

EVENT REPORT



INTRODUCTION

The New Zealand Pool Rescue Championships is the premier competition for pool rescue in New Zealand. The prestigious event highlights essential lifesaving skills and techniques critical for beach safety. Lifeguards and aspiring lifeguards compete for their clubs, showcasing their speed and skills.

The purpose of this report is to provide insights into the delivery of the 2024 AON NZ Pool Rescue Championships with a view to develop learnings that can be applied to future SLSNZ competitions.

Like all sports, Surf Life Saving felt the significant impacts of COVID on participation and has been focussed on steadily rebuilding the membership's engagement with our events. During this time, SLSNZ has also been introducing purposeful changes to the structure of our events that research indicates provides improved experiences and outcomes for participants and therefore increases in retention and attraction to the sport.

The primary sources of information were the 2024 NZ Pool Rescue Championships surveys for participants and coaches/managers as well as feedback from key volunteers and staff. The focus areas of the survey were communication, programming, event experience & reviewing initiatives from 2022 pool rescue working group.

OVERVIEW

- First time naming-rights partner in Aon.
- 460 entries from 31 clubs (Wanganui SLSC – first time entrants).
- Approx 80-100 first time participants.
- 46 Officials and Water Safety volunteers
- Programming kept ahead of time and no technology issues.
- 250 events total across the 3 days.
- 33 NZ records broken
- Successful delivery with excellent brand engagement and activations through Aon
- Grant funding allowed event to make a profit.
- Extremely positive event survey feedback
- Participants gave the event an overall NPS of 56. Coaches/Manager gave the event an overall NPS of 78
- One complaint – volunteer to volunteer.

PARTICIPATION

Division/Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Junior								150	158	194
Senior/Masters								190	274	266
Total	580	603	688	536	500	347	N/A	340	432	460

PROGRAMMING

The 2022 post-event survey produced the following results:

- 36 respondents - 3 coaches, 13 juniors, 6 managers & 14 parents/supporters
- 66.5% rated their **overall satisfaction** as 'very satisfied' or 'extremely satisfied'
- 61% were 'very satisfied' or 'extremely satisfied' with the **programming**
- 97% supported **the introduction of composite teams for juniors**, with 64% being supportive of them receiving medals.
- 85% supported the **future introduction of composite teams for seniors**, with 59% being supportive of them receiving medals
- 38% supported **seeded racing** regardless of age group and 58% needed more information.
- 62% supported **U15 racing up** in higher age-groups

Following the 2022 Pool Rescue Championships, a Pool Rescue volunteer working group was established to provide member in-put into the ongoing development of Pool Rescue events. Their recommendations that were implemented for 2023 onwards were:

- Continuation of junior composite teams
- Reducing underwater component for U11 & U12 50m Brick Medley
- Removal of fins from U14 50m Brick Medley
- Change to U14 patient tow with fins from 100m to 150m
- Introduction of junior mega-relay
- Introduction of U15 competitors racing up
- Introduction of 50m manikin medley for U15
- Reduction of U15 swim with obstacles from 200m to 100m
- Removal of use of 'rocket fins' for U15 competitors
- Removal of U19 division for Pool Lifesaver relay
- Replace all male/female relays with mixed only with the exception of the open division.
- Introduction of senior events on day one of the programme

Following feedback during interclub and regional events preceding the 2024 Championships, composite teams were introduced for all senior & masters relays without the ability to achieve medals or points.

The 2024 survey provided the following insights:

- 72 participants respondents from 20 clubs
 - 33 juniors
 - 24 seniors
 - 18 masters
- 27 coach/managers respondents from 19 clubs
- Composite Teams
 - 47% of participants & 22% of coaches/managers **supported the continuation of composite teams in all divisions being able to win medals**
 - 32% of participants & 37% of coaches/managers **supported the continuation of composite teams in all divisions but only juniors being able to win medals**
 - 21% of participants & 41% of coaches/managers **supported the continuation of composite teams in all divisions with no divisions winning medals**
 - Common threads in comments was a preference for both composite teams and club teams to get medals as well as risks of allowing clubs to self-select composite teams meant teams were often a mix of high-quality individuals from small clubs
- Mixed relays
 - 27% of participants & 30% of coaches/managers **preferred mixed teams**
 - 14% of participants & 7% of coaches/managers **preferred single gender teams**
 - 39% of participants & 22% of coaches/managers **had no preference**
- Timing
 - 80% of participants & 77% of coaches/managers **preferred the current time of year** for the event

FINANCIAL

- Annual operating expenses continue to increase, particularly the cost of venue hire, which accounts for over 40% of overall expenses.
- Event Management work particularly hard to reduce any unnecessary expenditure without compromising the event experience (this was helped by the activations and experiential elements supported by Aon)
- With current income streams currently limited to entry fees we were extremely fortunate to be given the opportunity to apply for and be successful in receiving funding from pelorus trust, without which the event would have made a small loss.

