders that will benefit service provision
- Principle 5: To be in a position to anticipate and react to changing innovations, as well as community needs and interests over time

#### 4.5 Summary of Future Service Requirements

To meet the future directions of the Lifeguard Service there are five core future business requirements that are sought during the Strategic Plan period.

- 1 Firstly, to sustain high quality beach patrol services commensurate with the increasing demands being placed on the services from population growth, redevelopment of foreshore areas and increased beach use by high risk groups. Growth in service provision will need to be carefully monitored with recognised hot spots - particularly around the Jetty Beach to Park Beach area - to be prioritised in the short-term.
- 2 Secondly, a clearer hierarchy of service provision would be beneficial - including a stronger correlation of service provision between Council Lifeguards and volunteer SLSCs. This would see Park Beach remaining as the top Tier 1 facility, with services in Woolgoolga (with a greater

population growth and extensive foreshore improvement plans in place) being increased over time to match Sawtell as Tier 2 service locations. Other localities would be patrolled on a holiday period basis – typically being over the peak Christmas holiday period at a minimum or school holidays during the surf season.

- 3 Thirdly, and in support of both patrol and emergency response needs, the level of supporting infrastructure would need to be comparable with these hierarchical needs. Storage facilities and key infrastructure such as PWCs, safe elevated viewing areas and storage facilities, would be available in Woolgoolga, Park Beach and Sawtell, whilst other localities would be more akin to their relative demands over the peak period, typically utilising mobile equipment or dedicated storage where necessary.
- 4 Fourthly, in support of prevention rather than reaction, education services will become all the more critical. Of particular importance will be maintaining the successful schools-based programs whilst continuing to identify opportunities to engage with at-risk communities, in particular CALD communities which have high levels of representation in drowning deaths over recent years.
- 5 Finally, to enable effective delivery of services, there is a need for the ongoing improvement of relationships and understanding between Council's Lifeguard Service and volunteer SLSCs and respective peak bodies. Together, both life savers and lifeguards have a core role in public safety. Working together provides greater sharing of resources, expertise and provides a basis for even greater outcomes for the community. These relationships need to be both day to day, as well as at higher levels where Council's formal agreements and delegations need to be clearly understood from a risk management and legal perspective.

These directions are considered to be relatively low-cost when compared to the services provided and their importance to the community and the tourist economy. Ensuring that sufficient financial resources are available and most effectively allocated is key to ensuring ongoing success of the Lifeguard Service.



## 5. Future Service Delivery Directions

This section provides an overview of the key service delivery directions that need to be addressed within the context of the Lifeguard Service over the next five years to enable the future position outlined in the previous section to be fully realised. Key issues have been identified under four core areas:

- 5.1 Beach and Water **Safety**
- 5.2 Emergency Response **Role**
- 5.3 **Education**
- 5.4 Other Service Delivery **Improvements**

Each area provides a brief review of the existing situation / issues which have been identified, the proposed future directions and the proposed strategies to be pursued to support the desired outcome. The relationship to the principles for the service (see Section 4.4) are also provided.

Timeframes used in this section are as follows:

- *Short-term*: 1 year
- *Medium-term*: 2-3 years
- *Long-term*: 3-5 years
- *Ongoing*: recurring strategy
- *As required*: strategy to be undertaken when triggered

### 5.1 Beach and Water Safety

#### 5.1.1 Beach Patrols

The current mix of beach patrol times and localities is considered to be generally in-line with community needs and reasonable requirements. There are however, some recognised pressures and requests that require attention as follows:

- Consideration of patrols at Jetty Beach and Corindi Beach, as well as supervision in the Moonee Beach / Moonee Creek area
- Provision of increased staffing around Park Beach, North Wall, Coffs Creek and Jetty Beach - particularly across the peak summer period
- Establishing consistency across patrol times in accordance with the four-tier system
- Provision of increased staffing at Sawtell Beach across the peak summer period, with noted potential need for long-term transition (beyond the period of this Strategic Plan) to some level of service throughout the year (need to be monitored over time)

With respect to patrol locations, a number of factors suggest that some level of lifeguard service at Jetty Beach is warranted. For instance, this would enable closer supervision of the North Wall area / beach, whilst enabling supervision of Jetty Beach that encourages a safe swimming location for those that do not have a high level of confidence in the water (e.g. some CALD community members) and enable a highly accessible beach area - potentially in conjunction with a beach mat and beach wheelchairs being available. Provision of a lifeguard service at Jetty Beach over the Peak Summer period would not only increase service levels, but also reduce the need for additional staff at Park Beach as responsibilities could be shared across both areas (or otherwise a third and potentially fourth staff member would be needed to monitor the Coffs Creek and North Wall areas).

Beach usage patterns at Sawtell beach over the Peak Summer period have highlighted a similar need to that at Park Beach for an additional staff member to be on duty over that time. Sawtell is continuing to grow as a popular destination and long term there is likely to be demand for some level of service year-round. Woolgoolga as the third key patrol location also has a number of factors suggesting an expansion of service, specifically patrol hours, is warranted in the short-term, with foreshore upgrades and opening of the Woolgoolga to Ballina section of the Pacific Highway also likely to see increased visitation that will need to be monitored.

A patrol at Corindi Beach has been sought by the community in recent years following the decision to dis-continue the Corindi Service following 2013/2014 season. The Red Rock / Corindi SLSC have been unable to sustain sufficient members to patrol Red Rock Beach, which has led to a drop in patrol days and advise that a further or alternative service at Corindi would not be possible for them. The alternative to a volunteer service is for Council to provide a seasonal service similar to that provided at Emerald Beach. In comparison to Emerald Beach, Corindi has similar demographic characteristics, though with a resident population of around 25% fewer people. Future monitoring of population growth and investigation of ongoing sustainable funding for services (e.g. from the Reflections Holiday Parks group) is warranted, though provision of a new service in the short-term and without suitable funding is not considered to be viable.

Similarly, whilst Moonee Beach is Crown Land under the control of a separate State Park (i.e. not Council) and is not considered to be safe enough to encourage swimming via a patrol style service, there may be opportunities for a supervisory style role for Council's Lifeguard Service in the area. Again, seeking a sustainable funding source would be necessary - such as the neighbouring Reflections Holiday Park. Revision and consistency of signage is also an ongoing issue for this area as further discussed in Section 5.1.3.

With respect to patrol times, progression to the following hierarchy is recommended, in discussion with SLSCs where applicable.

- Tier 1: Year round
  - Generally: 9am - 4pm EST and 9am - 5pm EDST
  - Peak Summer period (26 December - 26 January): 9am - 7pm
- Tier 2: Surf season only
  - Generally: 9am - 4pm EST and 9am - 5pm EDST
  - Peak Summer period (26 December - 26 January): 9am - 7pm
- Tier 3: Holiday period only
  - Generally: 9am - 4pm EST and 9am - 5pm EDST
- Tier 4: Peak period only
  - Peak Summer period (26 December - 26 January): 9am - 5pm

Provision of consistent times is important to ensure public confidence and understanding of the available patrolled swimming times, particularly between service providers at the same locations (i.e. times are the same between Council and volunteer services). There is also a need where reasonable for patrol times to match usage patterns and community need, requiring ongoing monitoring and resourcing considerations.

