



SURF LIFE SAVING
NEW ZEALAND



Surf Official Handbook

Updated: 15 July 2025

In it for life.



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Introduction

Surf lifesaving competitions provide opportunities for Surf Lifeguards and aspiring Lifeguards to further practice and develop important surf lifesaving skills, which may be used to rescue others from dangerous surf environments. We must therefore strive to provide safe opportunities for surf athletes to train and compete in a variety of conditions, similar to those they may face in a rescue situation, which may include elements of risk.

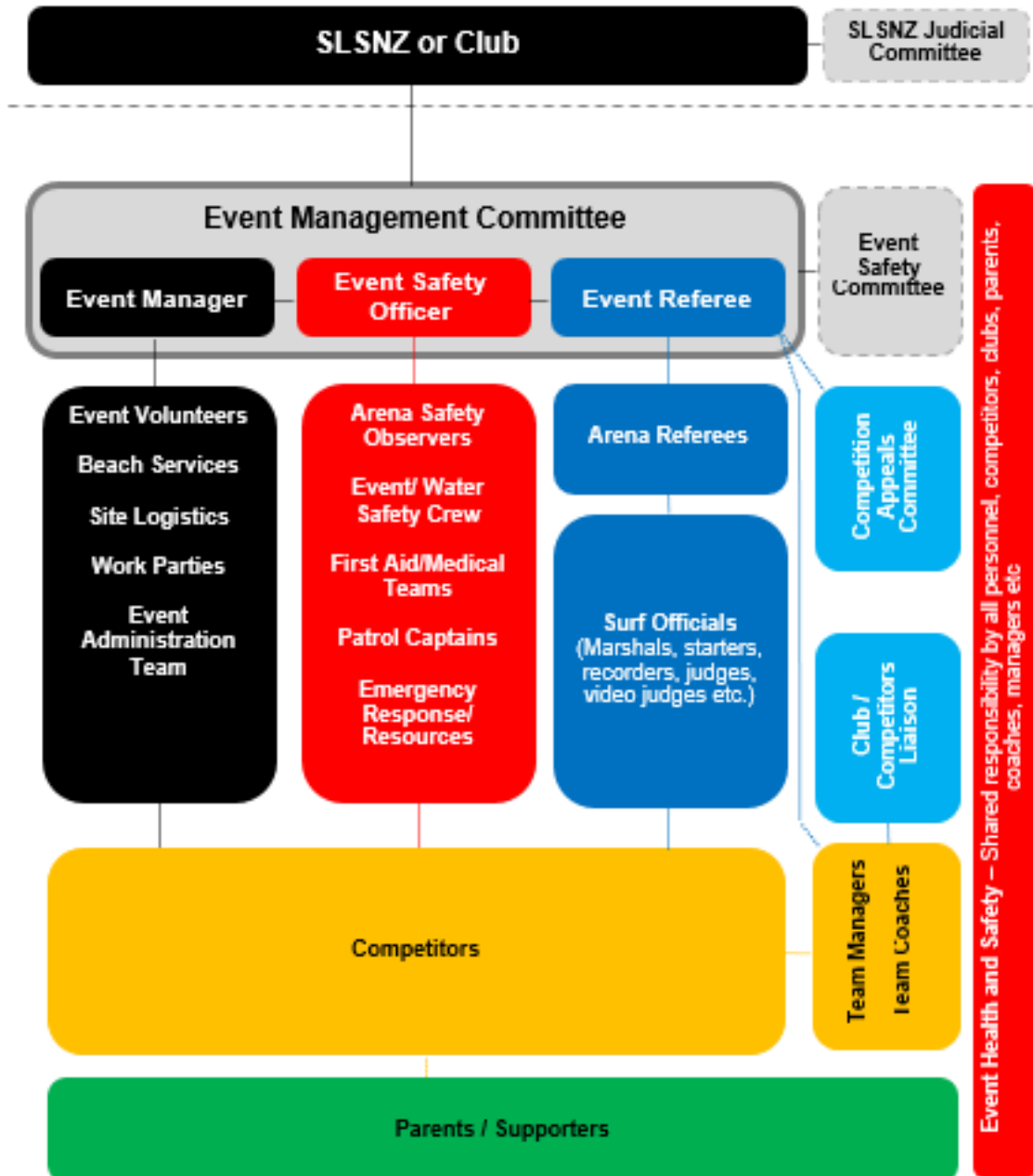
Surf lifesaving competitions have existed in New Zealand since the advent of surf lifesaving clubs in 1910. Surf Officials have therefore undoubtedly played an important role in the administration and delivery of surf lifesaving competitions since their inception. Surf lifesaving competitions have provided a much-needed forum to develop the knowledge, skill and experience of Surf Lifeguards so that they can react and respond quickly and effectively to rescues, and at times resuscitate victims of drowning or near drowning on our beaches.

Many committed surf athletes have adopted surf lifesaving as their primary sport, which requires them to train throughout the entire year. Pool Rescue lifesaving competitions have added to the number and diversity of lifesaving sport events available to our surf athletes, which in turn has added to the number and diversity of national and international competitions.

The SLSNZ Surf Officials Handbook provides a range of articles and resources designed to assist SLSNZ Surf Officials in their work and in their development at all levels.



