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## SLSA History Fact Sheet #8

### The 1954 Royal Carnival

In 1954, shortly after her coronation, Her Royal Highness Queen Elizabeth and her husband His Royal Highness Prince Philip conducted their first official tour of Australia. Millions of Australians turned out to see the young Queen in cities and towns throughout the country. On 6<sup>th</sup> February, a day in which more than a million lined Sydney streets to catch a glimpse of the Royal couple, a surf carnival was held in their honour at Bondi Beach. Representatives from every Australian state and New Zealand participated in the Colour Party, and the March Past was comprised of 56 clubs.

Newspapers reported that a crowd of more than 10,000 'greeted the Royal couple at the beach', and that up to 100,000 packed vantage points around Bondi. But the behaviour of this crowd was unexpected: they were reported to be so fascinated with the surf carnival that 'there was no staring at the Royal dais'. The Queen and Prince Philip were also captivated by the surf lifesaving display. According to the *Sun Herald*, the surfboat race was a highlight:

Eight shell-like surfboats took to the bouncing surf and the crowd settled down for a serious appraisal of the races. The Queen joined them. She edged forward in her (seat). The minutes ticked by. An official approached the Duke at 4pm to say time was up but the Queen did not move. As the noses of the boats lifted skywards into the next curling breaker the Duke also edged forward, his hands gripping his knees. As the boats skimmed shoreward on a wave's green back he talked excitedly to the Queen. In a later race he pointed frequently and his lips formed an 'Ohhh' with the crowds as a dumper tossed a boat on its back.

The Queen's eyes strayed to the southern end of the beach where graceful two-man surf skis skimmed with ballet-like precision towards the shore.



*Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip greet Judge and Mrs Curlewis at Bondi Beach, 1954.  
Image: National Archives Australia (A1773, RV164)*

The surf lifesaving community were very proud that the Queen and Prince Philip overstayed their visit to Bondi by 45 minutes. The headline on page one of the *Sun Herald* announced 'Thrills for Queen at Bondi Carnival: Stayed Extra Time'. It was also boasted that the English press had described the display as 'the most novel, interesting, and exciting show they had seen... to the Queen, as to themselves, the show was entirely new. Nowhere in the world was there anything exactly comparable'.

Three years later, HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, accepted the position of Chief Patron of the Surf Life Saving Association of Australia, a role he still holds. He commended the volunteer ethic of Australian surf lifesavers who, he said, 'pay a subscription to their clubs for the privilege of risking their necks to save others'. The display on Bondi beach he so keenly watched in 1954 undoubtedly fostered Prince Philip's fascination with, and admiration for, the Australian surf lifesaving movement.

## **Sources**

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*SLSAA Annual reports*, 1953-54; 1956-57  
*Sun Herald*, 7 February 1954, pp1, 3, 7.