School holiday periods are recognised peak periods with the Lifeguard Service using the NSW School holiday periods for patrol times. However, the NSW Christmas school holidays do not exactly match the 'Peak Summer' period and the NSW School holidays generally do not always align with those in other states, for example, Queensland typically differs from NSW by a week. Interstate tourism contributes to beach usage in the area and the completion of the Pacific Highway upgrade in coming years will increase the accessibility of the area to interstate tourists to the north.

The increased demands on the Lifeguard Service and logistics of delivery mean that the management requirements have similarly increased, raising some difficulties and competing priorities for a team leader required to also conduct beach patrols. This is an unusual operating situation which has implications for efficiencies and delivery options across the service.

**Future Directions:**

In the short-term, the commencement of patrols at Jetty Beach is identified as the highest priority, in conjunction with access facilities that would be provided during patrol times and otherwise to become available upon request / booking system. This would be combined with opportunities for education for targeted groups, including the continuation of regular events (say two per annum) as further discussed in Section 5.3.1. Other known areas of potential future services will be monitored, with a view to identifying potential sustainable funding sources to facilitate such services over time (see further details in Section 5.4.4).

Consistency of patrol times via a four-tier system will remain a target over coming years. Ongoing discussion with SLSCs and a staged approach to meeting these would be required. In the short-term, targeting a consistent 9am patrol commencement over all patrol sites is required. Similarly, an increase to 7pm over the Peak Summer period at key locations is a priority in order to match usage patterns, community need and emergency response characteristics.

Expansion of patrol hours would be discussed and agreed with SLSCs / SLS NSW over the Strategic Plan period. Options that may be further explored in conjunction with the SLSCs include potential for split shifts between service providers, supplementary resourcing / supervision from Council staff and non-flagged surveillance for part of the extended period.

The relevance of NSW and interstate School Holiday periods on beach usage should also be monitored in conjunction with the progress of the Pacific Highway upgrade and expectations for increased visitation from Queensland in particular. Once completed, monitoring of relevant statistics, for example bookings from Council's own holiday parks in Woolgoolga, would be beneficial.

The issue of increased demand on management of the Lifeguard Service for the Team Leader will also need to be monitored and resolved through staffing arrangements taking into account proposed additional patrols and staffing requirements.

**Relevant Principles:**

*Principle 1: To provide supervised places where individuals and families feel safe, both in and out of the water*

*Principle 4: To build supportive and strong partnerships with key stakeholders that will benefit service provision*

*Principle 5: To be in a position to anticipate and react to changing innovations, as well as community needs and interests over time*

**Actions:**

Establish and monitor a Lifeguard Service patrol at Jetty Beach, initially over the peak summer period (26 December to 26 January), with a view to future expansion following review of initial year of operation.

Short-term  
Unfunded: Est.  
\$10,000 setup +  
\$35,000 ongoing

Monitor need for additional patrol services, particularly at Corindi Beach and Moonee Beach, in conjunction with identification of ongoing funding sources, such as the Reflections Holiday Parks group.	Ongoing <i>Funding source TBC: Est. \$10,000 setup + \$35,000 ongoing (per location)</i>
In conjunction with SLSCs prior to 2019/2020 season, modify patrol times to seek consistency wherever possible for the next season, with an initial focus on all days being patrolled and with a 9am commencement.	Short-term <i>Dependant on SLSC capacity to extend</i>
In conjunction with SLSCs, develop a three-year transitional plan to create a consistent set of patrol times based on the tiered approach, including modification, supplementary services or non-flagged surveillance where necessary.	Short-term <i>Required resources TBC</i>
Upon opening of the Pacific Highway to South East Queensland, monitor beach usage during non-NSW school holiday periods where possible, with supplementary evidence from Council's tourist parks or other providers / data sources. Where deemed necessary, adjust patrol start / end dates and patrol times accordingly.	As required <i>Monitoring within existing resources</i>
Over the peak summer period, assign an additional (third) lifeguard at Sawtell Beach and monitor beach usage outside the current patrol period with a view to resourcing the expansion of patrol hours (to 7pm). Continue to monitor beach usage patterns over the longer-term for potential need to expand off-peak period patrols.	Short-term <i>Unfunded: Est. \$9,200 ongoing</i>
Over the peak summer period, assign an additional (third) lifeguard at Park Beach and extend hours to 7pm. Monitor beach usage outside of this period with a view to resourcing further expansion of patrol hours/periods and/or staff if required.	Short-term <i>Unfunded: Est. \$20,000 ongoing</i>
Review options for team leader patrol involvement versus a demand-based / flexible role that can more effectively respond to specific priorities whether these be on-beach or in a broader management capacity.	Medium-term <i>Unfunded: Est. \$36,000 ongoing</i>

### 5.1.2 Council Beach Patrol Infrastructure

To enable Council's beach surveillance (and emergency rescue) activities to be undertaken effectively, there is a need for related support infrastructure that is required over and above the immediate rescue equipment. This includes development of adequate storage areas to suit both current and future use, as well as the provision of observation towers / areas and adequacy of beach access.

Planning for storage facilities has commenced at Woolgoolga and Emerald Beach, storage at Sawtell was completed in early 2019, a storage facility at Diggers Beach has been completed and storage at Park Beach is sufficient for current needs with minor upgrade. However, locations such as Jetty Beach have no plans at this stage to address potential storage needs should this area be patrolled as recommended (including potential for access matting and beach wheelchairs) - albeit preliminary discussion with the neighbouring Yacht Club suggests that suitable arrangement could be made to utilise the Club's existing facilities.

Lifeguard towers are another important piece of infrastructure that reflects best practice supervision of beaches. As beach areas are developed and planned, consideration should be made as to the inclusion of lifeguard surveillance towers or elevated platforms at key locations. It is noted that Park

Beach facility is suitable, however the location and long-term planning of the Sawtell facility, and a facility within the planning context of the Woolgoolga foreshore master plan is required. The design of a portable, towable tower compliant with WHS and engineering specifications would also add value to the tier 3 and 4 service areas where towers could be established for the patrol season only.

A further overarching infrastructure issue is that of beach access for all beach managers and users - including for access by lifeguards and life savers. Due to the highly variable nature of the coastal zone within which the Lifeguard Service operates, access infrastructure is often located in high risk zones subject to change from tidal or storm impacts. This has resulted in significant access safety concerns in several locations. Management and delivery of a service within this context requires long term planning, monitoring and a well-considered risk management approach.