Competition Management Structure

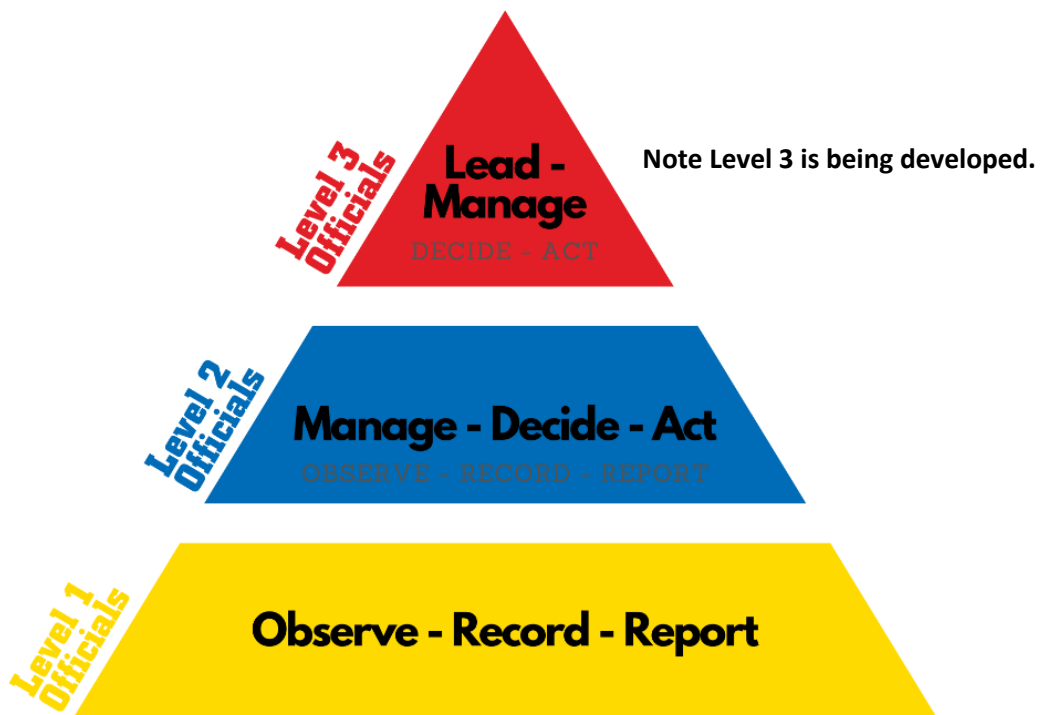




Officials Levels and Courses

In practice, there are three levels at which SLSNZ Surf Officials currently operate. Refer to the SLSNZ website for further information and the full details for the Surf Officials courses [here](#).

The primary purpose of the three Surf Official levels is highlighted in bold in the diagram below. The secondary text describes the secondary function of the levels. The requirements for Officials at each level may vary depending on the size and complexity of an event, as well as the relevant health and safety requirements.



Level 1 Accredited Officials will have successfully completed a training and assessment programme and probationary period confirming their competency as a Level One Official.

The primary purpose of level one officials is to:

- **Observe** the safe, effective and fair conduct of competitors in accordance with the SLSNZ rules and if necessary;
- **Record** their observations in a detailed and accurate manner and;
- **Report** these as appropriate to either the Chief Judge, or where appropriate to the Arena Referee or Event Referee.

Surf Official Level 1 Course includes the following components;

- Online Learning + 2-hour workshop
- 2 days' worth of practical experience
- Assessment report



- The theory component includes an online self-directed learning module.
- The practical component includes the 2-hour workshop and practical experience assisting for two days, at surf sports events.
- The assessment component includes opportunities for surf official candidates to assess their own knowledge, skills, experience and competency with an approved L1 Assessor, who will provide the candidate with feedback to assist them with their learning and development.

Level 2 Accredited Officials will have successfully completed a training and assessment programme and probationary period confirming their competency as a Surf Official Level 2.

The primary purpose of level two officials is to:

- **Manage** a specified element within a competition, and;
- Make **Decisions** and;
- **Act** on these decisions within the area specified for their role e.g. Arena Referee, Starter, Chief Judge.
- Additionally, a level two official should continue to observe, record and report breaches of the rules to the appropriate official/s.

Surf Official Level 2 Courses include the following components;

- Interactive workshop (1 day).
- Practical experience over two or more Competitions.
- Self-assessment during their practical experience, and the completion of the Surf Officials Level 2 Independent Assessment.

The theory component includes an interactive workshop with peers and facilitators where theory content and scenarios are used to further develop the knowledge, skills, experience, competency and understanding of the Surf Official Level 2 role/s. The practical component includes fulfilling one or more Surf Official Level 2 roles, at two or more competitions. The assessment component includes opportunities for surf official candidates to assess their own knowledge, skills, experience and competency with an Approved L2 Assessor, who will provide the candidate with feedback to assist them with their learning and development.

Recognition of Prior Learning

In some instances, candidates with evidence of significant prior, knowledge, skill experience and competency, may apply in writing to the SLSNZ National Education Manager, seeking recognition of their prior learning and experience for credit towards an award.



