



2025-26 SLSNSW Awards of Excellence V3

Attention: Members, Clubs and Branches

Actioned by: Branches

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Summary	This circular outlines the information related to the Surf Life Saving New South Wales (SLSNSW) Awards of Excellence recognising the 2025/26 season. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Section 1 – General Conditions• Section 2 – Summary of Awards• Section 3 – Nomination Process
Objective	To recognise outstanding achievements and contributions from members, clubs and branches in the 2025/26 season.
Action	Branches are to endorse and submit one nomination per category to SLSNSW by Tuesday 30 th June 2026.

We all know them – members who care, give up their time and want to make a difference in the organisation. The Surf Life Saving NSW Awards of Excellence celebrate the incredible people in our organisation and the impact they have on their clubs, its members and their local communities. This circular outlines the award conditions, the awards on offer and the nomination process.

This year's awards will be presented at the SLSNSW Awards of Excellence function on Saturday 22nd August 2026. This event will be held at Hyatt Regency Sydney, 161 Sussex Street, Sydney NSW 2000.

The following changes have been introduced for the 2025/26 season:

Award Name Change

- Young Lifesaver of the Year, previously known as 'Youth Lifesaver of the Year'
- Young Volunteer of the Year, previously known as 'Youth Volunteer of the Year'

Award Recognition at National Level

- Young Volunteer of the Year is now recognised at a National Level, rather than only at a State level

Retired Awards

- Branch of the Year (*decision made at April 2026 State Council Meeting*)
- Innovation Award
- Community Education Program of the Year*

New Award

- Community Engagement of the Year

*In place of the retiring Community Education Program of the Year Award, SLSA have introduced a new award for the 2025/26 season – Community Engagement of the Year.

Section 1 – General Conditions

General notes

- Branches are encouraged to use the online nomination template for their Branch Awards.
- SLSNSW will accept one award from each Branch, per category to ensure the process is streamlined and transparent.
- All nominees must be SLSA financial members. Nominations should focus on activities during the 2025/26 Surf Life Saving season, from 1st July 2025 – 30th June 2026.
- Where ages are mentioned, this refers to the members age as at 30 September 2025.
- Winners may be called upon to act as ambassadors of Surf Life Saving, both within the organisation and to external audiences.
- Surf Life Saving NSW State events or teams will not be considered for nomination for these awards.
- Paid employees at any level may apply for the awards listed. However, paid service will only be counted if applying for the Lifeguard of the Year or Coach of the Year awards. All other awards recognise voluntary contributions only. Unless otherwise specified, these awards are in recognition of individual achievements, team submissions will not be considered.

Guidelines for submission

- Applicants are required to complete and submit an [online nomination here](#) by **30th June 2026**. No nominations will be accepted via email or post.
- **Applicants must address the criteria for their nominated award** (*found in Section 3 of circular*).
- Nominations are to include a digital profile image of the nominee (for individual awards) or logo (for group/team awards) via the online nomination form. **Please ensure all nominee photographs are from the shoulders up and of a high-resolution quality. Please wear a club shirt or patrol uniform, no 'selfies'. Photos from Clubs or Branch Awards nights are ideal.**

Selection Process

- Finalists for the 'Surf Lifesaver of the Year', Volunteer of the Year', Young Lifesaver of the Year' and 'Young Volunteer of the Year' will be invited to participate in an **online interview, scheduled for the weekend of 11th and 12th July**, details of which will be available following the close of nominations. The SLSNSW selection panels will determine a winner from both a review of the application and the interview.
- Finalists from the remaining awards will be determined by a volunteer selection panel and will involve a review of applications.

SLSNSW Winners

- Winners of Awards listed in the 'SLSA Volunteer Awards' list will be nominated for the SLSA Awards of Excellence. All SLSNSW categories are aligned with SLSA selection criteria.
- The SLSA Awards of Excellence will be held on Saturday 7th November 2026, location to be confirmed.

Section 2 – Summary of Awards

SLSA Awards *Winners will progress to the SLSA Awards of Excellence*

Surf Lifesaver of the Year*

An active patrolling member who has made an outstanding contribution to the delivery and development of surf lifesaving frontline services.

Young Surf Lifesaver of the Year*

An active patrolling member (between the ages of 15-21, this refers to the members age as at 30 September 2025) who has made an outstanding contribution to the delivery and development of surf lifesaving frontline services.

