

**MEDIA RELEASE: AUSSIE SURF LIFESAVERS TO JOIN THE QUEEN IN
THAMES FLOTILLA
SURF BOATS TO SAIL BETWEEN THE FLAGS, PAGEANT PLAN REVEALS**

Wednesday 02 May 2012 – Australian surf lifesavers will join The Queen on the Thames for the Diamond Jubilee Pageant on Sunday 3 June, the Australian High Commission reveals today.

Nine surfboats crewed by Australian surf lifesavers will be among the 1,000 vessels in the river-borne celebration of Her Majesty's 60-year reign. Participants from the nation that invented surf lifesaving will take to the water ahead of the Royal Barge, *The Spirit of Chartwell*, on which The Queen, Duke of Edinburgh and members of the Royal Family will be aboard.

For many watching what is being billed as the greatest show the Thames has ever seen, including over one million flag-waving spectators on the riverbank, Australia's contribution will be a familiar image – albeit far from home. When Australians embraced the ocean in the early 20th century a love of the open water quickly developed into a way of life. With beachgoers entering the surf in rapidly escalating numbers came the need for a lifesaving movement. Volunteers first emerged on Sydney's Bondi beach in 1907 and later that year the Surf Bathing Association of New South Wales, now Surf Life Saving Australia, was formed.

Surf life saving in Australia

The largest volunteer movement of its kind in the world has since saved over 600,000 lives and, like popular beach culture, become part of Australia's very fabric. Its work to address an epidemic of child drowning deaths around the globe – estimated to average one per minute – is also gaining increasing attention.

An Australian, Allan Kennedy MBE, is credited with bringing the surf life saving movement to Great Britain sixty years ago. Alan Kennedy MBE travelled from his posting at Australia House, London in 1951 to later found the first surf life saving club in Great Britain in 1952. According to the Australian High Commissioner to the UK, HE John Dauth AO LVO, it reflects 'an even bigger story'.

"The participation of Australian surf life savers in the Thames Diamond Jubilee Pageant reflects Australia's wider contribution worldwide," he says. "Surf life saving is just one of many life-changing ideas to have originated in Australia. And more than a major movement in its own right, it also embodies the nation's unsung heroes across many other industries. The Australian volunteer surf lifesavers come from all walks of professional life and that's something we are proud to export overseas."

When not among those who each year spend well over a million hours patrolling the Australian coastline – or that of 30 countries in which Surf Life Saving Australia works abroad – those making the seven-mile trip from Battersea Bridge to Tower Bridge include bankers, business analysts and scientists. Some are already in the UK, such as Nathan Hillier (26) who won the under-23 silver medal at the 2008 Australian Surf Life Saving Championships before leaving the Gold Coast for London. He is now a Cardiac Physiologist at Kensington's Royal Brompton Hospital, the largest specialist heart and lung centre in the UK.

Australia Unlimited

Yet for 80 per cent of the surf lifesavers the journey begins more than 10,000 miles away. In keeping with the fabled Aussie pioneering spirit they have funded their own travel in order to take up the invitation from the Australian High Commission in London. All are backing the Australian Government's global *Australia Unlimited* campaign which aims to show a different side of the land Down Under. Kym Fullgrave, Austrade's Senior Trade and Investment Commissioner in London, hopes their efforts on the Thames can help turn the tide of public perception.

"Australia is perhaps better known for its beauty than its brains," he explains. "People think first about our people and the lifestyle that draws visitors and expats in vast numbers every year. But this perception, however positive, means we don't always get the credit we deserve in other areas; in Business, Science, Technology, Creative Industries and Education – as represented by some of the surf lifesavers in The Queen's flotilla. Their participation celebrates not only the incredible contribution that Surf Life Saving Australia makes around the world, but that of the Australian diaspora."

The global surf lifesaving movement, surf lifesaving reel and surf ski have been used worldwide and are considered to be among many Australian innovations born of the nation's isolation and geography. The island continent also pioneered Internet Wi-Fi, Google Maps, the black box flight recorder, solar hot water and the refrigerator. Spray-on-skin, the bionic ear, electronic pacemaker and world's first feature film also came from the country considered home by 12 Nobel Prize winners.

Participants

At 22 Caitlin McConnel is the youngest of 12 women to take part and one of 29 surf lifesavers to fly in from Australia for the event. "I can speak on behalf of all the surf lifesavers participating in saying it is a huge honour to be part of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations in London," she says. "It's just one month away now; I can't wait to get there, into the boat with the team and onto the Thames to fly the flag for Australia – and for Australians making a difference at home and abroad."

The contribution of Australians and Australian business in the UK is particularly relevant in 2012. Drawing on experience from Sydney in 2000, they are playing a key role in delivering the London Olympics.

The Australian surf lifesavers will rendezvous at Twickenham Rowing Club on Friday 1 June to test the Thames waters ahead of the big day. Their boats, on loan from the UK Surf Rowers' League (UKSRL), are travelling a far shorter distance from Twickenham and Cornwall. UKSRL President, Peter Gaisford, is one of nine 'sweeps' – or steersmen – from the organisation who will each join one of the Australian teams.

The Queen was last Down Under in October 2011 in her capacity as Head of the Commonwealth, when Australia hosted the 22nd Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. It was the third time the nation, a founding member of the Commonwealth, had hosted the event – more than any country other than the UK.

-ENDS-

*****Media & Picture Desk alert – interview/film/photo opportunity Friday 1 June 2012, 16:00pm*****

Australian surf lifesavers and dignitaries will be available for interview/filming/photos on Friday 1 June during a BBQ briefing at Twickenham Rowing Club (16:00 pm) to media accredited in advance through the below contact details.

Notes to the Editor

- Each year surf lifesavers across Australia rescue over 14,000 people; administer first aid to 67,500; and undertake 734,000 preventative actions. Its economic contribution is valued at AUD\$3.6 billion per annum in Australia alone. Over 70% of members volunteer over three hours each week.
- The International Lifesaving Federation – of which Surf Life Saving Australia is a founding member – says the best scientific evidence available indicates some 1.2 million people worldwide die by drowning every year; more than two persons per minute. Over 50 percent are children. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 97 percent of fatalities occur in low and middle-income countries.
- In the Economist's 2011 'World's Most Liveable Cities' rankings, Melbourne topped the charts with Sydney (6th), Perth (8th) and Adelaide (9th) close behind.

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About the Thames Diamond Jubilee Pageant

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