



# Marine Stinger Management Newsletter

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The life of the beach.





# Marine Stinger Management Newsletter

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## We can all make a difference

During drafting of this month's newsletter, news hit with the tragic death of Steve Irwin. I was asked repeatedly if I thought that people would become afraid of stingrays as a result. Good question! We fear what we do not understand. Each of us has a significant role that we can play in putting various risks into perspective for our visitors, our children, and others looking to us for guidance and looking for example.

Stingrays are not a thing to be feared; they are just living their lives in an environment in which we are visitors. Mr Irwin's death was a terrible but rare tragedy. We must continue to educate the public about the dangers of all marine creatures, including stingrays. See page 4 for a synopsis of stingray facts and safety tips.

Likewise, marine stingers are not some "deadly mystery from the deep" – we know how to protect from being stung while still enjoying our tropical waters. Each of us can help reduce stings and anxiety by passing along accurate messages based on prevention, rather than inaccurate messages that exaggerate or ignore the issue. Furthermore, pro-active education occurs every time someone sees us wearing a lycra suit or swimming inside a stinger net – we can all make a difference.

Dr. Lisa-ann Gershwin – Editor, Marine Stinger Management Newsletter  
National Marine Stinger Advisor – Surf Life Saving  
Mob. 0409 627 869 – Email: [lisa.gershwin@jcu.edu.au](mailto:lisa.gershwin@jcu.edu.au)

### Mark the Date: Calendar

- 1 November 2006: Irukandji Task Force Prevention & Response Working Group meeting: To make a submission, contact Marine Stinger Coordinator 0409 627 869 or [lisa.gershwin@jcu.edu.au](mailto:lisa.gershwin@jcu.edu.au)
- Seminars and Workshops are being planned for all locations and all management sectors; if you or your organisation would like to arrange a specific public or private session, please contact the Marine Stinger Coordinator, Dr. Lisa-ann Gershwin 0409 627 869

### Did you know...

An average-sized *Chironex* box jellyfish has about 120-180 metres of combined tentacle length... but it only takes less than 1.5m to kill a child or about 3-5m to kill an adult.

It's certainly worth wearing a lycra suit!



## Upcoming Seminars & Workshops

An intensive schedule of seminars and workshops is being organised for the upcoming months, with the goal of meeting with as many people as possible who want to know more about stingers or seek information on developing improved stinger management practises. Please contact the Marine Stinger Coordinator: 0409 627 869.

### **Overview Schedule:**

Sept last week: Great Keppel Island

Oct 1st week: Agnes Water / Gladstone / Rocky / Yeppoon / Emu Park

Oct 2nd week: Mackay / Sarina

Oct 3rd week: Airlie / Proserpine

Oct 4th week: Bowen / Ayr

Oct last/ first Nov: Townsville

Nov 1st week: Ingham / Cardwell / Kennedy

Nov 2nd week: Tully / Mission Beach / Innisfail / Kurramine / Dunk Isl.

Nov 3rd week: Cairns / Port Douglas / Mossman / Daintree

Nov 4th week: Cape: Cooktown / Thursday Isl. / Bamaga

Dec 1st week: Gulf: Weipa / Aurukun / Karumba / Mornington Isl.

### **In each city or town, the currently anticipated schedule is:**

Morning lectures:

school 1

school 2

Afternoon workshops:

tourism / local govt focus

ambulance / hospital / clinic focus

Evening:

public seminar or resort personnel

Weekend:

Surf Life Saving Clubs

### **Open time slots still exist in most regions**

#### **What we need from you:**

- Please tell us if you would like to arrange a meeting with your organisation
- Please tell us what information is the most important to you



