



Master Swimming Australia

Open Water Swimming Event Rules 2023

Revised November 2023

MASTERS SWIMMING AUSTRALIA

ABN 24 694 633 156

MSAC, 30 Aughtie Drive, Albert Park, 3206

w: www.mastersswimming.org.au

PREAMBLE

Masters Swimming Australia Open Water Swimming Event Rules 2023 are applicable to sanctioned events organised and conducted by Masters Swimming Australia and its Branches and Clubs. This includes co-sanctioned events.

The Rules are written to permit people with knowledge and experience of open water swimming conditions in their local area to design and safely conduct open water swimming events. The rules are intended to provide the minimum essential requirements for a Masters Swimming Australia sanctioned open water swimming event to be conducted anywhere in Australia.

The Rules are to be read in conjunction with the Masters Swimming Australia Open Water Swimming Event Guide, which provides guidance and detailed information on:

- responsibilities of event organisers,
- sanctioning,
- safety,
- responsibilities of swimmers,
- responsibilities of officials,
- event planning,
- race day management,
- safety management planning,
- thermal management planning,
- risk management, and
- example forms and plans.

2023 MSA OPEN WATER SWIMMING OWS RULES

OWS 1.1 Event Definitions

A Masters Swimming Australia (MSA) Open Water Swimming (OWS) event is defined as any swimming event that take place in rivers, lakes, oceans, water channels, dams, or rowing courses. Events may include solo and/or relay swims and be swum over distances determined by the Event Organiser. Refer to the Open Water Swimming Event Guide for the responsibilities of an Event Organiser, which include event planning, race-day conduct, and post-race activities. Whilst these responsibilities are largely administrative in nature and therefore not addressed in these rules, they are crucial to the successful conduct of an OWS event.

OWS 1.2 Sanctioning Events

MSA OWS events must be sanctioned by the MSA Board of Management or a Branch committee, and only MSA, its Branches or clubs may conduct sanctioned OWS events. The planning and conduct of an OWS event should be undertaken by or include the local Branch or club, in consultation with other local organisations (such as the local Surf Life Saving Australia club) that have knowledge and expertise in the safe conduct of events in their local area. An OWS event may be conducted in conjunction with another organisation (refer to OWS 1.2.2 for co-sanctioning).

MSA Branches and clubs may invite non-members to participate in a sanctioned OWS event. The terms and conditions under which non-members participate are to be determined by the event organiser (refer to OWS 1.3).

OWS 1.2.1 Sanction application

The application for sanction is to contain key event information including the date and time, venue, distances, draft safety plan, draft thermal plan and other information that may be stipulated by MSA or the sanctioning Branch. Refer to the Open Water Swimming Event Guide for further information on sanctioning and the Sanction Form.

Note. MSA Board of Management would normally only be called upon to sanction a national OWS championship event. A Branch may sanction a Branch OWS event providing the sanctioning is approved by the Branch committee.

OWS 1.2.2 Co-sanction

MSA OWS events run in conjunction with another organisation may be co-sanctioned providing MSA members' participation in the event and recording of results complies with these rules. Refer to the Open Water Swimming Event Guide for further information on co-sanctioning.

Note. For co-sanctioned events, MSA Event Organisers will need to ensure that appropriate arrangements are made to record MSA results (if necessary), in addition to other results that may be recorded for the co-sanctioned event.

OWS 1.3 Terms and Conditions

All OWS swimmers participating in a sanctioned event (MSA members and non-members) shall agree to the terms and conditions of entering a sanctioned OWS event and acknowledge the risks of participating in a sanctioned OWS event, as specified by the Event Organiser in the event terms and conditions.

Note. The terms and conditions are to be determined by the Event Organiser. Refer to the Open Water Swimming Event Guide for an example of event terms and conditions.

OWS 1.4 Senior Appointments

Every sanctioned OWS event shall be managed by an Event Director, Safety Officer, and Event Referee. These three senior appointments are jointly responsible for the safe and successful conduct of an OWS event, and their appointments shall not be combined. Their respective responsibilities are specified at OWS 4.2, OWS 4.3, and OWS 4.5, and additional responsibilities are detailed in the Open Water Swimming Event Guide.

Note. The three senior appointments may be supported by other officials as needed to manage and conduct an OWS event. The level of support will depend on the scale and course layout of the event amongst other considerations. For example, national OWS championship events are likely to require more officials than Branch or club events. The responsibilities of supporting officials are detailed in the Open Water Swimming Event Guide.

OWS 2.1 Safety

Safety is a primary consideration for all OWS events and all Event Organisers, event officials and swimmers share responsibility for ensuring the event is conducted safely. The Safety Officer has lead responsibility for the safe conduct of an OWS event.

