

Surf Life Saving Australia – Circular

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Australian for life.



Surf Boat Starting Process Education Circular

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Department	Sport		

Summary: The following Circular has been developed to provide further education to Officials, sweeps/coaches and Surf Boat athletes regarding starting process of Surf Boat races. The ASRL and Surf Boat Committee are very happy with the end result of the new Starters Process paper that has been developed by the ASRL in conjunction with input from Kim Marsh and SLSA. The idea was to work on developing a format and method to standardise the way our Starters & Check Starters operate at every event around Australia. We are confident that as this document is circulated to all officials and boat crews and hopefully taken on board, we will make real improvements with this aspect of our sport.

NOTES ON STARTING SURFBOAT RACES

1. INTRODUCTION
2. THE START
3. STARTING PROCEDURE
4. SURFBOAT STARTING SKILLS
5. ASSESSMENT AND TRAINING STARTERS AND CHECKSTARTERS
6. COURSE - STARTING LOCATION
7. DEALING WITH COMPETITOR COMPLAINTS AND POOR ATTITUDES
8. COMMON FAULTS BY THE STARTER
9. COMMON FAULTS BY THE CHECK STARTER

1. INTRODUCTION

The start of a surfboat race is one of the most significant ways a crew can apply their skill and expertise to gain an advantage. Equally an unfair start can greatly disadvantage a crew. A Starter must have an excellent appreciation of surf conditions in relation to surf boats and understand the practical methods of starting from a sweep and rower viewpoint.

It is important that those with the skill to start surfboat races are encouraged to become accredited and obtain the necessary firearm credentials. Most importantly their skill needs to be recognised by giving them precedence at events.

2. THE START

Many factors are at play at the start of a race. The attitude of crews as a team and individual can be extremely focussed and eager, almost 'on edge'. This can lead to volatility and unreasonable 'spur of the moment' reactions. The start of a surfboat race cannot be protested. This places additional pressure on the starting officials to perform well.

It is the Sweeps responsibility when the crew boards the boat at the start and when they proceed to sea through the break.

3. STARTING PROCEDURE

- Starter must be in an elevated position in the centre of the starting boats, visible to all crews. Spectators and crews not in the race must not impede the Starter's line of sight.
- Check Starter will stand in line with the back of the boats, usually in the centre of the starting area. The Starter will fire the gun only after the Check Starter(s) indicate their approval, by raising a flag or hand that the boats are in line.
- A crew is allowed to start behind the line but not in front of it.
- Every effort must be made by the Check Starter to allow all crews onto an equal bank if channels occur.
- Crews walking their boats forward after the Check Starter has raised their flag may be disqualified.
- The Starter will lift one arm into the air to indicate that the gun or hooter is about to be fired. There should be at least three seconds before the gun sounds, to enable rowers to prepare for the start. The action of putting an arm in the air, commonly known as 'Guns up', is the equivalent of 'get set' in a running race. If the Starter is not happy with the conditions, the arm will be put down, rather than leaving the gun in the air for a prolonged period.
- Ideally the bow of all boats will be down when the gun is fired. The starter should focus on all boats by scanning back and forth rather than only looking at the boats in front of them.
- The Starter must be aware of the early wave conditions the boats will meet. Crews should be able to row far enough off the beach to be able to safely stop for incoming waves. Crews cannot do this very effectively in the first few strokes. The Starter needs to place emphasis on this part of the race. They cannot take responsibility for wave conditions further out to sea. It's not the starter's job to pick a break for a crew.
- The Starter may fire a second gunshot or hooter to indicate a false start. Races can also be recalled by the Check Starter or Boat Referee. This occurs if one or more boats have been disadvantaged by the Starter's actions. A false start should not be indicated if a crew has not exercised adequate judgement causing their boat to be left on dry sand or similar.

