Media Release

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Tsunami myths busted

While images of tsunami from Japan 2011 and Indonesia 2004 may still be present in the media many misconceptions about what causes these natural disasters and their dangers remain. This summer the NSW State Emergency Service and Surf Life Saving NSW are teaming up to 'bust the myths' of tsunami to help people learn what to do if one impacted our shores.

The NSW coast has been affected by more than 30 tsunami in the past 200 years. Tsunami Warnings with a marine and immediate foreshore threat are more common on the Australian east coast than those warnings with a land inundation threat and can involve dangerous rips, waves and strong ocean currents that can cause damage to marinas and wash away boats and swimmers.

So what are the myths?

A tsunami is a single giant wave.

A tsunami is often a series of low, fast and long ocean waves that is caused by a sudden displacement of a large body of water. The sudden displacement happens often over a large area and the waves move out in all directions.

A tsunami is a huge cresting wave.

While tsunami can be large, they are usually seen as a series of low and long powerful waves with massive momentum. They rarely crest like the usual waves you may see at the beach.

A tsunami is a huge slow wave when in the middle of the deep ocean.

Even though tsunami can be travelling close to 950 kilometres per hour in the deep ocean, they are generally not noticeable because they are often very low.

A tsunami is a tidal wave.

Tsunami are unrelated to tides. Tidal waves are caused by effects like the moon, wind or seasonal change while tsunami are most commonly caused by undersea earthquakes.

NSW SES Commissioner Murray Kear said while tsunami events are rare for the Australian east coast, it is still important for people to be prepared.

"Everyone should take the time to learn more about their risks particularly if they are in a low-lying coastal area," Commissioner Kear said. "While it may not be a regular occurrence, the risk to lives

and potential to cause damage is significant so we should all prepare now so we can limit the amount of damage and potential loss of life should a tsunami occur."

Surf Life Saving NSW Lifesaving Manager, Dean Storey said some people also make the mistake of ignoring warnings and staying in the water or going down to the shoreline to watch a tsunami which can place lives at risk.

"A more common 'marine threat' tsunami can cause dangerous rip currents and tidal fluctuations, which can pose a serious risk to swimmers, surfers, rock-fishermen and boaties. If a warning is issued to clear the water and foreshore, it is imperative that the public heeds those warnings," he said.

Commissioner Kear added, "If there is a threat of land inundation, move to higher ground at least ten metres above sea level and one kilometre inland from the coast and rivers. Be sure to listen to your local radio station for warnings, information, updates and advice."

Find out how to be TsunamiSafe at http://www.ses.nsw.gov.au/communitysafety/tsunami or go to www.beachsafe.org.au/tsunami/

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