

Patricia Barry

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HELP IS HERE: Robbie Schwartz, Tony Barry and Paul Sito of Ithaca Caloundra City Lifesaving Club.

PHOTO: JOHN MCCUTCHEON

# Calm water can harm

## Beach might look safe but surf conditions can be tricky

By MEGAN MACKANDER

VOLUNTEER lifesavers have reminded swimmers of the importance of water safety messages, even at Caloundra's calmest beaches.

Ithaca Caloundra City Lifesaving Club volunteers will set up the flags at Bulcock Beach on September 22, to start another season of patrols.

Bulcock Beach, Caloundra Bar and Happy Valley are patrolled by Ithaca volunteers, who belong to Royal Life Saving and are in charge of still water, rather than surf beaches.

Their training, dedication and need for resources is equal to a surf lifesaving club patrolled beach.

Club secretary Patricia Barry said the warnings were just as real at a still water beach.

"The beach looks calm and safe, but people who don't know the beach aren't aware that as soon as you swim out past 40 metres, you may encounter up to 15 knots during a king tide," Ms Barry said.

"We persuade people to swim between the flags because many of the rescues we do are people who are trying to swim to Bribie Island."

Ithaca volunteers had a very busy 2011/12 season, with rescues doubling from the previous season.

And the 2012/13 season is expected to be just as busy.

"We performed 123 major

rescues, up from 78 in the previous year, and a lot of reasoning behind that I think is more visitors, a lot of boats overturning on the bar and tourists who don't know the waters and swim outside the flags," Ms Barry said.

Beach visitors went up 250% last season, with Ithaca casting the net wider for new members to make sure the waters are covered this season. Weekend beach user number rose from about 18,000 to 42,000 in 2011.

"We are a small club but we are looking after an important section of beach, it's a very popular spot," Ms Barry said. "The club relies on grants and donations and thanks to that we have all the modern equipment."