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**MASTERS SWIMMING AUSTRALIA OPEN WATER SWIMMING RULES
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OWS 1 OPEN WATER SWIMMING

OWS1.1 Masters Open Water Swimming shall be defined as any competition up to and including 10km that takes place in rivers, lakes, oceans or water channels, dams or rowing courses.

OWS1.1.2 Masters Swimming Australia or its Branches, may conduct any such open water event. Before the event can commence, the officials and the organisation providing water cover shall confirm that the conditions are such that all competitors can complete the course safely.

OWS1.1.3 Clubs or individuals conducting an Open Water Swim event or competition in line with the Rules of Masters Swimming Australia should apply to their Branch for sanction, providing a copy of the event and risk management plans, advertising and registration flyer and local authority requirement approval.

OWS1.2 No Masters Open Water events should be held in water with a temperature less than an average of 18° Celsius.

Note: *The water temperature taken at a minimum of three points at a depth of 40cm over the course, within one hour of the start time and averaged, will give you the course temperature.*

OWS1.3 Entry forms for Open Water events should contain a warning that only well prepared and medically fit swimmers should enter. Each swimmer is responsible for their own medical check.

OWS1.3.1 Swimmers who are not members of MSA should sign an At Risk Notification on entry.

OWS1.4 Entrants in OWS events must be at least 18 years of age on the day of the event.

OWS1.5 Briefings of swimmers and all course and safety personnel including medical and safety officers, course officials, course supervisors, safety craft, and paddlers must be held prior to the start of an event.

OWS1.5.1 The briefing of event officials, supervisors, safety personnel, safety craft, and paddlers is to be held at least 30 minutes before the start of the race to address their role in a safe event.

OWS1.5.2 The briefing of swimmers is to be held at least 15 minutes before the start of the race to fully address the course, rules and conditions relevant to the swim. All registered swimmers must attend this pre-race briefing.

OWS1.6 The number of registrations/swimmers and the venue conditions, will dictate the use of wave starts. Marshalling swimmers using brightly colour-coded caps to identify different waves can be done by nominated time, or gender, or age groups.

OWS1.7 A cut-off time for all events shall be determined and announced with the race details. A suggested time of 30 minutes per kilometre could apply. After expiry of the designated time limit, the Referee may order any or all swimmers still on the course to leave the water.

Note 1: *Advertising the cut off time on the registration flyer lets the swimmer know if they are prepared enough to nominate to swim the event distance.*

Note 2: *Setting a suggested time to be announced with the race details based on the distance swum i.e. 2.25k could be set at 30 minutes per kilometre or part thereof (1 hour 30 minutes) or 2.25k at 40 minutes per kilometre or part thereof (2 hours). This decision could be based on the type of registration times received and made by the Event Management Committee.*

OWS 2 OFFICIALS

The Meet director shall ensure there are sufficient officials to conduct an event safely and in accordance with Masters Swimming rules.

It is recommended that the following officials be in place for National and State sanctioned meets:

- Meet Referee,
- Assistant Referee(s),
- Chief Timekeeper, plus
- 2 Timekeepers,
- Chief Finish Judge, plus
- 2 Finish Judges,
- Safety Officer,
- Medical Officer,
- Course Officer, (Person who sets or checks the course is correct)
- Clerk of the Course,
- Recorder/Registrar,
- Turn Judges (one per alteration of Course),
- Starter, and
- Announcer

Note: *The duties of the Safety & Course Officers can be combined, as can the Course Officer and Clerk of Course; Assistant Referee and Starter; Starter and Chief Finish Judge, Medical Officer and Safety Officer; Clerk of Course and Announcer.*

Smaller Branch sanctioned meets shall appoint a minimum number of officials as listed below:

- Meet Manager (Meet Referee) *
- *Clerk of Course (Course Officer / Announcer)
- Safety Officer (Medical Officer)
- Recorder / Registrar
- Chief Timekeeper /Timekeeper
- Starter / Chief Finish Judge

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- Turn Judges (one for each change of direction in course) – Can be appointed / assigned from the on water safety crew.

*Should the event have a Meet Referee, the Meet Organiser (Director/Event Manager) can carry out the duties of Clerk of Course, Course Officer and Announcer.