OWS 2.1.1 Safety Plan

All MSA OWS events must be supported by a Safety Plan that considers all matters relevant to the safe conduct of each event. Refer to the Open Water Swimming Event Guide for information on safety considerations and the format for a Safety Plan.

OWS 2.1.2 Safety Officer

The Safety Officer is responsible for overseeing all safety aspects of an event. The position of Safety Officer shall not be a combined position or shared with other duties for the event. The Safety Officer's responsibilities are specified at OWS 4.3.

OWS 2.2 Water Temperature

OWS 2.2.1 The water temperature shall be measured within 30 minutes before the start of the race and must be a minimum of 18°C and a maximum of 31°C. The water temperature shall be certified by the Safety Officer as measured in as near to the middle of the course as possible at a depth of 40 cm. If water temperature is below 18°C, the use of wetsuits is compulsory.

OWS2.2.2 Water temperature is a primary safety consideration for OWS events. The amount of time swimmers are anticipated to be in the water is the primary consideration related to the anticipated water temperature, and may lead to swim distance and time limits being imposed along with swim suit requirements. MSA OWS events will not be sanctioned where the water temperature is expected to be and is found to be on the day of the proposed event below 16°C or above 31°C.

- For events where the water temperature is expected to be between 16°C and 23.9°C, a safety plan and a cold-water thermal plan are **required**.
- For events where the water temperature is expected to be between 24°C and 26.9°C, a safety plan is **required**, and a cold-water thermal plan is **optional**.
- For events where the water temperature expected to be between 27°C and 31°C, a safety plan and a warm-water thermal plan are **required**.

Note. Refer to the Open Water Swimming Event Guide for the procedures for determining water temperature.

Note. The requirement or option for swimmers to wear wetsuits is a Thermal Management Plan consideration and shall be stipulated in the event terms and conditions, noting that the tolerance swimmers to cold or hot water conditions varies depending on their acclimatisation to the local conditions and other physiological factors.

OWS 2.3 Briefings

Briefings of swimmers and all course and safety personnel including medical and Safety Officers, course officials, course supervisors, safety craft, and paddlers shall be held prior to the start of an event. The briefings shall address all safety considerations relevant to the event as identified in the Safety Plan and Thermal Plan (if required), along with other matters relevant to the conduct of the event. Refer to the Open Water Swimming Event Guide for suggested formats for the briefings.

OWS 2.3.1 Briefing Officials

The briefing of event officials, supervisors, safety personnel, safety craft, and paddlers shall be held at least 30 minutes before the start of the event to confirm their roles and responsibilities. This briefing is to be given by the Event Referee and the Safety Officer.

OWS 2.3.2 Briefing swimmers

The briefing of swimmers shall be held at least 15 minutes before the start of the event to fully address the course, rules, and conditions relevant to the swim. All registered swimmers must attend this pre-race briefing. This briefing is to be given by the Event Referee and the Safety Officer.

New OWS 3.1 Course Marking

The start line and start area, swimming course, and finish line must be clearly marked. The start may be initiated on land or in the water. The course marker buoys must be progressively visible to swimmers at the start and in the water as they proceed over the course to the finish. The location of the finish line must be visible to swimmers in the water from the last course marker buoy.

Note. The Open Water Swimming Event Guide provides guidance on the conduct of event starts and finishes and marking a course

New OWS 3.2 Motorised support craft

Swimmers and non-motorised support craft only are allowed on the course during the event. Motorised craft must remain clear of the course and at least 50 metres from any swimmer, except in response to a safety issue on the course.

Note. The Open Water Swimming Event Guide provides guidance on emergency procedures.

New OWS 3.2.1 Support craft

Motorised and non-motorised support craft must not impede the progress of any swimmer, except in response to a safety incident.

Note. The MSA Open Water Swimming Event Guide provides guidance on the operation of non-motorised and motorised craft during an event.

OWS 3.3 Swimmer visibility

All swimmers must be visible and identifiable to afloat officials and safety cover personnel whilst on the swimming course. Aids to visibility including such things as brightly coloured swimming caps and vests. Swimmer visibility requirements must be specified in the event terms and conditions. Swimmers may be identified by methods such as numbers on swimming caps and on their body. The method of swimmer identification must be specified in the event terms and conditions.

OWS 3.3.1 It shall be compulsory for all swimmers to wear highly visible coloured swim caps
Note. The MSA Open Water Swimming Event Guide provides guidance on swimmer visibility and identification.