Volunteer of the Year**

An impressive member who has made a difference through their volunteering efforts.

Young Volunteer of the Year

An impressive member (between the ages of 15-21, this refers to the members age as at 30 September 2025) who has made a difference through their volunteering efforts.

Club of the Year

An outstanding SLS-affiliated club that is committed to improving the experience of its members, providing a safer environment for the community, and improving club operations.

Community Engagement of the Year

This award recognises outstanding, non-commercial programs, projects, or initiatives that demonstrate exceptional commitment to driving positive social change, promoting environmental sustainability, and/or advancing Diversity Equity & Inclusion. The initiative should significantly contribute to one or more SLSA's [strategic priorities](#).

Athlete of the Year***

An athlete aged 15 or older who has achieved sporting excellence in Open Aged Competition.

Youth Athlete of the Year***

An athlete aged between 15-18 (this refers to the members age as at 30 September 2025) who has achieved sporting excellence in Youth and/or Open Aged Competition.

Surf Sport Team of the Year

The 38th edition of Surf Sport Manual defines a team as an event that is contested by more than one competitor from the same club or lifesaving unit who may either complete an event or race together as a discrete unit (e.g., boat race, IRB race, surf teams, R&R double surf ski team etc.) or separately (e.g., relay events, board rescue etc.).

Coach of the Year

An accredited coach who has made a significant contribution to athlete performance at a state, national and/or international level, to the development of athletes in SLS activities outside of surf sports, and to the educational development of other coaches in SLS.

Official of the Year

An accredited surf sports official who has made a significant contribution to both officiating at a state, national and/or international level, and to the educational development of other officials in SLS.

Trainer of the Year

An endorsed Trainer who is passionate about building the skills of others, consistently delivers a positive learning experience, and who encourages other members to engage in the delivery of training.

Assessor of the Year

An endorsed Assessor who is passionate about building the skills of others, consistently delivers a positive and supportive assessment experience, and who encourages other members to engage in training or assessment.

Rules

*Frontline service refers to any service that requires a member to wear the red and yellow uniform, including flood and swift-water service.

**Applications that focus on significant achievements in one area may not be considered if this area is also covered by other awards (e.g., Lifesaver, Coach, Official, Trainer and Assessor of the Year).

***A youth aged competitor (i.e. aged 15 to 18 years on 30 September 2025) may be nominated for both the Athlete of the Year and Youth Athlete of the Year. However, only results achieved in Open Age Events and Open Age Team representation are considered for Athlete of the Year Award.

SLSNSW Awards

Patrol Captain of the Year

A Patrol Captain who is passionate about improving the service their patrol offers to the community, or the experience it offers to members.

Support Operations Member of the Year

A Member involved in Support Operations (Duty Officer, Rescue Water Craft, Jet Rescue Boat, Offshore Rescue Boat, UAV) who has made a difference through their volunteering efforts in support operations.

Administrator of the Year

An Administrator who consistently goes the extra mile to make the lives of other members easier, or to make the services and programs delivered by the club run smoother.

Services Team of the Year

An outstanding team who have made a positive impact in Surf Life Saving or the community through their volunteer services.

Masters Athlete of the Year

An athlete over the age of 30 who has achieved sporting excellence.

Facilitator of the Year

A Facilitator who encourages members to engage in training or assessing, is passionate about building the skills of others, and consistently delivers a positive learning experience.

Section 3 – Nomination Process

Volunteer and Program/Innovation Awards

SLSA Awards

- Surf Lifesaver of the Year
- Young Surf Lifesaver of the Year
- Volunteer of the Year
- Young Volunteer of the Year
- Assessor of the Year
- Trainer of the Year

SLSNSW Awards

- Patrol Captain of the Year
- Support Operations Member of the Year
- Administrator of the Year
- Services Team of the Year
- Facilitator of the Year

To nominate for the above awards, complete the [online form](#) which includes answering the three questions below (with each answer no more than 400 words).

1. Tell us about the member/individual/team being nominated.
2. What has been achieved over the last 12 months (2025/2026 season)?
3. What impact has this had, and for whom?

For Surf Lifesaver and Young Surf Lifesaver of the Year awards, nominations require patrol hours to be uploaded for the 2023/24, 2024/25, and 2025/26 season (extracted from Surf Guard).