Surf Official Roles & Responsibilities

All Surf Officials should:

1. Have knowledge of the rules relevant to the role(s) they are performing for a particular competition (The rules are in the current [Competition Manual](#)).
2. Be responsible for their own and others Health, Safety & Welfare
3. Officiate the competition fairly & equitably in accordance with the rules.
4. Observe the races for compliance to the rules and breaches of the rules and report any breaches of the rules to the Chief Judge, and or Arena Referee i.e. OBSERVE, RECORD, REPORT.
5. Communicate effectively
6. Enjoy themselves!

Level One Surf Officials roles include:

1. Marshal
2. Check Marshal
3. Course Judge
4. Judge/Lane Judge
5. Finish Judge
6. Video Judge
7. Recorder
8. Starter

Level Two Surf Officials roles include:

1. Arena Referee
2. Chief Judge
3. Competition Liaison Officers
4. Competition Appeals Committee (CAC)

Level Three Surf Officials roles include:

Note level three training is still being developed.

1. Deputy Referee
2. Event Referee



Marshal

Purpose - ensure that the right competitors are in the right place at the right time, in the right order.

You are the key to participant satisfaction and usually interface between Officials and the competitors. How competitors perceive the skill and attitude of all Surf Officials may depend upon you. Competitors can be excused for having “nerves” or being tense before an event. This must be taken into account during the marshalling process. You must remain calm and in control at all times.

Duties of a Marshal

1. Pre-event - familiarise yourself with LiveHeats marshalling and results system using phones.
2. Ensure that you have a fully charged phone and backup power pack, or alternatively the correct marshalling sheets to conduct the event/s.
3. Liaise with the Arena Referee to confirm the number of athletes per heat, quarter, semi and final and that these comply with the maximum numbers permitted for the event.
4. If available, check the sound system is functioning and appropriately located.
5. Position yourself so that you can be seen and heard, as you conduct athletes through the marshalling process.
6. Let competitors know where to marshal
7. Let competitors know what heat and lane they are in.
8. If known let the athletes know how many will progress from each round.
9. Let competitors know when the marshalling for their race is complete.
10. Advise the Arena Referee and or Chief Judge of any infringements or irregularities arising during marshalling.
11. Maintain discipline of competitors in the marshalling area.

12. Liaise with the Announcers, Recorders, Chief Judge and Timekeepers regarding entries and draws.
13. Report any safety concerns to the Arena Referee.
14. Hand heats over to the Check Marshal for processing.

Tips for Marshalling

1. Ensure you have entry draws and order of events.
2. Check with the Arena Referee for any programme changes.
3. Treat athletes with courtesy.
4. Work as a team with your Check Marshal/s
5. Think and plan ahead

In summary – The Marshal is responsible for ensuring competitors entries are in order and competitors are marshalled correctly before proceeding to the start line, which means *'organise the athletes into their heats/races.'*

Check Marshal

Purpose – guide and or direct individual heats from the marshalling area to the start line in the correct arena and re-check the number of competitors and names to be sure we know who is in the race and therefore who should finish the race.

Duties of a Check Marshal

1. Pre-event - familiarise yourself with LiveHeats marshalling and results system using phones.
2. Ensure that you have a fully charged phone and backup power pack, or alternatively the correct marshalling sheets to conduct the event/s.
3. Assist the Marshal to assemble the competitors into heats as drawn.
4. Liaise with the Marshall to confirm communications and procedures for the handing over of athletes from Marshalling to Check Marshalling.
5. Assemble and stack heats of competitors into numerical order and when ready, direct heats to their designated arena.
6. If LiveHeats is used, check the competitors 'checked in' against their designated heat, immediately before they start their event.
7. Advise the Chief Judge and or Arena Referee of any infringements or irregularities.
8. Report any safety concerns to the Arena Referee.

Tips for Check Marshalling

1. Ensure you have entry draws and order of events.
2. Communicate regularly with your Marshall at all times.
3. Treat athletes with courtesy.
4. Work as a team with your Marshal, and fellow Check Marshal/s.

In summary – The Check Marshal is responsible for assisting the Marshall and ensuring competitors are moved from marshalling area to the start line in the correct arena and positioned in the correct starting positions, which means *'move athletes from marshalling to their start arenas in the correct order.'*

Course Judge

Purpose – observe races to ensure that competitors correctly proceed around the course according to rules.

Duties of a Course Judge

1. As far as possible, be located in a suitable position which may include in an elevated position, or in a boat, as the case may be, to obtain a constant view of the athletes and event.
2. Report any safety concerns to the Arena Referee.
3. Observe, record and report any breaches of the competition rules to the Chief Judge or Arena Referee.
4. Check the alignment of all buoys before the commencement of and during the progress of the competition.
5. In IRB events, also observe the driving and crew techniques comply with Driving and Crew Safety Procedures.
 - Where a driver and/or crew's techniques are considered to be a cautionary matter, the Course Judge(s) shall have the authority to caution the driver and/or crew members of the correct safety techniques. These breaches will be reported to the Referee.
 - Where driving or crew techniques are considered to be unsafe or dangerous the matter shall be reported to the Chief Judge or Event Referee.
 - Note 1: The Course Judges in IRB events shall refer to current SLSNZ Training Manuals and Bulletins which outline IRB operations and driver/crewing techniques.
 - Note 2: 'Cautionary matter' is considered as a matter where the crew breaches the standard expected of them when put into a situation where common sense and skill are ignored or where they endanger their own safety.
 - Note 3: 'Unsafe or dangerous' is considered as a matter where a crew causes or places either their own safety, their IRB, other competitors and their IRB's at risk of injury or collision.