OWS 2.1 MEET REFEREE shall:

- OWS2.1.1 Have full control and authority over all officials, shall approve their assignments and instruct them regarding all special features or regulations related to the competition; to include policing of approved swimwear, watches, heavy jewellery and speed, endurance, buoyancy aids and devices;
- OWS2.1.2 enforce all the rules and decisions of Masters Swimming and decide all questions relating to the actual conduct of the meeting, the event or competition, the final settlement of which is not otherwise covered by these rules;
- OWS2.1.3 have authority to intervene in the competition at any stage to ensure that these rules are observed;
- OWS2.1.4 in conjunction with the race committee, adjudicate on all protests related to the competition in progress;
- OWS2.1.5 give a decision in cases where the Judges' decision and times recorded do not agree;
- OWS2.1.6 ensure that all necessary officials for the conduct of the event or competition are at their respective posts. The Meet Referee may appoint substitutes for any who are absent, incapable of acting, or found to be inefficient, and appoint additional officials if considered necessary; to ensure swimmers do not take unfair advantage of another swimmer or commit unsporting like interference, and to ensure that support/ safety craft do not impede any swimmer, other than to direct them back to the field;
- OWS2.1.7 signal to swimmers at one minute to go, by raised flag and / or verbal command, that the start is imminent, and when satisfied indicate by pointing the flag at the starter that the competition may commence;
- Note:** *It has been found that the use of whistles can incite breaks – there has been success raising a flag, with patrol of start line and verbal command. When raised flag directed to Starter so are swimmers eyes, hence visual and audible successful. It is not easy to safely stop and restart a swim in ocean conditions and beach noise.*
- OWS2.1.8 disqualify any swimmer for any violation of the Rules that he personally observes or which are reported to him by other authorised officials;
- OWS2.1.9 order any swimmer from the water, on the advice of the Medical Officer, or on-water safety personnel, if that swimmer's safety is in question;
- OWS2.1.10 have authority to use any automatic or semi-automatic officiating equipment in any case of doubt or protests.

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OWS 2.2 REFEREE(S) shall:

- OWS2.2.1 ensure that all necessary officials for the conduct of the event are at their respective posts. With approval of the Meet Referee the Assistant Referee may appoint substitutes for any who are absent, incapable of acting or found to be inefficient, and appoint additional officials if considered necessary;
- OWS2.2.2 receive all reports prior to the start of the race from the Clerk of Course, Safety and Course Officers and inform the Meet Referee of the contents 20-15 minutes before the scheduled start of the race, including the number of registered swimmers;
- OWS2.2.3 as delegated by the Meet Referee, monitor the wearing and use of swimwear, watches and heavy jewellery, speed, endurance, buoyancy aids and devices;
- OWS2.2.4 after synchronising watches with the Meet Referee, at five minutes to go give one long blast of a whistle and give verbal command that swimmers can enter the water; with two minutes to go give two long blasts of a whistle and verbal command that swimmers must enter the water and position themselves at the start;
- OWS2.2.5 when the event is started in waves, direct swimmers to their starting position thereby assisting the Chief Timekeeper and Starter to ensure starts meet time requirements;
- OWS2.2.6 have the authority to intervene in the competition at any stage to ensure that the Rules are observed;
- OWS2.2.7 disqualify any swimmer for any violation of the Rules that he personally observe;
- OWS2.2.8 record race numbers of any swimmer(s) removed from the water, or withdrawn from the event once registered, advising the Meet Referee immediately the last swimmer has finished;

Note: *This assists the Meet Referee in ensuring all swimmers are accounted for at the completion of the event.*

- OWS2.2.9 assist the Chief Finish Judge and/ or Chief Timekeeper to ensure correct finish procedures are maintained.

OWS 2.3 STARTER shall:

- OWS2.3.1 Be stationed in such a position to be clearly visible to all swimmers; with a distinctive flag (visual) and an audible starting device, (horn or siren) having ensured it is in working order;
- OWS2.3.2 on a signal from the Referee, raise a distinctive flag into the vertical position;
- OWS2.3.3 bring the flag-holding arm down with the arm kept straight, and simultaneously activate an audible signal (horn or siren).

Note: *The audible start signal can be made by a guest starter in tandem with the Starter. Many requests are made for sponsors to 'start' an event.*

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OWS 2.4 CHIEF TIMEKEEPER shall:

OWS2.4.1 Check all Timekeepers' watches are in working order; Manual and or print out; and or work with the operators of electronic timing to synchronise the start procedure;

OWS2.4.2 assign at least two Timekeepers to their positions for the start and finish; if electronic timing is employed, assign the same compliment of manual watches, a minimum of one to be a print out watch;

OWS2.4.3 ensure that a time check is made 15 minutes before the start time to allow Timekeepers to synchronise their watches with the official running clocks/timing equipment;

OWS2.4.4 collect from Timekeepers a card/sheet/print out showing the time recorded for each swimmer and, if necessary, inspect their watches.

