

# Catching a break on gender equity in surfing

11 NOVEMBER 2024

Although women are now on equal footing to male professional surfers in terms of prize money, substantial challenges persist in achieving gender equity in the sport according to a study by University of Technology Sydney (UTS) researchers.



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Discussed at a panel event on 22 November involving industry experts, researchers and athletes, the study *Giving voice to women's*

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*experiences in surfing in Australia* aims to inform change that will empower the next generation of women surfers.

“Set against improvements like prize-money parity and an increase in women-only events and festivals to promote women’s surfing is the persistence of a male-dominated culture where women often have to prove themselves to gain respect in the lineup,” said Dr Ece Kaya, Senior Lecturer in Management in the UTS Business School, who worked with Dr Leila Khanjaninejad of the UTS Transdisciplinary School on the study.

“We found that culture also reflected in localism and territoriality, where heavily guarded surf spots and intimidation create additional barriers for women surfers,” she said.

The study found continuing obstacles for women included a significantly smaller women's World Surf League field; women having fewer slots and less support in competitions compared to men; and, disparities in commercial opportunities, with male surfers still benefiting disproportionately from sponsorships and marketing.

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Dr Ece Kaya

“Then there are systemic barriers such as women often having to juggle education and work, and surfing careers more than their male counterparts,” Dr Khanjaninejad said.

“So aside from cultural change there's a need for more women in leadership positions within the surfing industry to drive significant change and inspire younger generations.”

“Given surfing's significant economic and cultural role in Australia – from tourism to retail and manufacturing – public awareness can drive meaningful change and support for inclusive initiatives,” Dr Kaya said.

“Our research empowers everyday beachgoers and casual surfers to recognise their role in creating welcoming environments and challenging intimidating behaviour, highlighting how seemingly minor actions in the lineup can have major impacts on participation.

“This understanding builds crucial public support for government and Surfing Australia initiatives, from NSW's funding requirements to broader investments in programs and infrastructure that promote genuine inclusivity in Australian surfing.”

The panel discussion *Waves of Change: Women and Surfing in Australia* was held on Friday 22 November at the UTS Business School.

Speakers included world champion surfer and Olympian Tyler Wright, senior lawyer and chair of the Surf Coast Women's Boardriders Club Ashika Kanhai and Dr Rebecca Olive Vice Chancellor's Senior Research Fellow at RMIT University.

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#### **Acknowledgement of Country**

UTS acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, the Boorooberongal people of the Dharug Nation, the Bidiagal people and the Gamaygal people, upon whose ancestral lands our university stands. We would also like to pay respect to the Elders both past and present, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for these lands.