

A FIRST NSW Volunteer of the Year

A dad's mission to keep kids safe in the surf led to award

Laura Rumbel

DRIVEN by a dad's determination to keep his children safe in the surf, Callum Mercer joined his local surf life saving club as a nip-pers parent.

Today, that simple mission has rewritten history, with Mr Mercer named NSW Volunteer of the Year, a first for Birubi Point Surf Life Saving Club (SLSC).

The win follows his victory at the Hunter Branch Awards of Excellence earlier this year.

Mr Mercer will now represent NSW at the Surf Life Saving Australia National Awards of Excellence in Sydney this November.

Despite beating out nominees from more than 120 surflife saving clubs across NSW, the Bobs Farm resident remains deeply humble.

"I'm extremely proud, but it's quite overwhelming," Mr Mercer said.

"There are so many clubs with such incredible, inspiring volunteers that you almost feel unworthy."

Beyond his personal win, Mr Mercer said that the recognition belongs to the entire team at Birubi Point SLSC.

"It's those people that have made this possible and having a supportive committee really helps," he said.

"To have made it this far, has been a true honour."

What began as a dad wanting to protect his kids, then aged 6 and 8, quickly grew into a

passion for community service.

"We spend so much time by the beach, so my wife Mel and I wanted our kids to know what to do," Mr Mercer said.

"I always thought when they're older and going to the beach with friends, I want to make sure they can read the ocean and come home safe."

Bronze medallion at 49

At age 49, Mr Mercer took the plunge to complete his bronze medallion.

"You're never too old to do your bronze medallion," he said.

Now a qualified bronze trainer, one of his proudest personal milestones was training his own daughter Ruby for her Surf Rescue Certificate (SRC).

"That was a really fantastic moment," Mr Mercer said.

For Mr Mercer, nothing brings more pride than watching the club's young lifesavers step up and succeed.

"When you see them succeed, it's such a proud moment," he said.

As the club's director of youth, Mr Mercer has spearheaded a massive resurgence in cadet involvement.

Under his guidance, the program grew from 17 cadets clocking 181 patrol hours in 2024 to 29 cadets delivering a massive 756 hours last season.

"We've created these incredibly dedicated



Callum Mercer with his daughter Ruby before her first patrol. Picture supplied

and competent lifesavers," he said.

"We have kids turning up every single weekend to do patrol, even when they don't have to."

"It's given the club a new lease on life."

Targeting 13- to 16-year-olds

Birubi Point SLSC president Rohan Fisher said Mr Mercer identified a key opportunity to revitalise the club's youth program, targeting 13 to 16-year-olds.

"He has taken them under his wing and kept them involved," Mr Fisher said.

"He put a program together and he's really excelled at that and we're really proud

of what he's been able to achieve in a small amount of time."

The state accolade caps off a major milestone for Birubi Point SLSC, which will host the official Flags Up ceremony to open the new beach patrol season on September 26.

Mr Mercer hopes his journey encourages other local families to take the leap and join their nearest surf club.

"Birubi Point is an extremely supportive, welcoming club," he said.

"You don't have to be the best swimmer or incredibly fit."

There is a role in surf life saving for absolutely everyone."