Note: *Automated timing is being utilised by employing agents– The Chief Timekeeper should have authority to ensure timing is done in accordance with MSA rules.*

OWS 2.5 TIMEKEEPERS shall:

OWS2.5.1 Start their watches at the starting signal, and only stop their watches when instructed to do so by the Chief Timekeeper;

OWS2.5.2 record the time and swimmer's number on the time card/sheet/print out promptly after each finish and turn it over to the Chief Timekeeper.

Note: *When automatic officiating equipment is used, the same complement of hand timers is to be used.*

OWS 2.6 CHIEF JUDGE (Not applicable to Masters)

OWS 2.7 FINISHING JUDGES

There are three Finishing Judges, one of whom is to be appointed as the Chief Finish Judge, and they all shall:

OWS2.7.1 Be positioned in line with the finish where they have a clear view of the finish at all times;

OWS2.7.2 record the placing of the swimmers as they complete their swim, placing in order of finish according to the assignment given; one of whom shall issue a finish place biscuit. Where electronic timing is used, finish biscuits are not required;

OWS2.7.3 finishing judges shall not act as Timekeepers in the same event;

OWS2.7.4 should a swimmer be unable to walk out of a swim at the finish line, a personal runner can take that swimmers timing band or finish biscuit to the recorder, in order of that swimmers finish.

OWS 2.8 RACE JUDGES (Not applicable to Masters)

OWS 2.9 TURN JUDGES shall:

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OWS2.9.1 Be positioned to ensure that all swimmers execute the alterations in course as indicated in the competition information document, and as given at the pre-race briefing;

OWS2.9.2 record any infringement of the turn procedures on the record sheets provided, and advise the Meet Referee of the infringement immediately;

OWS2.9.3 deliver the signed record sheet to the Meet Referee or delegated Referee promptly upon completion of the event.

OWS 2.10 SAFETY OFFICER shall:

OWS2.10.1 Be responsible to the Referee for all aspects of safety related to the conduct of the event;

OWS2.10.2 Not applicable to Masters.

OWS2.10.3 Check that the entire course, with special regard to the start and finish areas is safe, suitable, and free of any obstruction;

Note: *Place matting across moss or slippery/jagged rock entries; clear a wading path of objects where visibility is negative.*

OWS2.10.4 be responsible for ensuring that sufficient powered safety craft are available during the event to provide full safety backup (see OWS 5.8);

OWS2.10.5 in conjunction with the Medical Officer, advise the Meet Referee if, in their opinion, conditions are unsuitable for staging the event and/or make recommendations for the modification of the course or the manner in which the competition is conducted.

OWS 2.11 MEDICAL OFFICER shall:

OWS2.11.1 Be responsible to the Meet Referee for all medical aspects related to the competition and swimmers;

OWS2.11.2 inform the local medical facilities of the nature of the event and ensure that any casualties can be evacuated to medical facilities at the earliest opportunity.

Clarification: *Refer to the MSA Safety Policy for Open Water Swimming venues.*

OWS2.11.3 In conjunction with the Safety Officer, advise the Meet Referee if, in their opinion, conditions are unsuitable for staging the event and/or make recommendations for the modification of the course or the manner in which the competition is conducted.

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OWS 2.12 COURSE OFFICER shall:

- OWS2.12.1 Be responsible to for the correct survey of the course;
- OWS2.12.2 ensure the start and finish areas are correctly marked, that all equipment has been correctly installed and is in working order;
- OWS2.12.3 ensure all course alteration points are correctly marked and supervised prior to the commencement of the event. Where possible, large marker buoys to be used; and to be a different colour to the surrounding boat and or channel or venue markers.

Note: *Markers can all look the same from in the water.*

- OWS2.12.4 with the Meet Referee and Safety Officer, inspect the course and markings prior to the commencement of the competition.

OWS 2.13 CLERK OF COURSE shall:

- OWS2.13.1 prepare swimmers prior to each event and ensure proper reception facilities are available;
- OWS2.13.2 ensure all swimmers are present in the assembly area at the required time prior to the start advising swimmers they are required to attend the pre race briefing;
- OWS2.13.3 keep swimmers and officials informed of the time remaining before the start at suitable up to the swimmer briefing; (i.e. at 35 minutes to start, registrations close in five minutes; officials briefing in 10, swimmer briefing in 20, until the last five minutes;
- OWS2.13.4 in conjunction with or in the absence of a Referee, direct swimmers to assume their start positions;
- OWS2.13.5 be responsible for ensuring that all clothing and equipment left in the start area is transported to the finish area, and is kept in safekeeping;

Note: *Having attendants is not applicable to Masters, however providing sustenance (water, fruit, refreshment) is recommended.*

OWS 2.14 RECORDER-REGISTRAR shall:

- OWS2.14.1 Receive and enter all registrations, allocating race numbers;
- OWS2.14.2 Appoint markers to ensure numbers are written on swimmers and or caps as required;
- OWS2.14.3 Advise the Referee(s) of the number of swimmers registered to swim on the day.
- OWS2.14.4 Record withdrawals from the competition, enter results on official forms and maintain a record for team awards as appropriate.
- OWS2.14.5 Record wearers of wet suits and or snorkels on registration lists and/ or at the finish for identification.

