



PLAYING IT SAFE: Caloundra City lifesavers close the beach yesterday. *PHOTO: CADE MOONEY*

Spawning confused for oil spill

A RARE natural phenomenon known to biologists as the "ultimate underwater snowstorm" created a stir in Caloundra yesterday.

A massive cloud of coral spawning was seen floating down Pumicestone Passage and Bulcock Beach, causing the evacuation of more than 40 people from the water.

The spectacle, described by Australian Geographic as "a rare natural wonder", caused alarm on the waterway after fears it might have been an oil spill.

Lifesavers from the Caloundra City club closed the beach and removed swimmers from the water about 2pm as the cloud moved from the passage out to sea.

"At first we thought it could have been a big oil spill," club vice-captain Robert Schwartz said.

"As a precaution we evacuated the swimmers from the water and closed the beach.

"Coral spawning is not dangerous to swimmers, but it is better to be safe than sorry."

According to Australian Geographic, the spectacle resembles an underwater snowstorm, with a flurry of buoyant gametes, usually pink or white, slowly drifting upwards in a real-life version of a shaken snow dome.

Caloundra Coast Guard radio operator Jim Cameron said it was rare to see coral spawning in the passage.

"I have never seen it here before and in such a mass," he said.

"It takes up the whole passage." A council environment officer took water samples for testing.