Tips for Course Judging

1. Position yourself in an elevated location where you can observe the entire race.
2. For tube and board rescue events, a Judge shall be positioned behind each team's lane marker.
3. On water course judges should report to the Arena Referee/Chief Judge at least 30minutes before the start of the competition to receive instructions, and
4. In events where competitors have to round all buoys, be stationed on the inside of the line of buoys, sea conditions permitting, and
5. In Rescue Tube Races, be stationed immediately to the side/s of and /or on in line with the swimming buoy.

As a guide for IRB events an 'on water' Course Judge shall:
6. Position their IRB in line with the buoys in such a way the Judges(s) can readily observe that the various Crews comply with the conditions of the competition and the various event rules.
7. The crew shall remain in the vicinity of the buoys until all patients are recovered.

In summary – The Course Judge observes all competitors to ensure they correctly and fairly negotiate the course to the rules of the event and report any breaches of the rules, which means '*observes the conduct of athletes throughout the course for compliance to the rules.*'

Judge/Lane Judge

Purpose – observe and assist with the conduct of events according to rules.

Duties of a Judge

1. Under the direction of the chief judge, observe the event from the prescribed location for compliance to the rules and where necessary record and report any breaches of the rules to the Chief Judge or Arena Referee.
2. Report any safety concerns to the Arena Referee.

Tips for a Judges

1. Work with other Surf Officials to ensure all aspects of the course are covered.
2. Ensure you're positioned to safely observe the event from your designated location.
3. Avoid facing into the sun (if possible).
4. Ensure clothing (hats, sunglasses) don't impede your view.

In summary – A Judge/Lane Judge is required to observe the progress of athletes throughout the race for compliance to the rules and report any breaches of the rules, which means '*observe competitors and record and report any breaches of the rules.*'

Finish Judge

Purpose – observe competitors' approach to and progress over the finish mark/s in accordance with the rules to determine the finish order of competitors.

Duties of a Finish Judge

1. Determine the finishing order of competitors.
2. Report any breach of rules to the Chief Judge and or Arena Referee.
3. Be positioned on either side of the finish line away from the finishing poles to ensure the best uninterrupted view of the finish of the event. Refer to judging aids (e.g. video) if necessary, to determine a finish. Record the result and notify the Chief Judge of any finishing issues or anomalies.
4. Where possible issue finish place tags to competitors.
5. Report any safety concerns to the Arena Referee.
6. When judging multiple lines for events like Board Rescue, position yourself on the finish line in the middle or the arena back-to-back with the other finish judge.

Tips for a Finish Judge

1. Ensure that all athletes are in your range of view.
2. Work with other Surf Officials so everyone has an effective view.
3. Ensure you're positioned to observe the event's start and finish
4. Be prepared to assist with the judging of relays transitions where these are adjacent to the finish area.
5. Avoid facing into the sun (if possible)
6. Ensure clothing (hats, sunglasses) don't impede your view

In summary – The Finish Judge is required to observe the approach of athletes towards and across the finish line of a race in order to decide the order of finishers in accordance with rules, which means '*observe and correctly record the finish order of athletes in a race.*'

Video Judge

Purpose – observe competitors' approach to the finish mark/s and video the progress over the finish mark/s to capture the finish order of competitors.

Duties of a Finish Judge

1. Determine the finishing order of competitors via video (iPad)
2. Report any breach of rules to the Chief Judge and or Arena Referee.
3. Be positioned on the finish line away from the finishing poles to ensure the best uninterrupted view of the finish for videoing of the event. Record the result and notify the Chief Judge of any finishing issues or anomalies.
4. Report any safety concerns to the Arena Referee.

Tips for a Video Judge

1. Ensure that all athletes are in your range of view on the device for the finish.
2. Ensure you're positioned to observe the event's finish
3. Be prepared to assist with the judging of relays transitions where these are adjacent to the finish area.
4. Avoid facing into the sun (if possible)
5. Ensure clothing (hats, sunglasses) don't impede your view of the video device screen.

In summary – The Finish Judge is required to observe the approach of athletes towards and across the finish line of a race in order to decide the order of finishers in accordance with rules, which means *'observe and correctly record the finish order of athletes in a race.'*

Recorder

Purpose – maintain an accurate record of the competitors in each race including disqualifications, and forward these results in a timely manner to the results team and or Marshalls for the continuation of the events.

Duties of a Recorder

1. Pre-event - familiarise yourself with LiveHeats marshalling and results system using phones.
2. Ensure that you have a fully charged phone and backup power pack, or alternatively the correct recording sheets to record the results.
3. Maintain a record of results/disqualifications and ensure results are passed onto the Results team and or the Marshal/s.
4. Liaise with the Marshal and assist with draws and pass on results and draws to the Announcers.
5. Report any safety concerns to the Arena Referee.

Tips for a Recorder

1. Do not assume you know the athletes name.
2. Double check which event you are recording.
3. Wherever possible, have the athletes report to you in the order that they finish.
4. Have pen (pencil) and paper available as a back up to the LiveHeats system.
5. Carry a clear plastic bag (zip lock type) to shield your recordings/phone in the event of wet cold conditions.