The competition manual states:-

- *If the Referee, Starter or Check Starter is not satisfied that the start has been fair for all Crews the race shall be recalled by way of a second shot from the gun or a whistle blast.*
- *The Starter and check starter have the power to disqualify, or eliminate, a Competitor for breaking the start, or for wilfully disobeying his orders, or for any other obstruction during the start.*
- *The Starter shall notify the Sectional Referee of all disqualifications.*
- *Ensure Competitors, Duty Boats, Judges and equipment are correctly positioned before starting the event.*
- *Whilst starting it is strongly recommended that ear protection is worn.*
- *The Check Starter should be visible to the crews.*

- *The Check Starter shall be appropriately positioned for the event and signal when competitors are in line and ready to start.*
- *The Check starter shall be responsible to recall competitors by whistle signal or other means if in his opinion the start conditions were breached or the start was unfair.*

4. SURFBOAT STARTING SKILLS

The major skill needed by a Starter is 'observation'. The Starter must observe all boats, assessing the factors that will influence the crews during the start. The initial consideration is that the Check Starter has indicated they are happy with the line of the boats. The other factors to observe are:-

- Trim of the boats
- Wave action the boats will initially encounter

The 'trim' is how level a boat is from bow to tuck. The gun should be fired when the bow of all the boats are down. It is difficult for the Bow rowers to board when the bow of their boat is up in the air.

The Starter can only be responsible for the initial wave conditions that may influence a boat.

- At the start boats should not be about to be hit by a forceful wave which may impede the crew's ability to gain forward motion. A boat moving backwards in shallow water will be extremely disadvantaged.
- Observing and taking into account the conditions all crews will encounter in their first 3 or 4 strokes is the skill that determines the ability of a Starter.
- The initial 3 – 4 strokes of a race usually provide sufficient time and space to enable the crew to safely clear the edge of the beach and for the sweep to be able to effectively stop and wait if necessary. In some conditions the number of strokes may need to be extended.
- There is a misconception that Starters should ensure all boats can progress through the entire wave zone cleanly. That is not necessarily the case as it is the skill of the Sweep that has to negotiate the outer break. The Starter's job is to ensure that as much as it is possible all crews meet with the same wave conditions along the line.
- In many circumstances, especially if the outer sand bank is relatively even across the width of all starting boats, it can be advantageous to start a boat race whilst set waves are breaking on the outer bank. By the time the boats actually reach the outer break, the waves have often subsided.
- The Starter should be mindful that the performance of various divisions can be a factor. For instance, Open Men's crews can be expected to leave the beach with more speed and power than other divisions.

5. ASSESSMENT AND TRAINING STARTERS AND CHECK STARTERS

Most good surfboat Starters have a natural skill or gift. Others develop with experience and training, while others regardless of experience are simply not suited to the task. The assessment of a good Starter can differ depending on one's viewpoint. Competitors will emphasise the ability to effectively board their boat and proceed cleanly to sea. Carnival officials and organisers may place more emphasis on turnaround time between races.

Safety and fairness are the most important considerations for a Starter.

Starters should communicate with competitors about conditions in particular the water movement on the edge.

People expected to have the skill and interest need to be encouraged to participate because of the special nature of starting surfboat races and its importance to competition. Initially all starters should be required to undertake a short induction style session at a boat carnival. During initial starting duties a mentor should review performance.

Competitors earmarked as 'potential' Starters should be allowed to stand on the Starter's stand when not racing. They should be given the opportunity to actively converse on best time to start and even act as a second set of eyes for the Starter. At some events 'potential' Starters may be allowed to start a few races with a hooter (or the starting gun but only if licensed).

All Starters and Check Starters can benefit from continuous training as well as feedback and dialogue with rowers and sweeps they have started. Training sessions should be held early in the competition season with a follow up session in the middle of the season.

6. COURSE - STARTING LOCATION

The course where the start will occur will be the responsibility of the Boat Referee and with the assistance of the Course Supervisor and Boat Panel. It can be challenging to provide all six boat starting positions with similar conditions such as depth, timing of waves, size of waves and current. Shallow water may have the greatest influence on a surfboat at the start of a race due to the drag created on the hull. Deeper water allows the boat to move further per stroke. Varying depth of water between starting positions can greatly influence fairness of a start.

