



# 150 rescues as swimmers swarm to beaches

By ANGELA THOMPSON

OFF-DUTY lifesavers helped avert multiple tragedies at North Wollongong beach last night, in their busiest day of rescues this season.

The volunteers made more than 150 rescues as glorious weather brought thousands to the Illawarra coast.

More than a third of rescues were at North Wollongong Beach, where five people from Western Sydney were sucked 200m out to sea about 7.30pm, when lifeguards had left.

Belinda Colvin, 21, of Campbelltown, was among the stricken group.

"We only meant to go in up to our knees, then all of a sudden it dropped off and we were out there,"

Ms Colvin said.

"I was thinking about my kids.

"I thought I would never see them again."

She said she and another of the swimmers worked to keep her partner, Dwayne Gaudron, afloat as he appeared to have an asthma attack.

The group flagged down a surfer, who came to Mr Gaudron's aid.

Retired lifesaver Russell Locke, North Wollongong lifesaver John Wren and other off-duty lifesavers also helped bring them ashore.

Sharlaine Gaudron, 20, said she doubted she would have been able to make it back without the help.

"Every time we tried to come back it just took us out again," she said.

Asked what might deter

swimmers from going into unpatrolled waters, they said being caught in a rip could bring the lesson home.

"If this hadn't have happened we would have come next week and done it again," Ms Gaudron said.

North Wollongong Surf Life Saving Club president Lance Tarrant said education remained a key challenge as lifesavers couldn't patrol all beaches at all hours.

Illawarra duty officer Anthony Turner said 57 rescues were recorded at North Wollongong.

At Thirroul, lifesavers used a jet ski to reach two girls 200m outside the flagged area. One needed oxygen and was treated at hospital.



**Lucky:** Lifesavers and emergency workers assist five western Sydney swimmers after their rescue at North Wollongong beach. Picture: DAVE TEASE