In summary – The Recorder is required to accurately record the finish order of athletes across the finish line of a race in accordance with the rules and report any breaches of the rules, which in means *'correctly record the finish order of athletes in a race.'*



Starter

Purpose – an official that gives the signal to commence a race at a time when conditions allow for the fairest start for all competitors.

Duties of a Starter

1. Inspect starting equipment and area for safe and effective operation. Starting equipment may comprise of a starting gun/pistol, air horn or whistle. Report and safety concerns to the Arena Referee.
2. Liaise with the Arena Referee, Marshal and Check Marshal to facilitate the safe and smooth operation of race starts.
3. Monitor the surf and other conditions, and then consider and practice starting procedure to maximise the opportunity to provide a safe and fair start for all competitors.
4. Receive the competitors from the Check Marshal including confirmation of the number of competitors starting the race.
5. Ensure that the Check Starter is correctly positioned and ready.
6. Assemble the competitors and provide a briefing for the race and course in keeping with the competition rules and any amendments as approved or required by the Arena Referee and or Event Referee.
7. Ensure that all athletes are advised of any safety concerns and actions required of them, e.g. "there are potential ankle breaking holes in the sand during the wade sections of the course. Please slow down and take care when crossing these sections to prevent injury."
8. Advise competitors of the 'starter calls' and back up call should the 'gun' fail, or competitor recall be required due to a false or unfair start.
9. Refer questions pertaining to event conditions to the Referee.
10. Line the competitors up in their allocated lanes in preparation for a start.
11. Ensure competitors, judging boats, Judges, equipment and water safety craft are correctly positioned before starting the event.
12. When conditions permit start the race.

13. Use ear protection when using starting devices with caps and or ammunition.
14. Disqualify or eliminate a competitor for breaking the start, or for willfully disobeying the starters orders, or for any other obstruction during the start.
15. Notify the Arena Referee of all disqualifications.
16. Inform the Chief Judge and Finish Judge of the number of starters.

Tips for Starters

1. Assess and monitor conditions for fair and safe starting options.
2. Communicate regularly with the Arena Referee about any concerns and guidance regarding the required interval between starts.
3. Liaise with the Check Starter and Check Marshal to ensure that competitors are efficiently managed and supported as they assemble for their race.
4. Stand in an elevated position wherever practicable.
5. Where surf conditions are challenging, brief the competitors on how you anticipate starting the race, and keep talking to them as you assess and prepare for the start, to avoid any surprises.
6. When surf conditions prevent a safe and or fair start e.g. ski races, use a dry start and brief the competitors that they can enter the water at any time 'after' the gun goes, not necessarily 'when' the gun goes.
7. Ensure you can be heard by all competitors.
8. Ensure that the Check Starter is correctly positioned and can observe all competitors prior to the start commands commence.
9. Ensure competitors, safety boats, Judges, equipment and in IRB events the patients, are correctly positioned before starting the event.

Arena Referee (AR)

Purpose – Safely manage a designated arena and officials, in order to conduct fair events for all competitors.

Duties of the Arena Referee

1. Implement the rules and regulations governing the competition in the assigned arena.
2. Be aware at all times of the safety and welfare of competitors, officials and other persons involved in that arena.
3. At the Event Referees discretion, consider and adjudicate on protests.
4. Ensure all appointed officials are aware of their positions and responsibilities.
5. Provide reports and recommendations to the Event Referee and to SLSNZ on the conduct of the arena, when requested.
6. Liaise with the Results personnel and Announcers regarding entries and draws.
7. Conduct briefings of Officials on the conduct and programme for the Event including conditions, timetables, arena layouts, special events, emergency and safety arrangements.
8. In consultation with the Event Referee, make alterations to the programme that may be necessary and communicate these changes without delay to all affected parties. Any alterations should take into consideration the safety and welfare of the competitors and officials.
9. Consider and adjudicate on reports, unbecoming conduct, protests, breaches of rules and on all matters relating to the conduct of officials, competitors, managers, coaches and events.
10. Conduct pre and post competition briefings as considered necessary with the officials, managers, coaches and competitors.
11. When requested report to SLSNZ personnel on the conduct of the competition together with any appropriate recommendations.

Chief Judge (CJ)

Purpose – is responsible to the Arena Referee for the following duties.

Duties of a Chief Judge

1. Supervise and assists in the setting up of courses for events.
2. Roster, rotate, define position and allocate duties and responsibilities for Judges.
3. Manage, locate and position Judges to best determine the finish and recording of event results.
4. In consultation with the Arena Referee, adjudicate on the observations and recordings of Judges' and Recorder where necessary.
5. Report any breach or infringements of rules to the Arena Referee.
6. Co-ordinate results and authorise disqualifications in consultation with the Arena Refer



Competition Liaison Officers:

Purpose - Liaise with competitors, coaches, team managers and officials so as to provide assistance and communicate any rules and queries related to the conduct of the events.

Duties of a Competition Liaison Officer

1. Be positioned to be accessible to competitors, coaches and team managers.
2. Advise the Area Referee, Deputy Referee or Event Referee of any concerns raised by competitors, coaches and team managers relating to event conduct, courses or safety issues.
3. Provide guidance for competitors, coaches and team managers on protest and appeal procedures and the best method of approach to the Event Referee involved. Note: Liaison Officers are, at all times, to execute their duties without bias and to demonstrate the maintenance of an open, neutral position in all dealings with officials, competitors, coaches and team managers.
4. Be aware at all times of the safety and welfare of competitors, officials and other personnel involved in the competition and immediately report any concerns to the Event Safety Officer and Event Referee or their delegate.