The conditions at the edge and through the starting zone can present a challenge to Starters. There may be times when an even start for all positions is difficult to achieve. It is the responsibility of the Sweep to decide when the crew can safely and effectively board the boat. Competitors should understand the difficulty for the starter on such days. Sensible competitors will appreciate that varied and difficult conditions are fundamental to our sport and usually reward crews that have developed the skills to cope with them.

The perfect conditions for starting is a straight edge with a gradual, smooth seabed and small straight waves parallel to the shore, spaced a fair distance apart. (It also helps if the sun is shining, there is enough breeze to remain cool, the host club is generous with food and drink, the referee is pleasant and the competitors are friendly). Experienced Starters know this seldom occurs. The Starter will be required to start races where natural elements present challenges to crews as well as themselves. Some factors affecting the start will have been determined by other decision makers.

Natural considerations of the starting positions are:-

- Curve of the beach.
- Slope of sea bed influencing the depth of the water. It can be very difficult for a crew to start when the sea bed drops away sharply. In this situation crews should hold their boats back and decide on their boarding procedure.
- Wave orientation. Waves that approach the beach on an angle may produce difficulties for the Starter to ensure all bows are down at the start. This may be made more difficult when attempting to line the boats up to the waves substantially changes the depth of water under the different starting positions.
- Nature of waves at water's edge. Forceful waves breaking on the shore can be dangerous. It will be difficult for boats to remain in a starting position for an extended time. Crews may need to constantly push boats out through waves to avoid taking water on board. It may be useful to brief Sweeps that Starters will fire the gun quite quickly. In these situations Sweeps must take some responsibility to keep their boats dry and accept that it will be difficult for the Starter to ensure all boats have even conditions at the start. Safety must be the Sweep's major consideration.
- Channels and outflowing currents
- Side currents.

- Strong wind. Wind across a beach may make it difficult for some crews to hear the gun. A visible sign such as a dropping flag may need to be considered.

7. DEALING WITH COMPETITOR COMPLAINTS AND POOR ATTITUDES

The start cannot be protested. Protocols must be followed to complain and express dissatisfaction about the performance of Starters. Competition Liaison Officers may be appointed at some championship events. These are usually boat officials with many years of competitive experience and a good knowledge of the rules. They may be the best people to mentor dissatisfied competitors and suggest the correct action. Competitors can also confer with the Boat Panel if one has been appointed. Otherwise the Boat Referee is the only official a competitor should initially discuss such a matter with.

Boat competitors and their supporters must avoid complaining about a Starter in the heat of the moment (easy to suggest, not always easy to comply). Such behaviour may lead to disciplinary action. Competitors should appreciate that even a good Starter can be challenged by conditions – at times their best efforts may have to be accepted with the respect that they have tried their hardest to provide an even start.

It must be noted that one of the biggest complaints many competitors have is the lack of consistency in relation to whether a boat has been deemed to be disadvantaged by a start and the race called back for a restart. If a Starter chooses to recall a race, for whatever reason, then those same criteria / circumstances which led to the race being recalled must be applied throughout the following races, regardless of division or other factors.

8. COMMON FAULTS BY THE STARTER

- Only observing the boats in the central positions. Starters must scan from one end to the other of the starting crews.
- Starting when some boats have their bow in the air and others are flat.
- Having the gun in the air too long.
- Constantly putting the gun or hand up and then lowering it, indicating indecision.
- Feeling pressured by how long it is taking to achieve suitable starting conditions and firing the gun at an inappropriate time.
- Attempting to take too much responsibility for enabling the boats to proceed through the entire break without being hit by waves.

9. COMMON FAULTS BY THE CHECK STARTER

- Lack of understanding that depth of water may differ in various starting positions, significantly adding to the difficulty of some crews to board their boat or gain motion.
- Failing to ensure that boats are the required distance apart.
- Focussing on the compliance of some crews more than others.