## Stingray Facts & Safety

- Stingrays are a diverse group of cartilaginous fish found in many parts of the world
- Stingrays are generally placid creatures which will swim away from humans if disturbed. They possess a sizable, venomous barb for defensive purposes. Their barb is not used for capturing prey
  - Stingray injuries usually occur in people wading in shallow water who step on the animal, and in people handling stingrays in boats, often landing an animal on a fishing line or sorting a trawl catch
  - Several incidents of injury to swimmers directly over stingrays have occurred, though this is rare.
- Serious illness and death from stingray injuries is uncommon, but each sting needs to be treated carefully.
  - At least 750 stings are known to occur *yearly* in the United States alone. There have been 18 known deaths worldwide, three of these in Australia. Most people stung will recover fully with simple treatment.
  - Penetration of major body structures (ie a stab-type wound) is the main cause of the few reported deaths from stingrays
  - The venom is very slow acting and causes local tissue death plus pain. Actions on the heart and other organs have been reported but these tend to not be life-threatening and are quite rare.
  - The wound may be heavily contaminated. Deaths and critical illness including tetanus from infected stingray wounds have been reported. Careful cleaning of wounds, up-to date tetanus immunisation and watching for signs of infection are extremely important
  - The wound if untreated may develop a large area of tissue death and have extremely delayed healing
- Avoiding the sting is the best protection
  - Wear foot protection and shuffle when wading
  - Do not swim or snorkel directly over stingrays
  - Do not handle stingrays: Don't land stingrays when fishing.
  - Appreciate these animals from a distance but do not disturb or harass them
- First aid if stung
  - Any stingray sting to the trunk, however trivial appearing, needs to be treated as a medical emergency. Call 000. These are fortunately rare
  - For other stings:
    - Control obvious bleeding. Do NOT pressure-immobilise
    - Immerse the affected part in water as hot as tolerable. If this does not relieve pain then cold packs may be tried
    - Clean the wound if feasible with water and antiseptic
    - Seek medical attention for all but the most trivial stingray injury



## What's coming in future issues?

In upcoming issues, we will look at topics including:

- Lessons learned from the 2005-2006 stinger season
- More on the changes to the [marinestingers.com](http://marinestingers.com) website
- An upcoming conference on marine stinger management
- Are stingers and stings increasing?
- Long term perspective on stinger trends

### *Did you know...*

Jellyfish are an ancient group of animals...

The oldest known jellyfish fossils date back to before the Cambrian Explosion, that is to say, over 585 million years ago! And they were first discovered in the Flinders Ranges of South Australia! They have since been discovered from many localities around the world, but the Flinders area known as Ediacara is still considered by many as the 'Dawn of Animal Life'.

The oldest box jellyfish fossils date back over 300 million years, and were nearly identical to those alive today! To put this in perspective, the dinosaurs became extinct about 65 million years ago, and humans only date back about 100,000 years. While fossil Irukandjis have yet to be found, it is currently believed that they date about as far back as the box jellyfishes.

### Where to get more information

Emergency sting information .....	000
Reports of stings or specimens .....	24/7: 0409 627 869
General safety information .....	SLSQ (07) 3846 8000
General jellyfish information .....	SLSQ (07) 3846 8000
Media enquiries .....	SLSQ (07) 3846 8044
Signage enquiries .....	SLSQ (07) 3846 8020
Requests for brochures, posters, etc .....	SLSQ (07) 3846 8000
Requests for speaking engagements .....	Coord. 0409 627 869
Research info or project ideas .....	Coord. 0409 627 869
Contributions to newsletter .....	<a href="mailto:lisa.gershwin@jcu.edu.au">lisa.gershwin@jcu.edu.au</a>
Add to mailing list .....	<a href="mailto:lisa.gershwin@jcu.edu.au">lisa.gershwin@jcu.edu.au</a>

<http://www.reef.crc.org.au/publications/brochures/Moreinformation.htm>

<http://www.marinestingers.com.au/marinestingers/default.htm>

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### If stung

by Irukandji / box jellyfish:

1. Call for help (dial '000' or send someone for a lifeguard)
2. Treat the victim (Provide emergency care - CPR if necessary)
3. Treat the sting (flood with vinegar)
4. Seek medical assistance