Competition Appeals Committee (CAC):

Purpose - Competition Appeals Committee members shall be responsible for adjudicating on all matters referred to the committee by the Arena Referee or Event Referee.

Duties of Competition Appeals Committee

1. The Competition Appeals Committee will deal with all protests referred to it by the Arena Referee or Event Referee under rule 10.3.2(e) and all appeals made by Participants under rule 10.3.2(g) of the Competition Manual.
2. In considering protests and appeals, the Competition Appeals Committee shall allow all relevant parties a reasonable opportunity to state their respective case and bring forward relevant evidence to the Competition Appeals Committee. The Competition Appeals Committee shall consider the protest or appeal and make a decision. It may uphold or dismiss a protest or appeal and impose penalties and/or refer the matter to the SLSNZ Judicial Committee as set out in rule 10.5. of the Competition Manual.
3. The assistance of video or other electronic equipment may be used to consider appeals. However, the onus is on the protester to provide proof of authenticity and any clearly viewable evidence and viewing mechanisms at the time that the appeal is heard. A minimum 9 inch/228 mm (measured on the diagonal) tablet type device with high definition is generally considered to be the minimum size to properly adjudicate on an appeal.
4. The Competition Appeals Committee will advise the Participant and relevant parties of its decision and of any penalty (if relevant or appropriate) imposed.



Deputy Event Referee (DER)

Purpose – The DER leads and manages the officials to deliver a safe, efficient and fair competition across arenas as allocated by the Event Referee.

Duties of the Deputy Event Referee:

Pre-Competition

1. Support the Event Referee in the development of the Event Programme.
2. In conjunction with Arena Referees and where applicable the Deputy Event Referee/s, lead and manage the appointment of all other officials from the list of applicants.
3. Participate in pre-competition safety preparedness briefings / activities
4. In conjunction with the Event Referee liaise with event registration personnel to ensure that event entries are appropriately managed and uploaded and operating correctly in the designated event management system, for example LiveHeats.

During Competition

1. Attend event briefings for officials and team managers.
2. Lead, manage and support Arena Referees in their roles.
3. Monitor the performance of Arena Referees and other officials
4. Execute agreed Competition Health & Safety Plan
5. Continually assess conditions and liaise with the Event Referee regarding any changes to risk levels.
6. Monitor the operation and delivery of the event to ensure compliance to planned timelines, agreed performance levels and health and safety requirements.
7. Where the competition is a multi-day format, participate in the daily Event Management Committee debrief meeting.

Post Competition

1. Participate in the competition debrief including reviewing any incidents that may have occurred and reflect on how they were managed; and
2. Provide any safety / risk management learning's to the Event Referee in for continued improvement.

Event Referee (ER)

Purpose – The Event Referee leads and manages the officials to deliver a safe, efficient and fair competition across all arenas for all competitors. The Event Referee is supported by the ESO, EM, DER and AR to provide effective safety management in all arenas before, during and after the competition.

Duties of the Event Referee:

Pre-Competition

1. Develop the Event Programme in consultation the Event Manager and other event personnel as necessary.
2. Appoint (in consultation with the Referees Selection Panel where required) Arena Referees as required for the competition.
3. Liaise with the Event Manager to ensure that all competition equipment and infrastructure is organised.
4. Review and endorse the Competition Safety Plan develop through a collaborative approach with the Event Management Committee. This may include:
 - a. Provide input to ensure appropriate safety and risk considerations are factored into the CSP.
 - b. Liaise with people with local knowledge on the venue and hazards.
 - c. Arrange provision of agreed safety resources for officials.
5. Participate in pre-competition safety preparedness briefings/activities
6. Liaise with event registration personnel to ensure that event entries are appropriately managed and uploaded and operating correctly in the designated event management system, for example LiveHeats.

During Competition

1. Conduct event briefings for officials and team managers.
2. Lead, manage and support Arena Referees in their roles.
3. Monitor the performance of Arena Referees and other officials
4. Execute agreed Competition Safety Plan
5. Continually assess conditions and liaise with the Event Manager and Event Safety Officer regarding any changes to risk levels.
6. Monitor the operation and delivery of the event to ensure compliance to planned timelines, agreed performance levels and health and safety requirements.
7. Where the competition is a multi-day format, participate in the daily Event Management Committee debrief meeting.

Post Competition

1. Participate in the competition debrief including reviewing any incidents that may have occurred and reflect on how they were managed; and
2. Provide any safety / risk management learning's to the Event Manager in for continued improvement.

Effective Officiating

Adapted from Patrick Hunter's, Athlete Representative, National Officials Committee, USA Swimming.

Athletes and Officials: We're on the Same Team

Regarding building a stronger relationship between athletes and officials. While sometimes seen as completely isolated parties with little interaction, it's suggested that athletes and officials are much more closely related, and that in many cases, officials can provide the solutions to issues raised by athletes and coaches at events, but only if everyone works as a team.

