



# AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE 2023

## National Award Winners 2023

Media Link available here: <https://www.surflifesaving.org.nz/news/2023/september/new-zealand-s-surf-lifeguards-honoured-at-2023-slsnz-national-awards-of-excellence>

Surf Life Saving New Zealand (SLSNZ) is thrilled to announce the winners of its 2023 National Awards of Excellence. Volunteers from around the country gathered at Te Papa in Wellington on 23 September for the awards, which recognised recipients in the areas of lifesaving, sport, and education.

Steve Fisher, SLSNZ CEO, said, “The awards are always a highlight in the SLSNZ calendar. It serves not only as an opportunity to acknowledge those who have gone above and beyond, but it’s also a great chance for us to all to come together and take stock of the important work we do before the next season begins.”

This year, Jess Bennett from Ocean Beach Kiwi Surf Life Saving Club (SLSC) in Hawke’s Bay won **DHL Volunteer of the Year**. Bennett has been managing the Hawke’s Bay Search and Rescue (SAR) callout squad for years, but her work around Cyclone Gabrielle was outstanding. She proactively planned for the event weeks in advance, leading the team with authority and respect.

When Cyclone Gabrielle did eventually hit, Bennett left her young family to spend weeks at the centre of the major rescue response in Hawke’s Bay. The SAR team, consisting of over 30 members and utilising 15 inflatable rescue boats (IRBs), conducted extensive SAR operations under her coordination. She led this team into uncharted territories but, despite being tested in various ways, Bennett remained approachable and compassionate.

Helen Jackson, Ocean Beach Kiwi SLSC Director of Sport, said, “From all of us to you, Jess, we want to thank you for giving tirelessly, for all that you have done, and all that you do.”

Samantha Larson from Kariaotahi Surf Club won **Lifeguard of the Year**.

During the 2022/2023 season, Larson demonstrated remarkable dedication and expertise in just about all aspects of surf lifesaving. She dedicated over 100 hours to club-level patrolling and assumed a pivotal role as the primary facilitator of Kariaotahi Surf Club’s Surf Lifeguard Award programme.

Larson was also a member of the Membership Development Committee and served as a facilitator for all Surf Life Saving Northern development camps.

During the season, Samantha also took charge of organising and leading the Wāhine on Water events throughout the North Island - an event designed to empower and encourage females to become IRB drivers. She passionately advocates for increasing female representation in IRBs and serves as a fantastic role model, actively participating in IRB racing herself.

Tara Coe, Kariaotahi Surf Club Head of Lifesaving, said, “The hours Samantha has given to surf this season has been immense. She definitely deserves the Lifeguard of the Year award.”

The National Awards of Excellence is an annual event, with finalists selected from winners of the regional Awards of Excellence held earlier in the year.

Fisher said, “The 2022/2023 season was incredibly busy, and I’d like to thank all of our members for the time they dedicated. A lot of work goes into keeping beachgoers safe, whether it’s training surf lifeguards or organising sport events that help hone their skills. It’s all important, and it doesn’t go unnoticed. The spirit and generosity of SLSNZ volunteers are something I am hugely grateful for.”

## **National Awards of Excellence 2023 Winners**

**Coach of the Year** - John Bryant, Mt Maunganui

**International Performance of the Year** - Danielle McKenzie, Mairangi Bay and Cory Taylor, Midway

**Instructor of the Year** - Poppy Crouch, Omanu

**Volunteer of the Year** - Jess Bennett, Ocean Beach Kiwi

**Official of the Year** - Bruce Matheson, Omanu

**Lifeguard of the Year** – Samantha Larson, Kariaotahi

**Patrol Support Officer of the Year** - Wade Meads, Maketu

**Rescue of the Year** - Hawke's Bay Search and Rescue Squad

**London Trophy** – Wanganui

(Given to the club with the most Surf Lifeguard Awards gained, proportional to the club's size)

