



Rough surf sparks Aussie Day fears

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UNSTABLE Gold Coast surf conditions caused more than 90 people to be rescued from beaches at the weekend.

Surf lifesavers are on alert, with dangerous conditions expected for Australia Day – traditionally one of the busiest days of the year.

The most dangerous beaches – Burleigh, Kurrawa and Southport – kept lifesavers busy, pulling swimmers from the surf and moving them between flags on Saturday and yesterday.

Lifesavers yesterday resorted to closing certain flagged areas at Surfers Paradise because rips were so strong.

About 40 people were rescued on

Saturday, while figures neared 50 yesterday. More than 20 of these people were rescued at Southport about 1pm.

King tides strongly drawing water out to sea throughout the day have been blamed for causing dangerous surf conditions, combined with nasty winds and gutters.

Conditions are expected to remain the same today and leading into the public holiday.

Rescue crews made sure they were prepared, yesterday participating in new emergency training exercises at Southport.

The Westpac Lifesaver Helicopter Rescue Service worked with Southport Surf Life Saving to winch mock victims out of the water and on to the sand.

The helicopter will alternate between clubs, providing crew

and lifesavers with valuable skills. Club captain Michael Phelps expects the Coast will need the chopper soon.

“Obviously, if we get a day where there’s big seas, we’re going to be relying on that,” he said.

Westpac has a new helicopter and equipment that allows greater access to the beach.

Mr Phelps said the old chopper used to blow sand and disturb people on the beach during descent.

A helipad area has to be cleared for the chopper to come in.

State helicopter administer Eddie Bennet believes that crews would benefit from more training with the new chopper.

“The reason we’re doing this is so we can be the best prepared for any emergency,” he said.

“It’s more realistic.”



Surf lifesavers help two swimmers out of trouble at Southport yesterday

Photo: RICHARD GOSLING