When showcasing members' or teams achievements, you may want to consider the questions below to boost the quality of your nomination...

- What relevant positions, roles, or responsibilities do they hold?
- Have they done something in response to an identified need or problem?
- Have they done something new or different to achieve results?
- Have they inspired others to think or to do things differently?
- Have they had to overcome any challenges to make a difference or achieve success?
- Do they model positive and supportive attitudes, behaviours and actions?

Club of the Year

To nominate for the Club of the Year award, complete the [online nomination form](#), and provide a response to the five questions below (with each answer no more than 400 words).

1. Tell us the story of your club.
 - What defines your culture, purpose and community impact?
 - Share your club's journey, what you stand for, and the moments that best reflect who you are today.
2. What are the most significant achievements your club has delivered in the 2025/2026 season?
 - Outline key initiatives, programs or milestones across lifesaving, sport, membership, governance, community engagement or innovation.
 - Where possible, include measurable outcomes or evidence of success.
3. Why did these achievements matter?
 - Describe the difference they made, to members, volunteers, patrol operations, your local community or the broader Surf Life Saving movement.
 - How did you engage and bring members along the journey to achieve this impact?
4. How is your club building for the future?
 - What are your priorities for sustainable growth, leadership development, inclusion, capability uplift and continuous improvement?
 - How are you ensuring long-term success beyond this season?
5. What is one lesson your club can share with other Surf Life Saving Clubs both in Australia and Internationally?
 - Reflect on a key insight, innovation or approach that others could learn from, and explain why it has been effective.

The following attachments should be uploaded to support the application:

- Club logo
- Club's strategic and/or operational plan
- Membership statistics for the last three seasons (2023/2024, 2024/2025, 2025/2026)
- A short club promotional video (to be used for SLSA Media purposes)

When showcasing club achievements, you may want to consider the questions below to boost the quality of your nomination...

- **Alignment to Strategy:** How does your club's work contribute to the priorities and objectives of the Surf Life Saving Australia 2030 Strategic Plan? Provide specific examples of alignment and impact.
- **Innovation and Strategic Delivery:** What new initiatives, programs or events were implemented during the 2025/2026 season to advance your strategic goals? How did you identify the need or opportunity, and how were outcomes measured?
- **Sustainability and Continuous Improvement:** How does your club embed sustainable practices and improvement measures across governance, leadership development, member capability, community engagement and the delivery of lifesaving services?
- **Overcoming Challenges:** What key challenges or barriers did your club face this season (e.g. resourcing, environmental, membership, operational), and how were they navigated to achieve success?

- Culture and Leadership: How does your club's management team and leadership group model positive behaviours, inclusive practices and a supportive culture? Provide examples that demonstrate this in action.
- Supporting Evidence: You are encouraged to attach supporting materials such as videos, photographs, testimonials, reference letters or media coverage that validate and strengthen your submission.

Note:

If your club has been a successful Club of the Year at a Branch, State or National level in the past five (5) years, please note this on your nomination.

Community Engagement of the Year Award

To nominate for Community Engagement of the Year award, complete the [online nomination form](#), and upload a one-page summary outlining the initiative that is being nominated. If multiple pages are submitted, only the first page will be reviewed.

When preparing your one-page summary, consider the following:

1. Tell us about the initiative that is being nominated.
2. Describe the innovative or creative approach used in this initiative.
3. How has this initiative engaged with communities and responded to their needs throughout its development and implementation?
4. How has the initiative benefited the participants, the community, and the organisation?
5. How has this initiative built meaningful partnerships, and fostered effective collaboration to achieve its goals?
6. How can this initiative be sustained over time, and what potential does it have to be scaled or adapted to benefit other clubs?

Supporting Documentation

The one-page summary will be the primary source of information. Nomination forms for other awards will not be accepted as supporting documentation.

The following Supporting materials are optional but can be uploaded:

- High Resolution photos
- Initiative logos

One piece of additional information may also be uploaded, such as:

- Promotional material
- Reference letter
- Operational plans
- Video of the initiative

Note:

The nominated program, project or initiative must have been delivered within the last 12 months; however, work contributing to its development in previous years will be considered.