COMMUNICATION

Clear, timely communication across a number of platforms (email, website, teamreach, social media) were used to ensure clubs, participants and volunteers were kept informed before, during and after the competition.

- 96% of coaches/managers rated the **entry circular** as good or excellent
- 85% of coaches/managers rated the **composite teams memo** as good or excellent
- 92% of coaches/managers rated the **online managers meeting** as good or excellent
- 92% of coaches/managers rated the **daily managers meeting** as good or excellent

EVENT EXPERIENCE

New partner Aon was given the event naming-rights as part of their wider partnership with SLSNZ. This was a first for pool rescue and they were very proactive in providing branded assets and activations which contributed to bringing the event to life and enhancing the event experience for participants, supporters and volunteers. This included:

- Event logo & merchandise
- Medal lanyards & prizegiving podium
- Officials & volunteer uniforms and free coffee vouchers
- Signage outside and inside the venue
- Free bbq, drinks, ice-creams and games as part of prizegiving
- Photobooth and give-aways
- Local Aon staff volunteering at the event
- 82% of participants and 91% of coaches/managers **agreed or strongly agreed that Aon enhanced the event experience**. Participant feedback samples:
 - 'It was amazing to have the BBQ and ice creams as well as the Photo Booth. We felt appreciated as a sport and welcome AON and their amazing support'.
 - 'The outdoor activities and foodies were a real added bonus especially this year with having two little ones, it helped occupy them and make them feel the pool wasn't a boring place'.
 - 'The break for sausages and ice cream was very well received by the whole team and gave us a good excuse to regroup as a team and everyone's positivity was lifted due to it'.
 - 'How fabulous to acknowledge all the new masters with a towel! Red officials tees were really clear'!
- SLSNZ also added a number of new initiatives alongside the event, including:
 - A high performance breakfast for coaches, parents & athletes to find out more about of high performance programmes
 - A volunteers dinner which included a Q&A session with officials who had attended the recent Lifesaving World Championships
 - Pool-side presentations to recognise the New Zealand athletes who broke pool World Records.
 - A partner engagement function with Aon executives and staff
- 76% of participants and 87% of coaches/managers **agreed or strongly agreed that the venue facilities, seating and food were convenient and easy to access**
- 82% of participants and 94% of coaches/managers **agreed or strongly agreed that the officials were approachable, helpful & knowledgeable**
- Coaches/Managers rated event footage (photos/videos) & communication as the areas most important in terms of requiring improvement
- Participants rated event communications and programming as the areas most important in terms of requiring improvement

HEALTH & SAFETY

There was one injury which involved a junior swimmer mis-judging touching the end of the pool, hitting their head and requiring first aid. It was identified that the removal of the 10m finishing flags during the preceding event resulted in the swimmer not having a visual marker of distance to the finish.

There was one complaint between volunteers regarding conduct. Significant time was invested to ensure fair and transparent process which was eventually resolved post-event but highlighted some short-comings in the available SLSNZ complaints process.

HUMAN RESOURCE

- The single-arena controllable indoor environment with predictable timeframes makes pool rescue events significantly easier to determine the required human resource.
- An expression of interest process for volunteer positions was competed with member-led appointments panel selecting the Event Referee and supporting them to select officiating roles.
- Four volunteers and four staff supported the event manager in delivering the logistical, equipment, commercial and non-officiating elements of the event.
- A rotating team of ten water safety ensured the equipment was in place to ensure programme efficiency.
- Additionally, two emcees/commentators were used to enhance the event.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Participation
 - Focus on improving awareness of pool rescue opportunities to grow participation at club & regional events.
 - Continue development sessions to support coaches
 - Communication of dates and programmes
 - Balance alignment across country with meeting local needs/constraints
- Programming
 - Continuation of composite teams supported by deeper quantitative analysis of the impact of composite teams – number, make up, results etc to help determine best implementation method.
 - Review mixed relay teams supported by deeper quantitative analysis of impact of mixed relay teams to help determine best implementation method.
 - Deeper qualitative analysis of comments and suggested improvements to find any common themes or potential initiatives to include.
- Financial
 - Continued focus on grant funding opportunities as well as direct income from organisational partners in order to reduce additional financial impact on the membership and ensure sustainable event.
- Communication
 - Early communication of competition dates, venues and programmes
 - Deeper analysis of survey comments to determine how to meet coaches/manager, participants & volunteers needs
 - Clear timelines for specific club and volunteer communications
- Event experience
 - Continue to work with Aon and other potential partners to provide great experiences for participants & volunteers.