

FACT SHEET 2

FLAGS ON THE BEACH



The red and yellow flags which are so familiar on Australian beaches today were first adopted by Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) in 1935, although the colours were divided diagonally rather than horizontally as they are today. It is thought these colours were adopted because of their origins in the international code of naval signals, in which the sign for 'man overboard' is a square divided diagonally between red and yellow. In 1939, SLSA also ordered that all surf lifesavers wear red and yellow quartered caps when on patrol, in order to make them easily identifiable. In 1980, the red and yellow colours of the surf lifesaving patrol flag and cap were officially recognised by Standards Australia. Today, red and yellow uniforms and flags have been adopted by the International Life Saving Federation (ILS), and the flags are also being considered by the International Standards Organisation (ISO).

Nowadays, surf lifesavers and lifeguards use a number of different flags to indicate the safest swimming areas for the beach going public.

FLAGS USED ON OUR BEACHES

RED AND YELLOW

Patrolled area – the safest swimming area

YELLOW

Warning – potentially dangerous conditions

RED

Beach closed – do not enter water

BLUE

Aquatic activity boundary – used to designate the boundary of an aquatic activity, often the board riding area for surfers

RED AND WHITE CHEQUERED

Evacuation – e.g. a shark has been sighted in the water

To make sure you enjoy your time at the beach, always swim between the red and yellow flags as they mark the safest swimming area. Even when swimming between the red and yellow flags, you should be aware that you may be exposed to a number of natural hazards such as large waves, variable water depth and marine stingers. Therefore, you should always assess your own swimming ability against the prevailing conditions and if in doubt, ask a surf lifesaver or lifeguard. You should also take note of markers on the shore line to judge your position in relation to the flags.

**REMEMBER –
SWIM BETWEEN THE
RED AND YELLOW
FLAGS – IF WE CAN'T
SEE YOU, WE CAN'T
SAVE YOU!**

For more information on any other matter relating to aquatic safety, contact:

Surf Life Saving Australia
02.9300.4000 or
slsa.com.au

Surf Life Saving NSW
(02) 9984 7188 or
surflifesaving.com.au

Surf Life Saving QLD
(07) 3846 8000 or
lifesaving.com.au

Life Saving Victoria
(03) 9676 6900 or
lifesavingvictoria.com.au

Surf Life Saving SA
(08) 8354 6900 or
surfrescue.com.au

Surf Life Saving WA
(08) 9243 9444 or
mybeach.com.au

Surf Life Saving TAS
(03) 6223 5555 or
slst.asn.au

Surf Life Saving NT
(08) 8985 6588 or
lifesavingnt.com.au

Or contact your local surf life saving club.



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