



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Surf Life Saving Australia

SPEECH

Monday, 25 October 2010

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Georganas, Steve, MP

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Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (1.18 pm)—I too rise in support of this motion today. Like the member for Bass, I too come from a coastal electorate where surf-lifesavers are the lifeblood of the community. I think it is also particularly fitting that we acknowledge the contribution of surf-lifesavers in the lead-up to summer when clubs are preparing for a busy beach season.

We are lucky here in Australia to have a magnificent coastline, great beaches, beautiful sand et cetera that we can enjoy and call, as we heard earlier, ‘our playground’. But that also means many thousands of kilometres of coastline for surf-lifesavers to patrol and hundreds of thousands of beachgoers who need to be kept safe and who may need assistance when they encounter a problem.

I would like to share with the House a surf-lifesaving story from my own electorate of Hindmarsh, an incident which happened at Henley Beach in November 2009. Henley Surf Life Saving Club is one of six different surf-lifesaving clubs in my electorate, which is bordered by the coast on its western side, stretching from Semaphore South right down to Somerton Park. It was on a warm November Saturday around lunchtime at Henley Beach in November 2009 that four of the Henley Surf Life Saving Club’s nippers, who were aged nine and ten at the time, spotted a woman struggling in the surf. Even though as nippers they had not yet begun learning official surf-lifesaving skills, they thought very quickly and went to help. Three of the boys managed to keep the woman afloat and her head above water while another went to shore for help. The woman was then attended to by senior surf-lifesavers and made a full recovery. The story was broadcast everywhere from the ABC to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Adelaide Advertiser* and the local papers. The nippers’ bravery and intelligence at such a young age is testament to the culture of Surf Life Saving Australia, and it reinforces the notion that everyone can be a contributor to water safety with a little bit of know-how.

This rescue at Henley Beach was just one of the thousands of rescues performed by surf-lifesavers across Australia. In the first half of 2010 surf-lifesavers performed 9,420 rescues. Each rescue, like the story I just told, was quite literally the saving of a life. Imagine if there had been no-one there to help on those 9,420 occasions. Unfortunately, not everyone was so lucky as to be among them. Surf Life Saving’s 2010 coastal safety report tells us that in 2009-10 there were 82 coastal drowning deaths in Australia. Eighty per cent of the victims were male and the most common time of the day was the late afternoon or early evening.

Around one-third of the deaths were of foreign citizens, so we know there is more work to do in terms of water safety for migrants and refugees, as well as short-term visitors from overseas. One of the most successful programs helping to address the problem of high risk among newly arrived migrants and refugees is the Department of Immigration and Citizenship’s program *On the Same Wave*, which has been run in partnership with Surf Life Saving Australia. The *On the Same Wave* program is aimed at culturally and linguistically diverse communities, especially new arrivals, urging them to become surf-lifesavers and to learn surf safety. This program has been a great success in South Australia where communities have embraced the opportunity to participate in the program, and Surf Life Saving have been able to ensure maximum participation by making culturally appropriate adjustments to their program.

It is programs like these that now enable every Australian to participate in surf-lifesaving, whether it be through fundraising activities, joining a club, learning first aid or just swimming between the flags. The output of the organisation is astounding. In 2009-10 more than 1.3 million preventive actions were conducted by lifesavers. There were over 117,000 first aid cases, 21,622 rescues and 97 people resuscitated. Those 97 people would not be with us today if we did not have surf-lifesaving.

This is only possible through the strong membership of surf-lifesaving clubs around Australia. The number of which is growing every year, as we heard from the member for Bass. For several years now in my electorate Surf Life Saving Australia have been trying to secure funding to build new headquarters, Surf Central. Elaine Farmer and Shane Daw, the CEOs, have come up against several brick walls. Having lobbied very hard for months,

I was extremely proud when the Gillard Labor government committed the necessary \$1.5 million to build the facility in my electorate. (*Time expired*)