

# lifeguard

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# TIM WILSON

DHL LIFEGUARD  
OF THE YEAR

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# LIFEGUARDING A TOWER OF STRENGTH OUT WEST

**L**ifeguard towers are an iconic image of lifeguarding throughout the world. Yet, in Australia, we use very few of them in our day-to-day lifeguarding operations. Apart from the large-style towers along beaches such as the Gold Coast, the smaller on-beach-style towers similar to those you'll see in the USA are few and far between.

*LIFEGUARD* asked **Matthew Duplessis**, Lifesaving Operations Coordinator for SLSWA, to explain the new approach to lifeguarding they are implementing with the use of on-beach towers.

**MATTHEW:** Over the past few years, we have been looking deeply into our operations and seeing how we can improve them, and questioning whether we are meeting the needs of the public.

We are still seeing a number of people getting into difficulties outside the primary patrolling area, so the question we had to ask was: Are our current methods sufficient, or can we do more?

We are seeing people accessing the coastline by moving away from the traditional patrolled areas, thus placing themselves at more risk due to not having rescue services at hand. With this change in beach user behaviour in mind, we had to look at how we could meet the increasing demands.

One of the methods we are looking at is the Californian-style lifeguard tower. We intend to trial these towers at strategically placed locations.

Providing permanent or semi-permanent surveillance/observation towers across Western Australian beaches is likely to improve the surveillance and search and rescue techniques of lifesaving services. A raised platform increases the length and breadth of the area under surveillance, without necessarily having to increase the lifesaving service level or profiles.

Elevated platforms also help improve the angle of vision, reducing the limiting effect that surface reflection, glare and sea surface conditions can have on surveillance. A raised platform should, where possible, provide unimpeded vision of the shoreline and above the wave zone, allowing for immediate response.

The current patrol tents and trailers by themselves do not meet the above objectives for a number of reasons. We believe that the introduction of towers will change the culture of our services and also bring a more professional look. Over the next few years, we will be looking at trialling more towers, which in turn will help manage the risk more effectively.

We are confident that this will be the future look of our operations in Western Australia. However, we first need to make sure that the towers meet our objectives. As we are still awaiting delivery of our first tower from California, we will have more updates in 2015.

A recent coronial inquest (Bryn Martin shark fatality) recommended a tower be placed at Cottesloe Beach due to lack of adequate surveillance.



An on-beach-style lifeguard tower used in the USA.



**A RAISED PLATFORM INCREASES  
THE LENGTH AND BREADTH OF  
THE AREA UNDER SURVEILLANCE**

An example of a large-style lifeguard tower used in eastern states.