

Lets educate ourselves about surf safety!

By Michael Christie.

Below is my effort at this.

It is not intended as advice, as I think we must all make our own decisions as to how we handle situations in the surf.

This is just my opinion on how to deal with it when we get in a situation we didn't mean to.

I think also, understanding the surf is a big help in dealing with conditions on an everyday basis. You don't have to be in trouble to get an advantage from knowing how the surf works.

The below is not intended to be Holy Scripture. As mentioned it is just my opinion, and I would hope that it would stimulate discussion and comment amongst us and even disagreement!!

Here goes.....

AVOIDING PANIC,

In my view the most dangerous thing in the ocean is ourselves. You can forget sharks and rays and stingers and even big surfs. **Once you lose it you are at real risk.** The trick is to stay alive and eventually you will get in to the beach. Even dead bodies end up on the beach and they aren't swimming too hard! So you will end up on the beach eventually just make sure you are still alive.

What happens with panic?? We lose firstly the ability to make rational decisions, like deciding that we are not moving because of a rip. Therefore we should move a bit north or south to get out of it and get washed in on a bank. Secondly we start panic swimming and get exhausted. Therefore no reserve of breath to go under white water and no reserve of energy to swim when we can, and eventually not enough energy to keep our heads above water.

So what to do? We are half way out and it is obviously beyond our capacity. We have made a mistake. [And EVERYONE makes mistakes.]

FIRSTLY DO NOT PANIC.

PANIC IS A PROBLEM!

- STOP; don't start attacking the water trying to swim somewhere.
- REMEMBER:
 - YOU DON'T HAVE TO GET ANYWHERE IN A HURRY.
 - USE YOUR ENERGY TO STAY AFLOAT AND GET AIR.
 - DON'T EXHAUST YOURSELF.
- Catch your breath and assess what is happening. Are you in a rip? Are you pushing in on the bank? It will be one or the other.
- Swim gently to stay afloat and keep your reserves of breath and energy.
- Go under any breaks. Dive so you are below the white water and if not too deep grab the sand on the bottom. Come up after each break to get air. [push off the bottom if you have been that deep]
- Calm yourself down and wait for a lull in the surf. A break between sets. [Very important. See below.]
- If you are in a rip, you will note you are being carried out to sea. This is not all bad: There is less break to the waves here. It will eventually take you out through the break. It will eventually drop you at the head of the bank where it is much easier to come in. Your decision is whether to swim across the rip to the bank or to sit it out till the rip itself takes you there. SLSA would have that you swim across the rip. Craig Riddington would have it that you sit it out and conserve your energy. I personally agree with the latter. The name of the game is staying alive and you must conserve energy, air and courage.
- If you are being pushed in on the bank, this may be one reason you have found it extremely hard getting out. You will note you are being pushed back to the beach. Not a bad thing at all! Once you have settled, catch the breaks by making yourself as large as possible. Legs and arms extended to allow the break to catch you and push you in. If you know how to catch a wave, then do so. Keep your breath. Swim gently. When you get to the beach don't get caught in the onshore current and get recycled into the outgoing rip again.
- If things change: [I was going in to the beach but now I seem to be going the other way!] Stop and reassess what has happened. Maybe you have slipped across a bit to another rip. Handle it as before.

Now all of the above is fine, we've got into trouble and there is a scheme of actions to help us get out of it. But how do we avoid getting to the point where we say 'oops I've made an error of judgement, bummer it.'

Like most problems in life the best defence and remedy is education. We can all learn more about how to stay safe in the surf. I don't regard myself as an expert but I

certainly am writing this from the point of view of someone who has thought about it. But I also intend it as a stimulus to others to put their bit in and say how they see it.

Firstly: Respect the ocean and know your own limits. Once a swell gets around two metres it is a serious swell and deserves respect. For some people it will be a swell of one metre. You can be injured or drown, and this has to be seriously considered. So there is no place for Machismo. No one has to prove anything. You should understand and know your own ability and limits.

Secondly: You should understand beaches and conditions and make sure you LOOK for them.