Note: *Time for swim can be given to the swimmer but not included in results, awards, prize lists.*

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OWS 3 THE START

OWS3.1 All Open Water swimming events shall start with all swimmers standing in or treading water in a depth sufficient for them to commence swimming on the start signal.

OWS3.2 The designated Referee or the Clerk of Course shall keep swimmers and officials informed of the time before the start at suitable intervals.

OWS3.3 Swimmers shall assume their start positions as directed at the swimmer briefing and as supervised by the designated Referee or Clerk of Course.

OWS3.4 The start line shall be clearly defined by either overhead apparatus or by removable equipment at water level, e.g. a line between two buoys (minimum).

OWS3.5 The Meet Referee shall indicate, by a flag held upright and verbal command, when the start is imminent, and indicate that the swimmers are under Starter's orders by pointing the flag at the Starter.

OWS3.6 The Starter shall be positioned to be clearly visible to all swimmers.

OWS3.7 If in the opinion of the Meet Referee unfair advantage has been gained at the start the event shall be stopped and restarted.

Note: *This is very difficult to do. It may be necessary to let the event proceed and disqualify the offending swimmers.*

OWS3.8 All safety craft shall be positioned prior to the start to avoid interference with any swimmer and shall navigate in such a way not to manoeuvre through the field of swimmers.

OWS3.9 Although they may start together, event results will be in five year age groups, male and female separately.

OWS 4 THE VENUE

OWS4.1 Events shall be conducted over a single leg; out and back single circuit courses; or multiple circuits.

OWS4.2 The course shall be in water that is subject only to minor current or tide, and may be salt or fresh water.

Note: *Local knowledge should be used to define minor current or tide; it is difficult to put rulings on venues which are so totally variable across the country. Commonsense and practicality should be used.*

OWS4.3 Where necessary, consent, permits or permission must be sought and granted by the relevant controlling authority for use of the venue. Local knowledge from other users and the controlling authority as to the suitability of the venue and the quality of the water should be obtained.

OWS4.4 In normal circumstances the minimum depth of water at any point on the course shall be one metre.

OWS4.5 Deleted. See OWS1.2

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OWS4.6 All turns or alterations of course shall be clearly indicated, preferably by large coloured buoys in contrast to local markers.

OWS4.7 A clearly marked craft or platform containing a Turn Judge shall be positioned at or near all alterations of the course, but must not obstruct a swimmer's visibility of the turn.

Note: *The platform may be on land if it has a commanding view of the turn.*

OWS4.8 All turn apparatus and Judges' craft/platforms shall be securely fixed in position, and not be subject to tidal, wind, or other movements.

OWS4.9 The final approach to the finish shall be clearly defined with markers of a distinctive colour.

OWS4.10 For National Swims, the finish shall be clearly defined in the water at a swimming depth to enable the swimmers to touch a vertical surface or swim across a defined finish line. For all other Open Water Swims the finish shall be clearly defined in the water at swimming depth where practicable. Swimmers shall touch a vertical surface or swim/walk across a defined finish line;

OWS4.11 Where a finish platform or overhead apparatus can not be installed, swimmers shall swim/walk across a defined finish line in the water, placed in order of finish, and or given a numbered place biscuit;

OWS4.12 When out of water electronic timing is used, swimmers should be put in order of finish at a defined 'in-water' finish line, to walk to the timer in order of swim finish. The timing device should be as close to the water's edge as is practicable. Running and pushing to a finish point should be deterred at all times.

OWS4.13 If a swimmer can not stand or walk to a finish line, they may use a representative to collect their place biscuit, timing band to walk it to the official finish in the order of the swimmers finish.

OWS 5 THE RACE

OWS5.1 Obstructing, interfering with or making intentional contact with another swimmer shall, if deemed by the Referee "unsporting interference", lead to disqualification.

OWS5.2 Swimmers shall maintain a reasonable clearance from other swimmers except at the start, finish, or where the course or race conditions dictate otherwise.