#### **Future Directions:**

Over time, planned infrastructure improvements will need to be considered at the master plan stages of relevant areas, and incorporated in existing spaces where available. The current planned roll-out of storage facilities includes:

- 2019/2020 - Park Beach Reserve
- 2020/2021 - Woolgoolga Beach and Emerald Beach
- 2022/2024 - Jetty Beach

With respect to elevated surveillance infrastructure, the relocation of the Woolgoolga SLSC facilities and the subsequent upgrade of the Woolgoolga foreshore provides an opportunity to identify and pursue an effective purpose designed outcome that can meet the needs of lifeguard patrols. Existing plans for Woolgoolga contain a reference to the need for such a facility and this will need to be further considered through the detailed design process.

Consideration of forward planning for Sawtell Beach tower replacement and for mobile towers in other localities would be considered moving forward through the medium and longer-term of the Strategic Plan. Similarly, storage for Jetty Beach would be considered pending agreement to pursue this direction, with an approach to the Yacht Club to share existing onsite storage in the short-term being a logical first step.

Beach access infrastructure in areas where the Lifeguard Service operates is a broader management concern for Council, as well as Crown Lands. Ensuring that these issues can be addressed through long-term planning (such as the case in Woolgoolga and Jetty Beach) is important, with the continued monitoring and communication with the respective stakeholders being important to resolve short-term erosion or similar incidents, e.g. replenishment of sand to fix ramp washouts and long-term maintenance/ replacement of infrastructure to more suitable options as and when available.

#### **Relevant Principles:**

*Principle 1: To provide supervised places where individuals and families feel safe, both in and out of the water*

*Principle 2: To be equipped and resourced to enable the delivery of core patrol and emergency response services*

*Principle 4: To build supportive and strong partnerships with key stakeholders that will benefit service provision*

### **Actions:**

Undertake a staged implementation of storage facilities in accordance with relevant development contribution plans and associated works programs.	Ongoing and as required <i>Within existing resources</i>
Ensure that elevated surveillance infrastructure is incorporated into the detailed design works for the Woolgoolga foreshore area, in consultation with relevant areas of Council and including the Lifeguard Service and Woolgoolga SLSC.	As required <i>Incorporate into foreshore dev. project – to be investigated</i>
Consider options and obtain pricing for the replacement of the Sawtell Beach tower to be in a position to attract grant funding in advance of alternative funding becoming available.	Medium-term <i>Asset renewal resources, grant funds could assist</i>
Review options and develop a business case and costs for the acquisition of mobile surveillance towers for use at seasonal patrol locations and as back-up for permanent infrastructure.	Medium-term <i>Within existing resources</i>
Continue to monitor, manage and respond to beach access maintenance needs with a view to improving infrastructure over time and as opportunities present (for example at Woolgoolga as part of the Woolgoolga foreshore planning).	Ongoing <i>Within existing resources</i>

### **5.1.3 Signage**

In acknowledging that not all beaches can be patrolled, or that patrols can only be resourced within realistic constraints, signage plays an important role in "remote surveillance" of beaches throughout the area. However, despite being within the LGA, there are a number of foreshore areas (such as Monee Beach) which are not under the care, control or management of Council. These areas have existing signage and other infrastructure that is not entirely consistent with those found in Council controlled locations.

This matter is complicated by processes undertaken by SLSNSW under a state-wide beach safety project commonly referred to as "Project Blueprint". The resulting *Coastal Public Safety Risk Assessment - Coffs Harbour Local Government Area - July 2013* recommended actions regarding signage standards which differed from the view of Council's insurer. With a new version of "Project Blueprint" process about to commence, there are however opportunities to improve relationships and develop increased consistency between all public space signage.

Given the tourism focus of the LGA, it is also important to consider opportunities to provide water safety information and educational information in ways that enable engagement with this sector - for example by increasing the range of languages used or improving imagery / symbols that have greater international understanding. This physical signage approach can also be used alongside more targeted opportunities for education through social media platforms and other digital channels and mechanisms used by this sector.

### **Future Directions:**

The second round of Project Blueprint, which is due to be conducted by SLSNSW over the next four years, provides a structured opportunity to engage with SLSNSW, Statewide Mutual (Council's insurer) and Crown authorities to create consensus amongst the parties involved in foreshore signage in the LGA. This will assist in providing long-term direction to the issue of signage consistency and Council's active participation in the project is critical to these outcomes.

Alongside this process, and as a matter of general best practice, internal auditing and assessment of existing signage would assist in informing future works schedules over time. This may include the rationalisation of, or update / improvement to, existing signage. Changes to existing signage may also be necessary in relation to modification or additional to patrol times and locations, and to implement multi-lingual signage in key locations.

### **Relevant Principles:**

*Principle 3: To be a respected and recognised community leader through high quality education that is inclusive, inviting and relevant to the needs of beach users*

*Principle 4: To build supportive and strong partnerships with key stakeholders that will benefit service provision*

*Principle 5: To be in a position to anticipate and react to changing innovations, as well as community needs and interests over time*

### **Actions:**

Undertake an internal audit to review Lifeguard Service related signage, identifying priorities to rationalise and improve signage in terms of effectiveness and consistency over time, including consideration of multi-lingual and related signage targeting at-risk groups.	Short-term <i>Unfunded: costs to be confirmed</i>
Based on the outcomes of an internal audit, improve existing signage through planned works schedules.	Ongoing <i>Unfunded: costs to be confirmed</i>
Actively engage with the Project Blueprint process to ensure the consistency of signage throughout the foreshore areas of the LGA can be addressed over the longer-term.	As required <i>Within existing resources</i>

#### **5.1.4 Skills and training**

With respect to frontline service provision, Practice Note 15 sets out the skills and training standards for lifeguards and life saving volunteers. Council's Lifeguard Service currently complies with this standard and there is a commitment to ensure these standards continue to be met and are incorporated into team and individual training plans.

The Lifeguard Service also relies on a number of casual employees alongside a small number of permanent staff. As a result, careful monitoring of training and skills needs will continue to be required in line with changes in staff, patrols, service delivery models, usage of technology (e.g. drones) and communications. Differences in education and skills requirements for supervisors and educators also needs to be recognised to ensure these staff are able effectively undertake their roles.

### **Future Directions:**

As a frontline service requirement, and with potential expansion of hours and locations in peak periods, training programs will need to ensure adequate numbers of staff with appropriate skill levels are available for all locations e.g. training in beach supervision and equipment operation.

Pre-season and regular re-refresh training and skills development throughout the season are identified by staff as a key opportunity. This could be timed to occur at the commencement of different periods - for example, pre-surf season, pre-peak period and again at the pre-Easter period. These could be undertaken alongside fitness assessments at the commencement of the season.

The delivery of education programs also requires a specific skill set, and these positions would benefit from targeted training and mentoring of staff to deliver these important preventative services. Consideration will also need to be given to training in the understanding of multi-cultural groups so that targeted education campaigns and education events are delivered in effective ways.