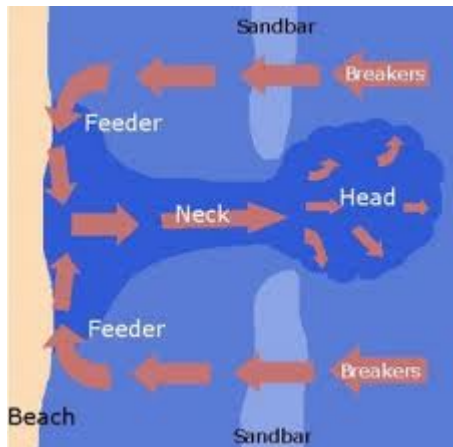
- Manly is *generally* a 'bar and rip' type beach. This means that there are rips along the length of the beach which straddle sand bars and are often fed from an onshore current or more usually from the wash off the banks.



The beach pictured is not Manly but is a typical 'bar and rip' type beach and certainly gives the idea. The point is you will not know what sort of beach you are dealing with unless you actually LOOK. In this photo you can see the banks with the breaking white water coming in to the beach, alternating with darker quiet looking water which are the rips going out to sea. So if you swam here you would know what to expect.

- Rip currents. Manly has a permanent rip at the southern end of the beach known affectionately as the 'escalator'. This is just the first of the rips in the bar and rip system and it is important to realise that there are additional rips as you move up the beach. The next up from the escalator is about 150m to the north and is to be avoided if you are trying to swim in. The 'flags' are usually on the sand bank between these two rips.
- Rips are just formed by water getting away from the beach that has come in over the banks. So in a heavy swell the rips will be a lot stronger. A rip leaves the beach and passes out to the break and sometimes a bit beyond and will curl

around to dissipate at the head of the sandbank, where the water comes in again and then circulates out again in the rip current.



- How to identify Rips? The water will be a little 'ruffled' and a different colour. It may be a bit sandy or have weed and bits of debris floating in it. Usually the waves don't break as strongly over the rip and this leaves a 'U' shaped depression in the break. One can usually see the flow of current out against the usual flow over the bank. But again to see this one has to actually look.
- Understand the swell. The swell is usually a result of several different sources. For example some may come from the Antarctic and be completely southerly with a component coming in from the east and some more from a different southerly point. The end result is that the swell is usually what is called an interference pattern. This means there will be 'sets' coming in to the beach and this has enormous importance to getting in and out of the break. Sets mean that there will be predictable lulls [and the reverse] in the break. Again if you look you will see that there is a definite predictable pattern. For example there may be three LARGE BREAKS followed by five or six SMALLER BREAKS. So if you are trying to get out from the beach it pays to wait for a lull before pushing out to the break. If you are having trouble getting in or out from the beach and you are caught in some big sets, because you have observed before you went in, you will know that it is a matter of a short wait till the big set ceases and there will be five or six small waves where you will have an opportunity to get in or out.
- LEAVING THE BEACH. [going OUT]
 - Wait for a lull. Stand waist deep until the lull just starts then head off.
 - Use the rip to get out.
 - Get beyond the break and relax.
 - Easy stroke and calm.
 - If you cop a big set, wait again for the lull between sets, then head off again. No prizes for first out.
 - Go under big waves, below the white water. Maybe grab the sand and push off.

- Don't get puffed out. Don't panic. Take it easy.
- COMING BACK TO THE BEACH. [coming IN]
 - Catch a wave if you can.
 - Wait for a lull between sets to swim in.
 - Don't swim into a rip. Stay on the bank.
 - Make yourself as large as possible to catch the white water.
- PRACTICE in a surf where you are comfortable.
- REMEMBER:
 - It is easy to go out in a rip, and quite hard to come in against it.
 - It is hard to go out on the bank and relatively easy to come in on it.

IN SUMMARY.

- Know your limits.
- Know and understand your beach.
- NEVER panic. Always keep CALM.
- Time entry and exit to sets.
- Go out on the rip.
- Come in on the sandbank.
- Swim a maintainable pace so you
 - Keep your breath.
 - Keep your energy.
 - Keep your courage.