OWS5.3 Safety craft shall not obstruct or place themselves directly ahead of any swimmer.

OWS5.4 All Open Water swimming events shall be freestyle events. Breaststroke kicking in congested areas, (starts and turns), may be considered 'unsporting interference' and lead to disqualification.

Note: *Breaststroke kicking in congested areas has been the biggest reported area of injury within OWS events.*

OWS5.5 Standing on the bottom during a race shall not disqualify a swimmer, but they may not walk.

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OWS5.6 With the exception of OWS5.5, swimmers shall not receive support from any fixed or floating object and shall not be touched by any safety craft or crew therein.

OWS5.7 Swimmers shall have their competition number clearly displayed in waterproof ink on their upper back or arms, and/or displayed on swim caps. It is compulsory for all swimmers to wear highly visible coloured caps throughout the race.

OWS5.8 A suggested ratio of safety paddle board/canoes at a minimum of 1:20 swimmers, with a back up of powered craft at a minimum of 1:50 swimmers should be provided. Support and safety craft personnel, should be easily identified with highly visible and uniform coloured clothing/caps.

Note: *When an event is conducted close to shore or as a circuit, the suggested ratio can be too congested on water. A ratio of 1:50 swimmer safety paddle craft and 1:100-150 motorised craft is more practicable using back up of 1:50 safety escorts walking the shore, and with motorised vehicle(s) on shore.*

OWS5.9 All support and safety craft personnel, should be fit and trained in close support techniques for supporting an unconscious swimmer until a rescue craft can attend. All support and safety craft personnel, should carry a whistle for risk management purposes.

Note: *Surf Lifesaving issue board paddlers with a whistle for safety use, with a high incident of shark sightings in past seasons, the wearing of a whistle to attract attention or have swimmers evacuate the water, is a risk management plan/priority.*

OWS5.10 No swimmer shall be permitted to use or wear any device that may be an aid to speed, endurance or buoyancy except as per OWS5.11. Goggles, cap, nose clip and earplugs may be used.

Note: *There are a small number of regular open water competitors, who for reasons of injury management cannot rotate the neck and apply to participate. Approval is sanctioned with the same condition as for wetsuits applied. The swimmer applies to the Meet Referee who records the number. This can also be done at registration.*

OWS5.11 **SWIMWEAR**

OWS 5.11.1 Swimwear shall comply with MSA General Rule GR16.1 (Effectively FINA General Rule GR5 and FINA By Law BL 8.) Rash vests may be worn at the discretion of the Meet Director. If worn they may be either long or short sleeve but must not provide compression or buoyancy. They shall be made from materials that meet the FINA requirements for swimwear.

OWS 5.11.2 For open water swimming competitions with water temperature from 20 C swimsuits (FINA BL8.4) for both men and women shall not cover the neck, nor extend past the shoulder, nor extend below the ankle. Subject to these specific shape specifications, swimsuits for open water swimming competitions shall further comply with all other requirements applicable to swimsuits for pool swimming competition.

OWS 5.11.3 For open water swimming competitions in water with temperature below 20 C, men and women may use either swimsuits (BL 8.4) or wetsuits. For the purpose of these rules, wetsuits are swimsuits made of material providing thermal insulation. Wetsuits

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for both men and women shall completely cover torso, back, shoulders and knees. They shall not extend beyond the neck, wrists and ankles.

Clarification: When the water temperature is **below 20 C** wetsuits are allowed and the swimmer is **eligible** for trophies or championship honours and points.

When the water temperature is **20 C or above** wetsuits may be allowed at the discretion of the Meet Director, but the swimmer then becomes **ineligible** for trophies or championship honours and points. If awards are given to wetsuit swimmers, they shall be awarded separately from non-wetsuit swimmers.

FINA Clarification: It is clarified that swimsuits, respectively wetsuits which fulfil the shape requirement set forth in BL 8.3, respectively BL 8.4 and 8.5 (for open water swimming competitions) can be accepted even if they do not bear a valid FINA approval label provided they effectively and evidently fulfil the material requirements set forth in the current FINA Requirements for Swimwear Approval.

- OWS5.12 Swimmers shall be allowed to use grease or other such substances providing these are not, in the opinion of the Meet Referee, excessive nor contravene any law.
- OWS5.13 The pacing of a swimmer by another person entering the water is not permitted.
- OWS5.14 The wearing of heavy jewellery and watches is not allowed due to safety requirements; watches cannot be worn.
- OWS5.15 When taking sustenance, swimmers may use rule OWS5.5 providing OWS5.6 is not infringed.