With trainer assessors on staff there is also an opportunity to run training or skills development in house as well as for and with volunteer SLSCs to improve skill levels and build connections. Shared training and skills development opportunities may assist in breaking-down barriers between these groups.

### **Relevant Principles:**

*Principle 1: To provide supervised places where individuals and families feel safe, both in and out of the water*

*Principle 3: To be a respected and recognised community leader through high quality education that is inclusive, inviting and relevant to the needs of beach users*

*Principle 4: To build supportive and strong partnerships with key stakeholders that will benefit service provision*

*Principle 5: To be in a position to anticipate and react to changing innovations, as well as community needs and interests over time*

### **Actions:**

Review skills and training needs of Lifeguard Service staff to ensure ongoing compliance with Practice Note 15 - Water Safety, including potential for expanded services and additional training needs.

Ongoing  
*Within existing resources*

Develop a more comprehensive preseason and recurring staff training / assessment program, to include training for compliance with Practice Note 15, skills development opportunities and fitness assessments.

Short-term  
*Within existing resources*

Explore opportunities to conduct joint skills or training exercises with volunteer SLSCs, potentially in conjunction with Council training / assessment programs.

Medium-term  
*Unfunded: Est. \$5,000 per exercise*

Identify training / mentoring needs and opportunities for key staff involved in education programs, including for example, multi-cultural education and other as required.

Short-term  
*Within existing resources*



## 5.2 Emergency Response Role

The Lifeguard Service's emergency response role is an important part of their core service delivery. In undertaking this function, there are a number of issues that are noted around information sharing, response capability and the systems employed to ensure responses are effective and timely.

With respect to information, where the Lifeguard Service responds to emergency call-outs, internal records are kept and if required (as per any significant incident) debriefing is undertaken as part of Council's standard processes. However, the Lifeguard Service is not always the one to respond and information relating to these "other" situations are instead retained centrally by 13 SURF and are not readily available or provided to Council, meaning that review and improvements to services provision, infrastructure related issues or training opportunities can be missed.

With respect to response capability, the timing of patrols influences the ability of staff to respond in an effective manner as it is more efficient to respond from a patrol location, with all equipment to hand, than from home. Similarly, the availability of equipment at strategic locations is important to enable timely responses without the need to detour to retrieve equipment such as PWCs.

This capability and responsiveness also relate back to long daylight hours and high numbers of 'swimmable days' over the Peak Summer period. 60% of emergency response call-outs occur outside of patrol hours, often in the 5 - 7pm period when patrols have ceased, meaning responses are "from home" rather than from patrol locations. During patrol periods, current staffing arrangements (two staff per beach) means that any response during this time requires staff to close a beach to respond, highlighting the deficiencies of not having a more flexible staffing system (for example, a mobile supervisor that is not tied to a specific beach).

From a systems perspective, the on-call system of emergency response is supported by a strong team culture and convenient placement of staff home addresses. Familiarity of staff (including casuals) with beaches and access points is important to ensure emergency response is fast and effective. Responses also require coordination with other agencies, often SLSCs, necessitating high levels of communication protocols and compatible equipment.

### ***Future Directions:***

Alongside localised benefits, the expansion of patrol times, addition of patrol locations and the inclusion of additional staff at key locations over the Peak Summer period would also help to alleviate emergency response impacts. This can be achieved through either eliminating the emergency situation by being present at the locality, or through higher levels of trained staff availability and their ability to respond from a work location.

However, it is also recognised that staff cannot be present at all times, and effective response during non-patrol times remains a key capability. This can be achieved most effectively by maintaining the strong team culture, supported by the necessary equipment. This means having PWCs and related infrastructure in the north, central and southern parts of the LGA, enabling ready access for staff response. Similarly, communications infrastructure such as radios must be current and consistent with broader response networks (e.g. SLSCs, Police and Emergency Services).

Connecting training and skills development to beach familiarity, including with beach access points for responding to emergencies would assist - particularly for supervisory/senior staff that may be on-call on a more regular basis. Regular monitoring of beach access points, and rectification of beach access issues (such as wash-outs after storm periods) is also important to practical implementation of emergency response. How the on-call roster system can best meet Lifeguard Service staff and coverage needs could also be examined to assist in creating efficiencies in response capability.

Following an emergency response, internal monitoring and review of data on call-outs, in addition to requesting timely information on all coastal call-outs from 13 SURF, will help to inform ongoing Lifeguard Service and Council management of the surf zone and foreshore areas. Outcomes of these reviews should be shared with SLSCs, with whom regular (annually initially) joint emergency scenario training would also be beneficial.

**Relevant Principles:**

*Principle 2: To be equipped and resourced to enable the delivery of core patrol and emergency response services*

*Principle 4: To build supportive and strong partnerships with key stakeholders that will benefit service provision*

*Principle 5: To be in a position to anticipate and react to changing innovations, as well as community needs and interests over time*

**Actions:**

Maintain internal monitoring and data on all call-outs, including those from 13 SURF that may not have involved the Lifeguard Service (but within the LGA), and review information collected for relevance to future planning.	Ongoing <i>Within existing resources</i>
Continue to monitor and improve beach access points including regular site inspection (annual) as well as review following storm events to inform emergency response planning and preparedness.	Ongoing <i>Within existing resources</i>
Replace radios and applicable communications equipment when required and to ensure emergency communications are maintained (including with switch to digital systems as required).	As required <i>Within existing resources</i>
In conjunction or in addition to Lifeguard Service staff training, conduct joint emergency response training exercise with volunteer SLSCs and others where possible, preferably at least annually in the lead-up to the peak summer period.	Short-term and Ongoing <i>Unfunded: Est. \$5,000 per exercise</i>
Review how the on-call roster system for emergency response can best meet Lifeguard Service, staff and coverage needs.	Short-term <i>Within existing resources</i>
Ensure staff familiarity with beach access points for responding to emergencies as part of ongoing training and skills development.	Short-term and Ongoing <i>Within existing resources</i>
Ensure availability of equipment, including PWCs, for emergency response in north (Woolgoolga), central (Park Beach) and southern (Sawtell) areas of the LGA. Regularly maintain and ensure such equipment is in good working order.	Short-term and Ongoing <i>Within existing resources</i>

## 5.3 Education

### 5.3.1 Schools

The Lifeguard Service has a well-established and successful education program which reaches the majority of schools in the LGA and some beyond. Recent restructuring of the Lifeguard Service team has been undertaken to include a dedicated education role (in conjunction with wider duties). This has assisted in streamlining this aspect with participating schools indicating their appreciation of the ease of communication and organisation (particularly via phone or email).

The current format of the school program follows APOLA certificates which are curriculum endorsed and well received. There is however, a gap in this service and demand is indicated from participating schools for more tailored sessions according to lower ability / experience students as well as new arrivals - again being a targeted at-risk group.