**Gudsell Cup** – Mairangi Bay

(Given to the club with the highest total number of Surf Lifeguard Awards gained – this is the qualification to become a surf lifeguard)

### **SLSNZ Life Membership**

- John Chapman, Ōrewa
- Bruce Matheson, Omanu
- Sheryl McLay, Mt Maunganui
- Ross Merrett, Papamoa
- Dr Kevin Moran ONZM, Muriwai
- Michelle Newton, Red Beach
- Mike Smith, Taylors Mistake
- Mark Weatherall, Omanu

### **50 Year Badges**

- Peter Brown, Piha
- Ricky Butt, Muriwai
- Warren Edwards, Sunset Beach
- Peter Housiaux QSM, Ōtaki
- Shelley Kerr, Mt Maunganui
- Alan Kindred, Muriwai
- Mark McCarthy, Ōrewa
- Kevin Moran, Muriwai
- George Thomson, Piha
- Terry Wyllie, Sunset Beach

### **SLSNZ Distinguished Service Awards**

- Matthew Bradley, St Clair
- Boyd Harris, Pukehina
- Joanne Hobson, Sunset Beach
- Benny Larsen, Ōrewa
- Bruce Matheson, Omanu
- Sheryl McLay, Mt Maunganui
- Spencer Raymond, Pauanui
- Dion Williams, Wainui

## SLSNZ Service Awards

- Rebecca Aburn, Brighton
- Tania Ahrens, Ruakākā
- Greg Akroyd, Mt Maunganui
- Mike Brown, Mairangi Bay
- Kate Bryce, Sumner
- Stu Bryce, New Brighton
- Robynne Cabusao, Omanu
- Chase Cahalane, Omanu
- Brady Campbell, Mairangi Bay
- Grace Campbell, Mairangi Bay
- Niam Chronican, St Clair
- Eric Clearwater, Waikanae
- Jon Copeland, Ōrewa
- Jayd Cosmatos, Nelson
- Kirsty Cullen, New Brighton
- Wayne Faasega, Warrington
- Mark Familton, Warrington
- Andrew Forsythe, Ruakākā
- Jeffery Foster, St Clair
- Zac Franich, Ōrewa
- Steve Glue, Waimairi
- Glenn Gowthorpe DSD, Muriwai
- Debi Hocart, Ōpōtiki
- Guy Hornblow, Kariaotahi
- Ashleigh Hurring, Fitzroy
- Samantha Larson, Kariaotahi
- Stu Lowth, Pukehina
- Graeme Lundie, Ōtaki
- Kath Manning, Waipu Cove
- Tim Manning, Waipu Cove
- Bruce Matheson, Omanu
- Ivan McCabe, Waipu Cove
- Adam McKernan, Ruakākā
- Ben McKernan, Ruakākā
- Rebecca McNaughton, Warrington
- Kevin Morrison, Mairangi Bay
- Dennis Mundy, Omanu
- Christine Nairn, Pukehina
- Simon Oldham, Omanu
- Ian Rae, Taylors Mistake
- Troy Reed, Spencer Park
- Rodney Richards, Waikanae
- Caitlin Ruddle, Waimairi
- Kim Saunders, Ōpōtiki
- Rick Schreuder, Kariaotahi
- Mark Senior, Sunset Beach
- Nigel Sorenson, Muriwai
- Brittany Spencer, Nelson
- Kathryn Stewart, Papamoa
- Luke Stockman, Muriwai
- Angela Stolwerk, Waipu Cove
- Rick Stolwerk, Waipu Cove
- Callum Sutherland, Brighton
- Philippa Taylor, Ruakākā
- Samuel Todd, St Clair
- Nevan Trotter, Brighton
- Dirk van der Woerd, Muriwai
- Garry van Leeuwen, Waimairi
- James Wellacott, Spencer Park
- Daniel Williams, Wainui
- Ossian Woods, St Clair