So, how can we achieve this? How can athletes and officials better communicate and relate to one another? While this is by no means an exhaustive list, some ideas include:

- a) Teach and share the philosophy. The philosophical aspects of officiating are designed to protect the athlete, namely, that the athlete always receives the benefit of the doubt. But how many athletes are aware that this is how officials are trained to operate? Share this philosophy with your coaches and athletes whenever possible!
- b) Be professional and personal at the same time. It is always important to maintain a professional image and demonstrate professional conduct, while on deck. Smile, say hello, and be warm and friendly towards both the coaches and athletes. If you know an athlete, don't be a stranger. A simple "Hello," "Good luck," or even a smile can send incredibly positive energy in the direction of the athlete.
- c) Develop partnerships with clubs. Work with local clubs to use practice time to develop both the athletes and officials. Bringing in an official to a practice to explain whistle protocol, what officials are looking for, and maybe even deliver an age-appropriate briefing which may provide critical information to the athletes and allow them to better understand things from an official's perspective. Likewise, using practice time to train new starters or demonstrate different legal and illegal variations practices will serve to develop a more competent group of officials and, send the message to coaches and athletes that the officials are working hard to "get it right"!

There are five core principles of athlete-centred officiating:

1. **Plan.** Involving both athletes and officials in event planning can reduce major headaches for event operations, as both athletes and officials can foresee potential issues that others cannot. Ensure that event information (circulars) is clearly presented so athletes are aware of the official's expectations. Nobody likes surprises!
2. **Be practical.** Understand why the rules exist, and refrain from over-analysing or providing your own interpretations. Look for reasons to allow an athlete to participate, not bar them from doing so. Remember that everyone including athletes, coaches, and officials make mistakes, and therefore, try to be understanding. And, most of all, remember that this is not rocket science or brain surgery, but rather a sport event - don't over complicate things!



3. **Offer customer service.** Coaches and athletes are your customers. Approach every situation, no matter how tense, with a warm, friendly, "How can I help you?" Be a solution to the athletes and coaches, not an additional problem. Explain to them the things that they do not understand, and remember that above all, that you are looking out for the athletes!
4. **Be consistent.** Treat all competitions with the same level of professionalism and strive to provide the same high-quality officiating at all events. Remember that no athlete wants to be disqualified, so help them correct their mistakes early by being consistent! Always keep in mind that every decision has the potential to set a precedent, so make sure that all decisions are supported by the rules! If in doubt, the athlete must benefit from the decision.
5. **Be human.** Remember that your attitude sets the tone for the entire event, including the athletes. Look like you are having fun and that you enjoy what you are doing. Positive energy is contagious, and your positive energy makes an incredible difference!

By taking these simple steps to think in an athlete-centred way, we can make great strides to create the best possible experience for our athletes.

Effective officials are:

1. **Athlete Centred** - Always use a proactive *athlete centred* approach to officiating. The interests of the athletes should be considered as primary and second only to health and safety. The competitors are the central reason for holding events, not the officials or spectators.
2. **Proactive** - Ensure a fair competition by taking proactive steps to avoid having to make the call to disqualify an athlete. The goal is not 'to catch the competitors out' but rather to seek a fair competitive opportunity for all.
3. **Consistent** - Treat all competitors and events equally. No one should get special treatment, rather ensure that each athlete has the same opportunity to compete. Sometimes fairness requires officials to disqualify, do not shy from this duty when required.
4. **Positive Attitude** - Take a positive approach to competitions and your duties as an official. A dictatorial manner can be upsetting and distracting to nervous competitors. Avoid taking action which interrupts an event unless the safety of competitors or other personnel is at risk.
5. **Professional** - The Officials conduct must always be beyond reproach, particularly in adverse circumstances. Be courteous to competitors, managers, coaches, spectators and fellow officials at all times.
6. **Teamwork/Communication Focused** - Work as part of a *team of officials*, ensure clear communications with fellow officials and with competitors. Take the initiative to clarify to avoid potential problems.
7. **Timing** - Every official has a role to ensure that the competition runs to time. Thinking, planning and acting in preparation for the next event while effectively delivering the current event is part of being an effective official.

These qualities are reflected by officials that;

- a) Exercises teamwork, common sense, judgment, tact and a proactive approach to providing a safe and enjoyable competition.
- b) View officiating as both an art and a science – consider the rules and applies them in a caring and appropriate manner.



- c) Approaches every competition and every event as important and maintains fairness, objectivity, consistency and impartiality in every situation and in every event.
- d) Works as a team to exhibit and exercise a high level of professionalism, integrity and consistency.
- e) Maintains a high standard of concentration and communication and remains prepared to react quickly.
- f) Maintains an awareness for safety and acts decisively when needed, brisk but not brusque where necessary. Be solutions oriented.
- g) Is knowledgeable of the rules and applies them appropriately to the event and acts in accordance with their assigned role and to the level of their accreditation.
- h) Understands the athletes' needs and circumstances – be present, but not highly visible. Facilitate the event for the benefit of the competitors.
- i) Are patient and positive despite the situation and the emotive or derogatory statements of others. Abuse of Officials should be reported immediately for action of the EMC, CAC or the SLSNZ Judicial Committee.

In summary - What is athlete centred officiating?

A style of officiating that promotes an environment where learning through athlete ownership, awareness and responsibility, through observing, questioning, listening and prompting occurs, which means *'provide a safe and supportive environment in which athletes can learn and develop from participating.'*



Effective Communication

Effective communication is fundamental to being a good official. Officials must be prepared to not only communicate or inform competitors and managers, but to also receive messages from competitors and managers.

