Closing Tathra and Merimbula Wharves during a Dangerous Surf Warning

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<th>Department</th>
<th>Organisational Development &amp; Governance</th>
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<td>Responsible Officer</td>
<td>Executive Manager</td>
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Documentation / Council and External References

- Bega Valley Shire Council Risk Management Strategy
- Bega Valley Shire Council Risk Management Procedure 5.03.1
- Surf Life Saving New South Wales—Standard Operating Procedures
- AS 4997-2005 Guidelines for the design of maritime structures

Background

Bega Valley Shire Council (Council) is responsible for the care, control and management of historic steamer wharf owned by the Crown at Tathra and the Merimbula fishing wharf. Both wharves are considered tourist attractions and are used extensively by tourists and local residents predominantly as platforms for recreational fishing.

By the very nature of their location and usage, both wharves will always present a relatively high inherent risk of injury to users. This risk will obviously be heightened during times of adverse weather and/or water conditions.

In 2009, Council engaged the services of Australian CoastSafe to undertake a Coastal Public Safety Risk Assessment of both wharves. In October 2014, InConsult was engaged by Council to assess the current level of risk and identify additional risk controls for both wharves.

The overall objective of this procedure is to:

- Eliminate or mitigate the risk identified within the October 2014 Risk Assessment; and
- Provide guidance to Council personnel for closing Merimbula and Tathra Wharves in the event of adverse weather conditions (linked to Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) and Surf Life Saving New South (SLSNSW)).

Within this procedure, for the purpose of consistency, adverse weather and/or water conditions will be referred to as Dangerous Surf and the warning system utilised as Dangerous Surf Warning (DSW). A DSW shall be deemed as any ‘release’ of a warning to the media/public and other services regarding forecasted high-risk surf/weather conditions. The Dangerous Surf Warning system is administered by SLSNSW under its arrangement with the BOM.

Development and Monitoring of Dangerous Surf Warnings

The following BOM / SLSNSW protocols are currently in place and are considered the most effective measures of identifying and providing DSW:
**Procedure 5.03.7 Closing Tathra & Merimbula Wharves**

*Version: 1*

*Issued: 15 December 2014*

*Next review: November 2017*

- BOM forecasters identify potential dangerous surf situations 48-24hrs prior;
- SLSNSW release a SMEAC brief (Situation, Mission, Execution, Administration, Communication): to internal and external services/emergency services (including Bega Valley Shire Council personnel);
- SLSNSW release media advisories to impacted regions (or state wide), these releases are either: ‘General’ or ‘Rock-Fishing specific’ depending on time-of-year/risk activities; and
- SLSNSW provide updated information to stakeholders as/if deemed necessary.

**Note:** A SMEAC Brief is a standard format template for reporting DSW under each of the headings of Situation, Mission, Execution, Administration and Communication. The Surf Life Saving State Operations Centre releases a SMEAC Brief to assist services in planning/preparing for potential higher-risk situations. Refer to Appendix 1 for further details.

SMEAC Briefs for our region are received by:

- Local Emergency Management Officer;
- Works Manager;
- Public Spaces Maintenance Co-ordinator;
- Customer Service Centre Co-ordinator; and
- Communications Co-ordinator.

**Wharf Closure / Re-opening**

Should a SMEAC Brief be received during Council’s normal business hours the Works Manager and/or Public Spaces Maintenance Co-ordinator is responsible for disseminating the ‘brief’, at the earliest opportunity, to appropriate Council personnel. In the event the SMEAC Brief is received outside of Council’s normal business hours, Customer Service personnel will utilise the out-of-hours call out process to contact ‘on-call’ staff as per the after-hours roster.

Council personnel will close the wharves by way of signage and barriers at the entrances of Tathra and Merimbula Wharves. Both wharves will remain closed until the expiration of the DSW; regardless of localised conditions.

**Communicating Closures / Re-opening to the Community**

Concurrent with the responses outlined above, the Communications Coordinator will be responsible for disseminating wharves closure information via Media Releases, Council’s website and social media posts.

As Customer Service Centre personnel fulfil a vital link between Council and the community (including visitors to our region) it is crucial they remain situationally aware of the closure of Tathra and Merimbula wharves and the predicted reopening timeframe. Furthermore, these communication protocols will establish a consultation and feedback mechanism with key stakeholders; including representatives from the community. This is a key element of the enterprise risk management process.
Appendix 1 – SMEAC Brief

STATE OPERATIONS CENTRE

SMEAC BRIEF – DANGEROUS SURF ADVISORY

EFFECTIVE: FRIDAY 18TH TO SATURDAY 19TH JULY 2014

LOCATION: NSW COASTLINE

Advisory Target: SLS State & Branch Duty Officers, SLS Club Callout Teams
Lifeguard Service Supervisors, NSW Emergency Services

Issued at: 1200 hours on 17/07/2014
Issued by: SLSNSW State Operations Centre
Emergency Number: 13SURF (24/7), Non-Emergency (Business Hours): (02) 9471 8092

Situation

The Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) is forecasting a 4-6 metre southerly swell with a 12 second swell period to affect the NSW coast from Friday 18/07/2014 until Saturday 19/07/2014.

Winds are expected to be south-westerly up to 40 knots over the two days.

These conditions will be hazardous for coastal activities such as swimming, surfing and rock fishing.

Mission

- Services and systems appropriately briefed and prepared for an increased risk of coastal emergencies and higher risk response situations.

Execution

- Lifeguard Supervisors and Support Operations briefed by relevant Lifeguard staff and Branch Officers,
- Emergency services (NSW Police) are aware and prepared for immediate ‘Surf Rescue’ notification through 13SURF,
- On-call surf rescue services / response teams are aware and prepared appropriately
- Relevant on-duty lifeguard/lifesaving services are aware and prepared appropriately
- Upward notification from Lifeguards/Lifesavers to 13SURF for any locally identified/reported major SAR emergencies
- Appropriate risk assessments conducted prior to any response (risk/gain + support available)
- Appropriate media advisories are released and consistent information provided

Administration

As per service coodination/command systems

Communication

State Operations Centre/State Duty Officer – 137873 (13SURF)

PUBLIC SAFETY MESSAGES – DURING HAZARDOUS SURF WARNING

1. Avoid rock fishing and water activities on exposed beaches/rock-shelves
2. Only swim at patrolled beaches, between the red & yellow flags
3. Check the official Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) forecast before undertaking rock fishing and water activities (http://www.bom.gov.au/nsw/)
5. See www.beachsafe.org.au for patrolled locations/times and rock fishing safety information
6. If witnessing an in-water emergency dial 000 – Police

Example
Appendix 2 – Wharf Closure Process

**Procedure 5.03.7 Closing Tathra & Merimbula Wharves**

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Next review: November 2017

**BOM**
- Identify potential dangerous surf situations

**SLSNSW**
- Release SMEAC Brief; updating as necessary

**BVSC**
- Upon receipt of SMEAC Brief, implement risk controls

During Council’s normal operating hours, Works Manager and/or Public Spaces Maintenance Co-ordinator disseminate SMEAC Brief to appropriate Council personnel.

Outside of Council’s normal business hours, Customer Service personnel will utilise the out-of-hours call out process to contact ‘on-call’ staff as per the after-hours roster.

Concurrent with the responses outlined above, the Communications Coordinator releases wharves closure information via Media Releases, Council’s website and social media posts.

**Note:** Further details of the above processes are contained within the main body of this procedure.
## Appendix 3 – Glossary of Terms

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<td>Bureau of Meteorology</td>
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<td>DSW</td>
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<td>LEMO</td>
<td>Local Emergency Management Officer</td>
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