The success of the program is highly reliant on the provision of experienced and enthusiastic staff, and this is seen as a current strength of the service. There is however still the potential to assist staff and expand their capacity and confidence in an educational context as identified in the Skills and training section 5.1.4.

#### **Future Directions:**

Consultation revealed a positive response to the existing service offering, albeit also an identified need and support from participating schools for additional programs tailored to new arrivals, less able swimmers and CALD students to fill gaps and enable full participation in the wider programs.

This consultation feedback aligns with broader recognition of at-risk groups within the local catchment and the need for additional services targeted to CALD communities both now, and into the foreseeable future (see further details in Section 5.3.2). Over time, the provision of patrols at Jetty Beach may also aid in staffing the delivery of education programs as it is already used in case of poor conditions in more open beach locations and is identified as a preferable location for education of those that are less confident in the water.

Alongside the development of any additional programs and materials, a review and update of existing educational materials in light of the evolution of the program, and in conjunction with APOLA, would be beneficial.

In a broader resourcing sense, the increased demand on the education role, not just for the schools' programs but also reaching at risk community members, also needs to be taken into account as part of workload management and allocation of staff resources. Potential exists for such a position to be education orientated in all non-holiday periods, and to otherwise assist in peak period frontline services.

#### **Relevant Principles:**

*Principle 3: To be a respected and recognised community leader through high quality education that is inclusive, inviting and relevant to the needs of beach users*

*Principle 4: To build supportive and strong partnerships with key stakeholders that will benefit service provision*

### **Actions:**

As an ongoing process of schools-based education, undertake an annual review and update of education materials in conjunction with updates from APOLA or as otherwise required based on local conditions.

Short-term and Ongoing

*Unfunded: Est. \$3,000 ongoing*

Identify opportunities for the funding, development and delivery of targeted education for new arrivals, CALD students and lower ability swimmers.

Medium-term

*Unfunded: Est. \$23,400 per year of targeted program, investigate grants and partnerships*

In recognition of potential for greater resourcing implications across Lifeguard Service, consider options for greater allocation of time off-beach for education staff to pursue and deliver expanded education program to schools and other at-risk communities, generally at a cost recovery basis.

Short-term

*Cost recovery activity*

### **5.3.2 Reaching At-Risk and Underrepresented Communities**

Prevention through education is a core strategy for the Lifeguard Service to continue to provide safe and accessible beach locations. This includes the identification and response to those groups and circumstances that most frequently require emergency assistance or may otherwise be at-risk or under-represented in the Coffs Harbour's coastal lifestyle. These communities include:

- CALD communities
- Low, restricted and dis-ability groups
- Visitors and tourists including international and domestic from inland rural locations

A number of local organisations working with refugee, migrant and disability groups have highlighted the importance of beach accessibility and water safety education, some of whom the Lifeguard Service already work with. The success and response to events such as the recent Multicultural Surf Awareness day reinforced the importance of this aspect of the service. Many have expressed an interest in working collaboratively with the Lifeguard Service to deliver targeted programs.

For example, SSI (who are based both locally and throughout Australia) has already funded and run migrant specific water safety programs in Sydney which could be used as a blueprint and precedent for more localised versions. The Lifeguard Service has also run similar programs with blueberry farms in the area who employ CALD workers and provides informative material to the tourism sector which should continue.

In addition to face-to-face education, social media platforms including the Lifeguard Service's Facebook page are an important secondary source of information for providing and sharing education, as well as linking with visitor websites and pages. Other platforms, such as Instagram, could also be built up and utilised further in the future in order to reach a younger audience demographic.

### **Future Directions:**

Recognising the Lifeguard Service's previous unsuccessful funding applications, the greater use of partnerships with service providers in order to deliver and/or submit joint funding applications for programs targeting multicultural or ability related funding is recommended. A number of local

service providers have indicated support for such an approach with multicultural and ability based programs being identified as a preferable way to target parents, not just children (which are identified through schools based education in Section 5.3.1).

Existing targeted programs such as with the seasonal workers (e.g. blueberries) should be continued and expanded where possible. Other additional opportunities also exist to reach CALD community members such as through English classes run by TAFE with a wide catchment pool of participants. For instance, the Lifeguard Service could partner, run a session and/ or inform content of these classes.

Additional educational material and signage, as discussed in section 5.3.1, could be made available in languages other than English however the effectiveness and need for these should be assessed in conjunction with representative groups and service providers. Other alternatives for at-beach education is via technology innovations such as the Life-fi<sup>6</sup> system being trialled in Queensland and which provides targeted messaging via a localised wi-fi access and audio in a range of languages, and similarly beacon technology for use with mobile devices.

Inland, domestic beach users particularly children, could also be reached with support of NGOs who work in the area, including through access to drought funding assistance or a collaboration directly with the NSW Department of Education. It is noted however, that whilst these services would be preferable, the ongoing localised schools and targeted efforts are the current high priorities.

With respect to the use of media, both social and more traditional, the development of a basic media strategy would assist the service to ensure that messaging and campaign efforts are well structured and utilising the most effective means available to suit the required demographic. This would also highlight, and be complemented by, media training for staff.

In lieu of a media strategy that suggests otherwise, continuing to provide information to tourism accommodation and service providers remains as a conduit to informing and incorporating water safety messaging into tourism and promotional material.

From a frontline service perspective, the opportunity to engage "on the sand" with targeted at-risk groups would be significantly improved by provision of patrols at Jetty Beach. The area has been highlighted as an attractive alternative to a full "surf beach" location, in particular for some CALD members of the community and for those with reduced access. Opportunities for combining information and education at the same time as patrols (e.g. through the Life-Fi and other static displays / information) would reinforce the use of this area as a "safe haven" for these targeted groups and under-represented communities.

**Relevant Principles:**

*Principle 1: To provide supervised places where individuals and families feel safe, both in and out of the water*

*Principle 3: To be a respected and recognised community leader through high quality education that is inclusive, inviting and relevant to the needs of beach users*

*Principle 4: To build supportive and strong partnerships with key stakeholders that will benefit service provision*

*Principle 5: To be in a position to anticipate and react to changing innovations, as well as community needs and interests over time*

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<sup>6</sup> See <http://lifesaving.com.au/revolutionary-technology-help-save-lives-surfers-paradise/>

## Actions:

Partner with migrant, refugee and disability service providers such as SSI, Guide Dogs and St Vincent de Paul to identify, attract funding and deliver specific education programs and accessible beach events.	Short-term and Ongoing <i>Within existing resources / grants &amp; other funding sourced</i>
In conjunction migrant, refugee and disability service providers, explore opportunities to reach wider CALD community through collaboration and input into TAFE programs or other education avenues.	Medium-term <i>Within existing resources</i>
Prepare and implement a media strategy for the Lifeguard Service to include opportunities to target specific audiences by media type, media training for staff and other matters as required.	Short-term <i>Within existing resources</i>
In lieu of alternative advice via the media strategy, continue to provide information and educational material to tourism accommodation and service providers as a conduit to visitors.	Ongoing <i>Within existing resources</i>
Continue to work with seasonal worker farms and industry participants / co-operatives who employ high proportions of CALD workers including delivery of seasonal workshops and/or other programs as required.	Ongoing <i>Within existing resources</i>
Explore opportunities, potentially within the context of broader campaigns with the Department of Education or as part of drought relief programs, for the delivery of education programs for inland regional students.	Medium-term <i>Within existing resources / cost-recovery</i>
Pending approval for expansion of services, promote commencement of patrols at Jetty Beach as a safe and accessible patrol location alternative for CALD, disability and others without full 'surf beach' confidence, including availability of on beach information and education.	Short-term <i>Unfunded: Est. \$5,000</i>