OWS 3.4 Disqualification

Swimmers may be disqualified from recording a result in an event for violating any of the rules set down for the event. This includes the following:

- OWS 3.4.1 Crossing the start line before the signal to start.
- OWS 3.4.2 Not passing or rounding a course marker buoy as specified in the event instruction.
- OWS 3.4.3 Deliberately obstructing or making contact with another swimmer.
- OWS 3.4.4 Not finishing the course as specified in the event instruction.
- OWS 3.4.5 Not complying with the rules for swimwear, devices, and equipment.
- OWS 3.4.6 Leaving the course other than at the finish.
- OWS 3.4.7 Moving forward when in contact with a support craft.
- OWS 3.4.8 Remaining on the course after a cut-off time, if specified.
- OWS 3.4.9 Any other provision specified in the event instruction.

New OWS 3.5 Swimwear

Swimwear allowed for an OWS event must be specified in the event instruction. When more than one form of swimwear is allowed, such as wetsuits and non wetsuits, separate categories of swimmer may be recognised for the purposes of recording results.

Note. MSA General Rule - GR 16 Swimwear may be applied or modified at the discretion of the event organisers and the Event Director.

OWS 4.1 Event management

There shall be a designated Event Director, Safety Officer and Event Referee for each sanctioned OWS event. The requirement for other officials shall be identified on a case-by-case basis. The Open Water Swimming Event Guide provides further information on the responsibilities of all officials that may be required to support an OWS event.

OWS 4.2 Event Director

A sanctioned OWS event shall be managed by an Event Director. The Event Director is responsible for the overall conduct of the event and ensuring the event is conducted in accordance with the Safety Plan, Thermal Plan (if required), terms and conditions of entry, MSA OWS event rules, Open Water Swimming Event Guide, and any other event instructions as specified by the event organiser.

The Event Director has specific responsibility for:

- a. Ensuring the event has been sanctioned by the relevant Branch committee or Masters Swimming Australia Board of Management (for National Championship events), and ensuring any other relevant permits relating to the venue have been obtained.

- b. Ensuring the event has a safety plan and a supporting thermal plan for cold water or warm water if required.
- c. Ensuring there are sufficient officials and safety personnel available to support the event, in consultation with the Safety Officer and the Event Referee.
- d. Determining the event course and marking the course.
- e. Briefing all swimmers prior to the start of the event on the layout of the course and the conduct of the event.
- f. Directing the Event Referee to modify the way the event is to be conducted, including changing the course or distance, delaying the start, or stopping a race in progress, according to the conditions on the day of the event.
- g. Cancelling the event.

Note. Refer to the Open Water Swimming Event Guide for further information about the Event Director's responsibilities.

OWS 4.3 Safety Officer

The Safety Officer shall have sole responsibility for:

- a. Completing and complying with the approved Safety Plan, including a Thermal Plan for events to be conducted in water temperatures in accordance with OWS 2.2.
- b. Checking that the entire course, especially the start and finish areas, is safe and free of obstructions or hazards.
- c. Arranging sufficient observation and rescue watercraft, equipment and qualified safety staff are available during the swim.
- d. Briefing and allocating tasks to appropriately qualified safety staff.
- e. Advising the Event Director to modify the way the event is to be conducted, including changing the course or distance, delaying the start, stopping an event in progress, or cancelling an event after considering the conditions on the day of the event.

Note. Refer to the Open Water Swimming Event Guide for further information about the Safety Officer's responsibilities.

OWS 4.4 Event changes

Noting the potential for conditions to change prior to and during an OWS event, the Event Director and the Safety Officer are jointly responsible for monitoring conditions at the event venue at least during the 24 hours immediately prior to an event and deciding if the event is to proceed. This decision may be made at any time prior to the scheduled start of the event or after the event has started and may involve cancelling or postponing the event, changing the course and distances to be swum, and/or setting a time limit.

OWS 4.5 Event Referee

The Event Referee is responsible for the fair conduct of the OWS event in accordance with the terms and conditions and specified rules for the event. The Event Referee shall:

- a. Appoint and brief all officials for the event to permit the event to be held in accordance with the terms and conditions and rules specified for the event.
- b. Brief all swimmers about the event course, event rules particularly as they relate to conduct of swimmers whilst participating in the event, and other necessary information about the event.
- c. Stop, warn, remove or take other action against a swimmer who does not comply with the rules or safety procedures applicable to the event.
- d. Disqualify any swimmer who violates the rules or safety procedures.
- e. Modify the refereeing of the event as required when the conduct of the event has been changed by the Event Director and Safety Officer (refer to OWS 4.4).

Note. Refer to the Open Water Swimming Event Guide for further information about the Event Referee's responsibilities.