Sport Awards

SLSA Awards

- Athlete of the Year
- Youth Athlete of the Year
- Surf Sport Team of the Year
- Official of the Year
- Coach of the Year

SLSNSW Awards

- Masters Athlete of the Year

Athlete of the Year

How to nominate for the above award:

Complete the [online nomination form](#) and answer the questions listed below (with each answer no more than 400 words).

1. Has the athlete competed in any representative teams (including international competition) during the 25/26 season? If so, please list the team and how they contributed to the success of the team?
2. List the competition results achieved by the athlete in the 25/26 season at championship carnivals or major surf sports events?
3. In the 25/26 season how is the athlete a positive role model, a good sportsperson and/or an ambassador for Surf Life Saving? How do they contribute to broader lifesaving activities and engage with other members (including juniors or mentoring)?
4. Does the athlete hold any coaching and/or officiating qualifications?

Youth Athlete of the Year

How to nominate for the above award:

Complete the [online nomination form](#) and answer the questions listed below (with each answer no more than 400 words).

1. List the competition results achieved by the Youth Athlete in the 25/26 season at championship carnivals or major surf sports events?
2. Has the Youth Athlete competed in any representative teams (including international competition, if relevant) during the 25/26 season? If so, please list the team and how they contributed to the success of the team?
3. In the 25/26 season how is the youth athlete a positive role model, a good sportsperson and/or an ambassador for Surf Life Saving? Do they contribute to broader lifesaving activities and engage with other members (including juniors, mentoring, coaching or officiating)?

Surf Sport Team of the Year

How to nominate for the above award:

Complete the [online nomination form](#) and answer the questions listed below (with each answer no more than 400 words).

1. List the competition results achieved by the Team in the 25/26 season at championship carnivals or major surf sports events?
2. Has the Team competed as a Branch/State or National representative team during the 25/26 season? If so, please list the events?
3. In the 25/26 season how has the Team been positive role models and shown good sportsmanship and/or been good ambassadors for Surf Life Saving? Do they contribute to broader lifesaving activities and engage with other members (including juniors)?

Official of the Year

How to nominate for the above award:

Complete the [online nomination form](#) and answer the questions listed below (with each answer no more than 400 words).

1. What officiating qualification does the member currently hold, Core, Technical or Senior Official?
2. List the officiating roles that the member has fulfilled during the season at Club, Branch, State, National and International level (where applicable).
3. Describe the Official's achievements during the 25/26 season, giving examples of how this has made a difference to others (athletes, officials, clubs etc). Areas of achievement may be in:
 - mentoring
 - education and training
 - documentation and processes
 - new programs
 - solving problems etc
4. Please provide examples of how the official adheres to and is a role model of the values of SLSA, Surf Sports and the SLSA's sports related policies such as the SLSA Gender Equity, Match Fixing and Member Protection policies.
5. Describe any training or development the official has undertaken this season to improve, which has had an impact on their performance or Surf Sports competition in general

Coach of the Year

How to nominate for the above award:

Complete the [online nomination form](#) and answer the questions listed below (with each answer no more than 400 words).

1. What coaching qualification does the member currently hold, Foundation, Development or Performance Coach?
2. What coaching roles has the member fulfilled during the 25/26 season at Club, Branch (where applicable), State, National and International Level?
3. List the competition results attributed to the coach, where this member was the primary coach for the athlete and/or team, in the 25/26 season.
4. Has the coach been involved in any mentoring and development of other coaches, creating of supporting documentation and/or programs. Please provide examples of where the coach has shown a positive and supportive attitude, behaviour and actions (including who it has impacted and how) in the 25/26 season?
5. Has the coach undertaken any personal development to improve themselves as a coach in the 25/26 season?

Masters Athlete of the Year

How to nominate for the above award:

Complete the [online nomination form](#) and answer the questions listed below (with each answer no more than 400 words).

1. Has the athlete competed in any representative teams (including international competition) during the 25/26 season? If so, please list the team and how they contributed to the success of the team?
2. List the competition results achieved by the athlete in the 25/26 season at championship carnivals or major surf sports events?
3. In the 25/26 season how is the athlete a positive role model, a good sportsperson and/or an ambassador for Surf Life Saving? How do they contribute to broader lifesaving activities and engage with other members (including juniors or mentoring)?
4. Does the athlete hold any coaching and/or officiating qualifications?