## 5.4 Other Service Delivery Improvements

### 5.4.1 Providing Accessible Services

For a number of years, the Lifeguard Service has offered free use and booking of two adult "Sandcruiser" all-terrain beach wheelchairs available at Park Beach and Woolgoolga while also promoting a number of other beach wheelchairs available for free community use from SLSCs and the Coffs Harbour Yacht Club.

While take-up of these has been irregular / occasional, an emphasis on inclusion within Council and more broadly has recently increased. Recent upgrades to foreshore facilities such as at Jetty Beach, and future planning for the Woolgoolga Beach, make further and substantial increases in these access arrangements. Whilst access ramps (including boat ramps and pedestrian ramps) are present at a number of other beaches and waterways within the LGA, none of these would be considered as

being compliant with applicable or preferred standards. Many of these are susceptible to erosion during storm and weather events.

As previously discussed in section 5.3.2, there are a number of organisations and groups invested in the provision of accessible services. This is supported by Council's Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2017-2021 which also identifies the need to review beach access for people with mobility issues, including the use of beach wheelchairs and beach mats. Provision of these services has been echoed by representative groups in regard to the provision of a beach mat and associated infrastructure, particularly at Jetty Beach. Such infrastructure would complement the existing infrastructure at Jetty Beach and assist those utilising mobility aides (from wheelchairs to walkers and prams) to access the hard sand and the water.

There is also a request to expand the range of wheelchairs available to include adult and child sized "Hippocampe" style wheelchairs which is a more versatile model than that currently provided by Council. An adult chair of this model is currently provided by the Coffs Harbour Yacht Club and in conjunction with the measures suggested in regards to a beach mat, its use provides an opportunity to stage and evaluate the specifics of need before investing in additional chairs.

#### **Future Directions:**

In light of recent infrastructure upgrades and existing community use of the Jetty Beach area as well as the feasibility and appropriateness of other beach locations, establishment of patrols at Jetty Beach is considered to be best option to provide an accessible and safe beach in the LGA. By initially operating patrols over the peak summer period, operations can then be reviewed with a view to future expansion dependant on need / demand.

Purchase of a Mobi-Mat for use of Jetty Beach would, in conjunction with existing infrastructure, make the area even more accessible to non-beach wheelchair users and those with mobility issues, using mobility aides, or with prams etc. The administration of this service could initially be combined with the delivery of patrols and, dependant on further demand, could progress to a booking or hire system or arrangement with community group, other organisation or contractor outside of established patrols.

The above measures complement other identified access needs from at-risk members of the community as discussed in section 5.3.2, particularly the provision of a patrolled low impact surf beach location where CALD communities and less-confident swimmers can attend the beach in a safe and patrolled environment.

#### **Relevant Principles:**

*Principle 1: To provide supervised places where individuals and families feel safe, both in and out of the water*

*Principle 2: To be equipped and resourced to enable the delivery of core patrol and emergency response services*

*Principle 3: To be a respected and recognised community leader through high quality education that is inclusive, inviting and relevant to the needs of beach users*

*Principle 4: To build supportive and strong partnerships with key stakeholders that will benefit service provision*

*Principle 5: To be in a position to anticipate and react to changing innovations, as well as community needs and interests over time*

### **Actions:**

Pending approval for expansion of services, promote commencement of patrols at Jetty Beach as a safe and accessible patrol location alternative for CALD, disability and others without full 'surf beach' confidence, including availability of beach wheelchairs.	Short-term <i>Promotion within existing resources</i>
Consider the purchase of a beach mat and related infrastructure (50m Mobi-Mat or similar) for use on Jetty Beach, with a view to being administered by the Lifeguard Service during patrol times only – reliant on the proposed Jetty Beach Patrol being resourced.	Short-term <i>Unfunded: Est. \$25,000 (Capex) + ongoing TBC Explore grants</i>
Approach the Coffs Harbour Yacht Club to negotiate storage and potential assistance in management of beach mat, wheelchair and patrol equipment at Jetty Beach.	Short-term <i>Unfunded: Expected low cost, to be negotiated</i>
Pending outcomes of above, make the beach mat available at Jetty Beach over initial Peak Summer patrol period and explore administration and booking options to make available at other times in line with demand.	Short-term <i>Unfunded: TBC</i>
Promote and monitor beach wheelchair and mat usage and demand with potential purchase of additional beach wheelchairs in future seasons.	Medium-term <i>Unfunded: Est. \$15,000 for 2 new beach wheelchairs Explore grants</i>
Ensure effective and compliant beach access opportunities are included within master planning and design outcomes with respect to future foreshore upgrades (e.g. Woolgoolga Beach).	As required <i>Unfunded: TBC</i>

### **5.4.2 Innovation**

As discussed in Section 3.3.2, the pace of technological advancement means there are emerging opportunities with potential application for the Lifeguard Service in the short and longer term. Developments in beach user, water conditions and shark monitoring as well as rescue equipment, search and rescue and communications are all worthwhile of monitoring into the future.

Developments in alert and notification systems such as subscription message alerts are a welcome improvement which could aid the Lifeguard Service in their communication with surf zone stakeholders in relation to beach closure, conditions and hazard updates as well as potentially in emergency situations. Similarly, the Smart Beaches project being trialled in Lake Macquarie and Northern Beaches LGAs - which aims to improve and simplify beach usage and condition reports - could also hold applicable outcomes for the Lifeguard Service.

The rapid advancement and development of drone technology and its myriad of applications is something to be monitored closely including developments and expansion of wider national programs such as Westpac's Little Ripper Lifesaver. Involvement in the current drone trial that the Lifeguard Service is participating in should be continued along with the remote rescue tube trial in Sawtell providing equipment to improve safety of bystander rescues. For professional rescue scenarios, developments in rescue equipment such as powered rescue boards are innovations that



should be considered to complement existing PWCs (such as jet skis) and when replacing / upgrading standard rescue equipment.

**Future Directions:**

The pace of technological advancement and innovation means monitoring and keeping up to date with applicable outcomes is important for the Lifeguard Service to continue to evolve and deliver to a high standard. This applies to projects the Lifeguard Service already knows about or is participating in such as the drones and remote rescue tube trials, trial by others such as the Smart Beaches, Little Ripper Lifesaver or Life-Fi, but also others not currently identified or which are likely to arise during the Strategic Plan period.

