



# Surf Life Saving Australia – Circular

October 2009

## NATIONAL IRB REVIEW

<b>Document id</b>	34/09-10	<b>Audience</b>	State/territory centres, branches, IRB teams, captains, drivers and crew, IRB competitors, IRB trainers, assessors, coaches, IRB advisors.
<b>Department</b>	Lifesaving and Sports		

### Summary

SLSA, together with state and territory centres, is conducting a national review into all IRB operations.

The following circular provides the terms of reference for this review and invites surf life saving members to submit discussion or opinion papers that will then be reviewed by an IRB expert panel.

SLSA, together with state and territory centres, is conducting a national review into all IRB operations.

The aim of the review is to improve member safety and reduce injuries. All aspects of IRB operations will be addressed including competition, lifesaving, equipment, training, assessing, coaching, technique, culture, and data collection.

An IRB expert panel has been chosen to address these key issues. On this panel are four representatives from lifesaving and four representatives from surf sports.

The review began in late September and initial recommendations from the panel will be presented to the relevant national boards in early 2010.

Members in the surf life saving community who wish to contribute to this review may do so by a written submission.

Please use the template at the end of this circular to address the terms of reference (outlined below) and email or send your submission to:

Lifesaving Development Coordinator  
Surf Life Saving Australia

[bcorbett@slsa.asn.au](mailto:bcorbett@slsa.asn.au)

ATTN: Lifesaving Development Coordinator  
Surf Life Saving Australia  
Locked Bag 2  
Bondi Beach  
NSW 2026

**\* All submissions are due by Friday the 30<sup>th</sup> October 2009 \***



The terms of reference for the review are as follows:

## Background

Inflatable Rescue Boats (IRBs) play an important role in the Australian surf lifesaving movement; both in saving lives in the water and as a surf sport.

Developed and introduced in the 1970's, IRBs were initially developed as a more effective and quicker way of saving lives. Today they have become the rescue 'workhorse' of lifesaving patrols, replacing the traditional belt and line method. All 307 SLSA affiliated clubs own and operate at least one IRB when on lifesaving duty and on average nearly 3000 people are rescued every year through the use of an IRB.

The 1970's also saw the birth of IRB racing as an exciting and highly competitive sport. Competition has played a significant role in the development of the IRB and for the improvement and innovation of operator skills (SLSA, 1992; Carpinter, 1982; Pen, Barrett, Neal and Steele, 1996). It is known that IRB competition helps to improve the prowess of IRB Drivers and crewpersons; teach crews how to correctly tune their motor and properly trim their IRB for maximum performance and reliability for both lifesaving patrol duties and competition; and allow crews to demonstrate their training techniques and their abilities to perform a rescue.

Since the introduction of IRBs in the 1970's there have been a number of modifications to IRB equipment and to the training and assessment of the IRB drivers and crewpersons which has improved the overall performance of IRBs and operators in the surf. It is perceived that the prowess of drivers and crew to perform rescues has greatly improved and this is reflected in the number of difficult rescues carried out by inflatable rescue boat crews. However, over this period of time data also shows an increase in injuries to IRB drivers and crewpersons when using the IRB both in lifesaving duties and in competition.

It is speculated by some that the nature of these injuries may be possibly linked to the following reasons:

NB: Please note that the following points are not definitive or limited. They are purely speculations by some members of the organisation.

- Increase in speed of the IRB:

Modifications to IRB equipment has in turn led to the increase of the maximum speed of IRBs, and the rate of acceleration to that maximum speed. It is known that as manufacturers continue to compete for business and produce equipment that outperforms their previous models, equipment will continue to be faster. Examples of changes that have occurred to the specifications since the reintroduction of IRB Competition in 2005 include boat design, nozzle guard design, and propeller guard design.



- Positioning and type of crew and driver foot straps in the IRB:

SLSA data shows that many of the documented IRB injuries are ankle and feet injuries.

- Size and type of IRB hulls

Some expert data has suggested that smaller sized craft potentially offer less stability and greater acceleration and speed than larger sized craft. Likewise, that single hull craft (class 1 and 2) offer less stability than catamaran craft (class 3). Further, the lack of 'forgiveness' of rigid hulls (class 2) versus soft hulls (class 1) on operators has also been a significantly talking point.

- Training and Education:

It should be examined whether the driver/crew techniques, training and assessment of IRB awards are adequate to produce competent craft operators. This should include whether particular methods have advantages over others across the different styles of craft, consideration of how injuries are occurring during training and also confirmation that current assessment criteria is still more than adequate and allows validity.

- IRB Culture

Some have questioned whether a culture of safety exists within SLSA with regards to IRBs. Since the reintroduction of competition, SLSA has taken measures to attempt to enhance this through the introduction of a power craft code of conduct. However, the impact and effectiveness of these measures have not been assessed to date.

- IRB equipment policy – Lifesaving vs. competition

There has been a perceived conflict at times for what is best practice equipment and training for lifesaving purposes compared to what is best practice equipment for surf sports competition. Prior to IRB Competition being reintroduced in 2005 a number of measures were introduced to reduce the speed of IRB equipment for the purposes of IRB competition including the introduction of sealed motors and four bladed propellers.

However, recent review of data and injuries has suggested that further research into IRBs and surf lifesaving should be undertaken to determine whether this (and possibly other measures) should be applied across the board.

- IRB Data (Recording of injuries and IRB use)

The collection of statistics in regards to IRB use already occurs with data being entered and stored in SurfGuard. These statistics provide helpful insight to what is occurring in IRBs across Australia. However, it should be assessed whether this data collection is sufficient, accurate and detailed enough. Are there are other aspects that need to be captured and assessed?



As such, a full review of all IRB equipment and training will be undertaken by SLSA and SLSA nominated powercraft experts.

### Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for the review are as follows:

1. To review and recommend changes to IRB equipment specifications for lifesaving and competition purposes. The review panels are tasked with recommending design changes to the existing IRB specifications which will improve safety for crews. The review panel should also recommend any further research that should be conducted into ensuring crew safety.
2. To review and recommend changes to IRB driver and crew techniques, training and assessment methods. The review panels are tasked with recommending changes to driving and crewing techniques, training methods and assessment of awards. Recommendations can include changes to proficiencies etc.
3. Investigation into SLSA IRB culture. The review panel is asked to investigate the IRB culture and recommend changes that can be made to encourage the culture of safety and responsibility.
4. Investigation into data collection and current IRB policy.

**\* Please use the template below to address the terms of reference and send to the Lifesaving Development Coordinator at Surf Life Saving Australia by the 30<sup>th</sup> October 2009 \***



NATIONAL IRB REVIEW 2009  
DISCUSSION PAPER

Name:	
Contact address:	
Contact phone:	
Contact Email:	
State:	
Club (if applicable):	
Business name (if applicable):	

Terms of Reference:

Surf Life Saving Australia Ltd  
Locked Bag 2 / Level 1, 1 Notts Avenue  
BONDI BEACH NSW 2026  
Phone: (02) 9300-4000

ACN 003 147 180  
ABN 67 449 738 159  
[www.slsa.com.au](http://www.slsa.com.au)  
[info@slsa.asn.au](mailto:info@slsa.asn.au)