How we communicate is often more important than what we communicate. Every verbal and non-verbal communication reflects the sender's and receiver's attitude towards each other. To be truly athlete-centred, officials need to consider using a variety of effective communication tools to ensure that the message they send is the same message that is received.

The Communication Process

Communication is a two-way process that involves sending and receiving (interpreting) messages. There are three dimensions of communication, sending/receiving; verbal/non-verbal and content/emotion.

Effective communication is not only about sending messages, but also receiving them. Officials must be able to send clear, positive and concise messages, as well as be attentive and astute listeners in order to understand competitors and managers. During situations where conflict is present and communication is strained, the key is to listen more and send less.

While most of us tend to focus on communicating the verbal message, more than 70 percent of our communication is nonverbal such as facial expressions, body language and tone of voice.

Nippers through to elite competitors, coaches, managers and parents are very perceptive in reading our emotive nonverbal messages. Therefore, to get the content of our messages across, we need to practice and take care to ensure that appropriate emotion and nonverbal communication is included in our message to increase the receptivity of the message.

Nervousness and anxiety are exacerbated at important competitions so the more that we are able to communicate effectively with competitors the more able they are at managing their own and their team's performance.

How to Develop Effective Communication Skills

Successful communication requires developing good people skills and showing a human face. Providing a caring and positive environment for competition, encourages competitors to continue with their chosen sport and will likely encourage them to return the following season.

The following ideas and clues may assist officials to communicate effectively during competitions;

1. **Demeanour** - dress appropriately, like you are keen to take part with the athletes and have an open, positive enthusiastic approach.
2. **Age** – recognising the difference in communicating to older teenagers or adults to kids is key.
3. **Acknowledgement** - greet participants warmly, always by name. Children and teenagers are sensitive to the mispronunciation of their name, so take the trouble to pronounce their names correctly wherever possible.



4. **Positioning** - ensure you can see everyone, and they can see you. Give all athletes equal attention by roaming around to communicate to everyone and acknowledge their worth.
5. **Body Language** - adopt a neutral body posture, facing your athletes. Try to make sure that your emotions are in check. Watch competitor's faces and gestures for clues on how they are feeling and or acting.
6. **Avoid Embarrassment** - don't 'spotlight' or embarrass competitors. Make sure that you do what you can to maintain and develop the competitor's self-worth.
7. **Eye Contact** - looking competitors in the eye shows sincerity and confidence. However, be aware that eye contact may not be appropriate in some cultures.
8. **Voice** - speak clearly and choose words appropriate to the cognitive ability of the competitors so that they can understand.
9. **Listening** - tends to be one of our weakest communication skills. Listen carefully to competitor's questions and comments. Try to listen from the competitor's perspective. Some competitors love to ask questions, so it is important for coaches to give them that opportunity as well as show the importance of their input.
10. **Feedback** - have a positive and constructive attitude when both giving and receiving feedback with competitors.
11. **Cultural** - New Zealand is a multi-cultural society with a mix of ethnic groups. As an official, it is important to be sensitive and alert to cultural differences.
12. **Gender** - females and males may view things differently and read and give different messages. Remember, the athlete-centred approach is about finding out how to interpret and give your messages, so competitors understand and feel confident there is mutual understanding.
13. **Empathy** - The key to being an effective official is being able to show empathy. Empathy is trying to understand others' perspectives from their eyes. It is about understanding yourself, so you can try to use that understanding of self to understand others' points of view. There are several types of empathy: **Cognitive, Affective, Communicative.**
14. **Verbal Communication** - self-reflection is the best way to learn how you are verbally communicating with others. Watch the body language of competitors, listen to what they say, know yourself and why you react the way you do to certain situations.
15. **Explaining** - is an essential part of some officiating roles. It is important that during explanations, you are concise and clear, and your explanation is pitched to the cognitive ability of the competitor/s.
16. **Non-verbal communication** - is the ability to give and receive messages without using expressive verbal language. Some components of non-verbal communication include body language, gestures and voice tone.
17. **Listening** - Listening is an incredibly underrated skill. Take your time and really listen to what is being said or conveyed through their body language to you.

Active Listening Tips:

- Neutral and relaxed posture.
- Look at the athlete when communicating with them.
- If a person is not looking you in the eye, try to read the meaning of that.
- Show that you are following what the athlete is saying by nodding your head and making verbal comments.
- Paraphrase or summarise what was said in your own words to ensure that both of you understand what was said and meant.
- Ask questions if you don't understand or if you require further clarification.
- Search for the real meaning behind what is being said rather than focusing on the details.

Reference Martens, 1990.



Key Reference Documents for Officials:

Competition Safety Plan (CSP) - The purpose of the CSP is to provide information, advice and guidance to SLSNZ workers and volunteers, to ensure the health, safety and welfare of workers and other people affected by the work of Surf Life Saving New Zealand.

[Click here](#) to our sport resource page to download a template of the Competition Safety Plan.

Further resources can be found through the below links to the SLSNZ Website:

[Our Approach to Health and Safety](#)

[SLSNZ Incident and Injury Notification flow chart](#)

[Missing Person at Sea](#)

[SLSNZ Code of Conduct](#)