It also applies to equipment and operating methods with the usefulness of advanced technology or methods of operation being evaluated according to efficiencies, cost and benefit to the Lifeguard Service as existing equipment needs to be replaced.

Where the outcomes of trials, such as the remote rescue tube trail in Sawtell, are successful the logical next step is to expand to other beaches in the LGA subject to business case development and funding (including through grants where possible). Similarly, pending the outcomes of the drone trial, incorporating use of drones into operations could be beneficial into the future. There is also a benefit to the Lifeguard Service pursuing further opportunities to be involved in trials and other initiatives as they become available.

**Relevant Principles:**

*Principle 1: To provide supervised places where individuals and families feel safe, both in and out of the water*

*Principle 2: To be equipped and resourced to enable the delivery of core patrol and emergency response services*

*Principle 5: To be in a position to anticipate and react to changing innovations, as well as community needs and interests over time*

**Actions:**

Monitor outcomes of the Lake Macquarie Smart Beaches pilot project in particular (and others in general) for applicability to the Coffs Harbour LGA.	Medium-term <i>Within existing resources</i>
Conduct remote rescue tube trial at Sawtell, undertake assessment of effectiveness for cost, and expand to other locations based on business case and funding availability.	Medium-term <i>Trial is within existing resources</i>
Continue participation in drone trial and integrate / expand dependant on outcomes, including ongoing review of other drone trial programs, including the Westpac Little Ripper trial.	Medium-term and as required <i>Within existing resources</i>
Review alert and notification system options for beach closures, conditions and hazards in light of advances in technology such as subscription message alerts.	Short-term <i>Within existing resources</i>

Review use and benefit of advanced rescue equipment and PWCs when upgrading or replacing assets as well as needs of patrol locations. Where advanced forms of equipment are to be considered, establish a clear business case and evaluation process to monitor effectiveness for future expansion.

As required  
*Can review within existing resources*

*Adv. equipment costs TBC*

Monitor research, trials and developments in relevant technology as well as innovation in operations for surf safety in light of opportunities for improvements to the Lifeguard Service (including participation in trials where available).

Ongoing  
*Within existing resources*

### 5.4.3 Additional Services to Others

The catchment area for all users of the Lifeguard Service area extends beyond the boundaries of the Coffs Harbour LGA. To that end, as the only council in the area to deliver their Lifeguard Service via an in-house model, there is potential as an established service provider to deliver that service to others, taking advantage of council to council service provisions within the *Local Government Act*. In its most direct way, this could take the form of expansion of patrol services to include locations in other LGAs along with broader education campaigns.

Similarly, the Lifeguard Service already delivers some education services to a small number of schools just outside the LGA, who identified the value of the program particularly being small inland schools whose students did not have the exposure and opportunities of coastal schools to be familiar with the water. These services are understood to be delivered on a cost recovery basis.

The Lifeguard Service also currently attends a number of events throughout the year providing either an educational stand, supervision and/or first aid. These events are valuable opportunities to connect with the wider community in an information, education or supervision capacity. The majority of these events are either Council run or sponsored, and the Lifeguard Service's attendance is covered by the relevant division.

Coffs Harbour and the wider region also plays host to a number of large events which bring a large number of people to the area at a single time - for example the Oztag junior state championships typically held in February. This in turn impacts beach usage with attendees often falling into some of the at-risk categories and while these numbers can put pressure on patrols, they also provide an opportunity to engage around beach and water safety either between the flags or at the event in some way.

#### **Future Directions:**

There are recurring opportunities for Council to consider offering and tendering their Lifeguard Service capabilities to neighbouring LGAs which could be of benefit to overall service delivery capacity and efficiencies. Aside from patrols, the delivery of the Lifeguard Service's education and engagement program to surrounding areas outside the LGA could also be deliberately pursued as part of a similar process or preventative action program, assuming that these services can be provided on a cost recovery basis and have a net benefit to the community.

Attendance and support of Council run or sponsored events could be streamlined by having dedicated events funding allocated to the Lifeguard Service. The events typically do not change from year to year and being in a position to better plan and allocate staff resourcing would benefit service delivery and provide scope to explore other event opportunities. Similarly, ensuring the Lifeguard Service is aware of major events in the area, will assist in providing information and

engaging with organisers and attendees and/or adjusting staffing and patrols in response. This can be achieved using existing Council networks and connections.

**Relevant Principles:**

*Principle 1: To provide supervised places where individuals and families feel safe, both in and out of the water*

*Principle 2: To be equipped and resourced to enable the delivery of core patrol and emergency response services*

*Principle 3: To be a respected and recognised community leader through high quality education that is inclusive, inviting and relevant to the needs of beach users*

*Principle 4: To build supportive and strong partnerships with key stakeholders that will benefit service provision*

*Principle 5: To be in a position to anticipate and react to changing innovations, as well as community needs and interests over time*

**Actions:**

Explore options to approach neighbouring councils, including Nambucca and Bellingen, to identify options for delivery of Lifeguard Services.	Medium-term <i>Within existing resources</i>
Arrange allocation of dedicated internal Council funding for core events the Lifeguard Service attends and assists with, with a particular focus on those relating to at-risk groups such as Harmony Day.	Short-term <i>Unfunded: Est \$5,000 ongoing</i>
Explore option to expand education programs to schools and groups outside the Coffs Harbour LGA as a service to other councils or as part of the Lifeguard Service’s existing preventative action program on a cost recovery basis.	Medium-term <i>Cost recovery activity</i>
Establish and maintain a process of dialogue between the Lifeguard Service and Council's Tourism and Major Events Sections regarding notification, involvement and response to large events in the area.	Short-term and Ongoing <i>Within existing resources</i>

**5.4.4 Developing Income Opportunities**

As previously mentioned in Section 2.7, the Lifeguard Service is wholly funded by Council, with limited income streams generally being associated with cost recovery of education programs. This situation generally aligns with the Lifeguard Service's value to the community and requirements regarding community safety and tourism promotion.

Nonetheless, with increasing demands and requests for expansion of patrol services in particular, consideration also need to be given to how these may be funded.

In regards to external funding sources, for some time there has been consideration given to the creation of a "beach safety levy" on business and / or accommodation providers. This idea has been discussed on many occasions, however never implemented. For example, the Coffs Coast Tourism Strategic Plan 2020 identifies commencement of a stakeholder engagement process to introduce a tourism and business levy, albeit for general use. This process has to-date not solicited any widespread support. Such a levy would need to be carefully considered in the context of who should

be levied (business / rate payers / tourism providers), how such funds are invested (Lifeguard Service, foreshore infrastructure, or some other higher priority use) and to what extent of costs would remain, in effect, as a Council subsidy.

