



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**Surf Lifesavers**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 19 September 2011**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Monday, 19 September 2011  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Ms RISHWORTH

**Source** House  
**Proof** Yes  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

(Kingston) (NaN.NaN pm)

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (20: 42): I rise in support of this very important motion which goes to acknowledging the great work of a surf lifesavers and highlighting the importance of water safety. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the member for Bass for bringing this important that matter to the attention of the House.

This motion rightly acknowledges a surf lifesavers who risk their lives to perform rescues in Australia every year but in particular last year and also recognises the contribution of surf lifesavers in northern Australia as their first season comes to an end. Surf lifesavers have been protecting the lives of beachgoers for over a century. It is one of Australia's largest volunteer organisations with a total membership of around 130,000 and an active team of around 40,000 people who patrol our coastline on a regular basis.

It is estimated that surf lifesavers spend more than 1 million hours patrolling our beaches each year. If you think about it, 1 million hours is such an incredible contribution patrolling our beaches, performing rescue operations and using support services such as helicopters and rescue boats. Together each year Surf Lifesavers rescue around 11,000 people, provide emergency care to 35,000 and safety advice to more than 600,000. These dedicated astray and volunteers spend their time creating a safe environment around our beaches through patrols and through education initiatives.

When faced with hazardous and potentially life threatening scenarios, surf lifesavers frequently demonstrate exceptional courage and skill in order to protect and save the lives of their fellow Australians. I cannot speak highly enough of the selfless men and women who give up their own time to protect and save and promote life along our coastline. In my electorate we have five great Surf life saving clubs in order to take this opportunity to congratulate all the members and volunteers at Aldinga Surf life saving club, Moana Surf life saving club Southport Surf life saving club, Port Noarlunga serve lifesaving club and Christies Beach Surf life saving club, which I have the privilege of also being a member of. This motion recognises the importance of water safety as we head into the warmer months in the southern parts of Australia. Taking

the family for a day at the beach is part and parcel of the Australian way of life and I would certainly encourage everyone to come down to my electorate, which has 31 kilometres of beach on pristine coastline. However, while we have some beautiful beaches it is also vital to remember that we must stay vigilant about water safety. Unfortunately, in my electorate we have had a tragic start to the warmer months with a scuba diver drowning at Port Noarlunga only a few days ago. The stark reality is that beaches are dangerous environments and the demand for vigilance is important for every Australian.

The national coastal safety report compiled by Surf Lifesaving Australia, released last week, reported a total of 61 coastal drowning deaths between 2010 and 2011. While this figure is below the seven-year average of 89, which I think is really important to note, it remains that every life lost is one too many. The report also reveals that almost 50 per cent of drowning deaths occurred five kilometres or more from the nearest surf lifesaving station. These figures suggest that surf lifesavers are an effective means of preserving the life of swimmers. The motion also urges 'users of aquatic environments', including 'pools, rivers, lakes and the surf, to understand those environments' are dangerous and to exercise caution. Drowning does not just happen at the beach or in swimming pools. It can happen in rivers, in creeks, in streams, in lakes, in dams or in lagoons. One disturbing trend has seen a substantial increase in the proportion of drownings occurring in the over-55 age group and in the under-five age group.

Learning to swim is a really important part of the Australian lifestyle. I would certainly encourage people to take advantage of the wide range of educational programs available through Surf Lifesaving Australia. I note that the motion does urge people to think about learning to swim and I would like to say—given my previous life as a swimming teacher, having taught mums and bubs classes as well as adult learn-to-swim classes and everything in between—it is never too late to learn how to swim. I say to anyone out there that improved water confidence could be the thing that saves your life. I would like to conclude by again commending the member for Bass on this motion which provides a valuable opportunity to recognise the wonderful work of our surf lifesavers in protecting lives at the beach. Also, it provides a timely reminder to all Australians to ensure that they are water smart,

as summer sets in in the southern areas of Australia, and to listen to the advice of surf lifesavers and always swim between the flags.