

Joan Vaughan

Born and bred near Parramatta, I knew nothing about Surf Clubs until I met John (Rooster) Vaughan on Burning Palms beach in 1951. I very soon found out, as John was a member of both Burning Palms and Coogee Surf Clubs.

I worked privately for Gus Staunton (who was then Hon. Secretary of Sydney Branch) in 1962. Gus found another interest for us both by starting (with a few other enthusiasts) the Mini Car Club of NSW, which has been a big part of my life for the last sixty years.

Working for Gus, I was well aware of the Sydney Branch of the SLSA. When Nick Dixon from Cronulla SLSC became Hon. Secretary of the NSW State Centre in 1968, he employed me to work for State Centre – I was their first and only employee. Until then, all positions on State Centre (and Sydney Branch) were held by volunteers.

State Centre moved into the same building in Surry Hills as National Council. By this time, Gus Staunton was Hon. Secretary of the National Council (all very incestuous, isn't it!)

As a member of the Ladies Auxiliary of Burning Palms since 1952, I was well aware of the situation of there being no women members of Surf Clubs. After one surf carnival, sitting on the low brick fence in front of the Maroubra Clubhouse (women not even being allowed into the Clubhouse), I decided that this situation had to change.

As an employee of the State Centre, I had a lot of contact with the delegates of all the Branches in NSW and constantly got into their ears about women becoming members of Clubs. I was told "no woman could pull a surf belt" – I would just love to see their faces now when they look at a surf carnival programme and see "Under 18 Female Belt Race" !

In 1979, John Vaughan received a sponsorship to tour New Zealand, looking into the situation of women in Surf Life Saving in NZ. We travelled all over the North Island, speaking to a lot of members of Surf Clubs (two Clubs had lady members only). The Kiwis could not understand the Aussie attitude at all.

Following John's report that Australia would benefit from the introduction of women into the surf movement, the wheels began to turn. I retired from working for Sydney Branch in 1989, but remained a surf boat official (which I had been for a very long time) until 2018. I have seen many changes in surf lifesaving since that day on Burning Palms beach – all of them good! Go the ladies!