A further potential income stream could relate to peak service provision via contracted services - as currently provided at the Lorikeet and Darlington caravan parks near Corindi. In particular, there are a number of caravan parks operated by Council and the Crown which are located in areas where service provision is either recommended to be expanded or Council has been requested to commence or recommence services - for example, Red Rock, Corindi, Moonee, Woolgoolga, Coffs Harbour (Park Beach) and Sawtell. Both these entities could be approached to enter into arrangements for recommended and additional service delivery.

Alternatively, as identified in the previous section 5.4.3, there are recurring opportunities for Council to consider offering the expansion of their Lifeguard Service capabilities to neighbouring LGAs. While this provides an opportunity to increase efficiencies for the Lifeguard Service, there is also potential for such scenarios to be modest income opportunities, whilst having only minor benefits in leveraging existing assets and capacity. A similar, smaller scale opportunity exists in regard to delivery of the education and engagement program external to the LGA. This is currently run at cost however if there was demand outside of the LGA the pricing structure could be reviewed.

***Future Directions:***

The provision of a Lifeguard Service is generally recognised as having limited income streams and generally operated as a community service. Whilst a levy would appear to be a possible source of new funds, there would need to be a greater level of consultation and justification to enable this to occur. At a more localised level, the connection between coastal holiday parks (typically on Crown land and having more direct impacts on demand) may be a more logical and direct income course to supplement existing funding.

Pursuing an expansion of Council's Lifeguard Service to delivery in other LGAs, whilst leveraging some economics of scale, would not be expected to be a particularly profitable income stream. Similarly, the expansion of education services external to the LGA would generally be seen as delivery on a cost recovery basis, though some margins may be possible, again given the economies of scale by utilising existing staffing and resources. This would require establishing the demand as well as feasibility of a fee for service model in both instances.

***Relevant Principles:***

*Principle 1: To provide supervised places where individuals and families feel safe, both in and out of the water*

*Principle 2: To be equipped and resourced to enable the delivery of core patrol and emergency response services*

*Principle 3: To be a respected and recognised community leader through high quality education that is inclusive, inviting and relevant to the needs of beach users*

*Principle 4: To build supportive and strong partnerships with key stakeholders that will benefit service provision*

**Actions:**

Undertake initial discussions with Council's holiday parks management to ascertain opportunities for future partnership arrangements. Similarly, and through appropriate management or political channels, pursue discussions with NSW State Holiday Parks Land Manager with a view to establishing future partnership arrangements.	Short-term <i>Within existing resources</i>
Continue to work with Council's Tourism Section to explore the opportunity and feasibility of partial funding of the Lifeguard Service from a beach safety or tourism levy.	Ongoing <i>Within existing resources</i>
In exploring options to approach neighbouring councils, including Nambucca and Bellingen, to identify options for delivery of Lifeguard Services (see Section 5.4.3) - consider Council's projected cost of services, benefits received and risk margins that may be possible.	As required <i>Unfunded: Est. \$5,000-10,000</i>
In exploring opportunities for the delivery of education programs for inland regional students (see Section 5.3.2) - consider Council's projected cost of services, benefits received and risk margins that may be possible.	As required <i>Per above actions</i>

**5.4.5 Partners and Stakeholders**

There are a number of key stakeholders who aid, are involved with, or are invested in beach safety and use of the surf zone. These include service delivery partners including most predominantly the volunteer SLSCs, other land managers such as National Parks & Wildlife, as well as Board rider clubs, learn to surf operators, Marine Rescue and other emergency service providers. There are also additional partners and stakeholders in regard to education, tourism and accessibility in the form of schools, Department of Education, tourism operators, Council's advisory groups and community service organisations many of which have been mentioned in previous sections.

To enable effective delivery of services there is a need for the ongoing improvement of relationships and understanding between invested parties, in particular between Council's Lifeguard Service and SLSCs and their respective peak bodies. Together, both life savers and lifeguards have a core role in public safety. Working together provides greater sharing of resources, expertise and provides a basis for even greater outcomes for the community. These relationships need to be both day to day, as well as at higher levels where Council's formal agreements and delegations need to be clearly understood from a risk management and legal perspective.

Similarly, the distribution of ownership and responsibility along the Coffs Harbour LGA coastline in relation to management of beaches and reserves makes the relationship with other land managers such as Crown land and the National Parks & Wildlife important - particularly with respect to consistency of signage, maintaining beach access for emergency response and future provision of beach and water safety services in locations not currently serviced.

**Future Directions:**

As a priority and looking to the future of beach usage and safety in the area, regular communication as well as regular surf user meetings are needed. While this creates a commitment from all involved, this would provide an opportunity to improve coordination as well as raise and deal with any safety or beach management issues in a timely manner, and was generally well received from consultation participants provided that outcomes are "actioned" and not "ignored".

On a partnership level, relationships with the SLSCs requires attention especially in light of some experiencing membership difficulties and the potential need for expansion of patrols in the area and recognition that the Red Rock / Corindi Club are not currently patrolling on Saturdays. First steps in that regard include review of service agreements and confirmation / correlation of Council's expectations and of the respective SLSC's commitments / capabilities.

As previously highlighted in section 5.4.2, there is also an opportunity with advances in technology to improve and streamline routine communication with stakeholders. This could take the form of subscription automated alerts for beach closures / hazards (e.g. contamination) to partners and stakeholders. This could deliver improvements not only from a safety perspective ensuring the right information is getting to the right place at the right time could also strengthen relationships through increased communication.

As previously mentioned in Sections 5.1.4 and 5.2, joint training with SLSCs and other emergency service providers is also an important exercise. The regular provision of training and scenarios (even if a strong level of participation is not initially apparent) needs to be pursued into the future not only from an emergency response and logistics improvement perspective, but also for relationship building between key partners.

**Relevant Principles:**

*Principle 1: To provide supervised places where individuals and families feel safe, both in and out of the water*

*Principle 3: To be a respected and recognised community leader through high quality education that is inclusive, inviting and relevant to the needs of beach users*

*Principle 4: To build supportive and strong partnerships with key stakeholders that will benefit service provision*

**Actions:**

Regular surf-user stakeholder meetings (including SLSCs, National Parks & Wildlife Service, Crown land managers and others as applicable) be held prior to the commencement of the surf season and following the Easter period to raise and coordinate safety and management issues for the following period and to report back on previous meeting outcomes, as well as to assist with service planning.	Short-term and ongoing <i>Within existing resources</i>
In conjunction with SLSCs, and prior to the 2019/2020 surf season, review service agreements including options to progress the harmonising of patrols and early identification of resourcing concerns and options for delivery.	Short-term <i>Within existing resources</i>
Review and establish a system for alerts to partners for beach closures / hazards and related information.	Short-term <i>Improved alert system costs TBC</i>
Maintain professional connections and partnerships with APOLA, SLS Branch / State / National bodies and others as may be applicable over the period of the Strategic Plan.	Ongoing <i>Within existing resources</i>

**LIFEGUARD**

