



Cassandra Stephenson
Committee Clerk
Standing Committee on Public Administration
Legislative Council
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Ms Stephenson

Re: Review of Policy on Recreation in Public Drinking Water Catchments

The Action Outdoors Association is pleased to make this submission to the Standing Committee reviewing policy on recreation in public drinking water catchments. We hope we can assist the Committee in devising a policy that ensures less restrictive bushwalking and bush cycling recreation opportunities in public drinking water catchments and at the same time assists in providing safe, secure and high quality drinking water for the public of Western Australia.

Action Outdoors Association has been operating for around 26 years and currently has some 200 members with an average age of 54. Our members represent a wide cross section of the community. We strongly support the collective submission by the Federation of Western Australian Bushwalkers Inc calling for a return of our historic bushwalking opportunities in the public drinking water catchments.

Our members walk and cycle for pleasure, recreation, relaxation and a stimulating challenge. As a result, we keep relatively fit and healthy and socially connected. We recognise that recreational exercise is beneficial and we are also aware that the Government of Western Australia appreciates the value of exercise. We also note the State Trails Strategy Minister Terry Waldron said he "recognizes activity on trails provides significant physical and mental health benefits by reducing chronic disease and reducing the epidemic of overweight and obesity. Social, economic, health and environmental benefits are also demonstrated".

The now expired Policy 13 restricts all bushwalking and bush cycling activities in catchments serving the metropolitan area, except on designated tracks, and restricts overnight stays except at designated campsites. This leaves bushwalkers and bush cyclists with only the Bibbulmun Track, the Munda Biddi Trail and a few short tracks in the 'hills suburbs'. We actively enjoy these tracks. They have been very successful in introducing people to the delights of bushwalking and bush cycling, who otherwise would not have the skills to do so. However this limited number of tracks does not offer a sufficient variety of bushwalking and bush cycling activities. We need less restrictive access to the public drinking water catchments for bushwalking, bush cycling and occasional overnight camping. The expired Policy 13 is an inhibitor to our bushwalking and bush cycling activities away from these designated tracks. This restrictive policy runs in the face of other Government initiatives to get people active and fit and socially connected.

We walk in hills' catchments because of their natural beauty and because we have little elsewhere to go. Perth is perched on the coast, between the Darling Scarp and the sea. To the north and south there is sand-plain scrub, and land cleared for agriculture and housing, which with a few notable exceptions is relatively unattractive for bushwalking. To the east, beyond the Darling Scarp and its bushland, there is cleared and mostly privately owned land which has been cleared for agriculture. The bush of the Darling Scarp is substantially the only area within a day's drive range of Perth that offers good opportunities for bushwalking and bush cycling activities. It is large, near wilderness, with scenic and nature qualities, plus accessible by good roads.

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The policy of exclusion does not stop people who ignore the law, some of whom may have no concern for water quality, and Policy 13 certainly would not stop anyone who had an undesirable intent for our water supply. The regular weekend presence of bushwalkers and bush cyclists from our and other clubs may inhibit the activities of this latter group. Our members are environmentally aware and do not wish to see harm come to our public drinking water catchments. We understand that the Department of Water has a limited number of rangers. Our members are larger in number and are on foot or on mountain bikes. We would potentially be able to alert the Department of Water rangers to any observed misdemeanours, particularly on weekends when most club activities occur.

Our members are aware that the improper disposal of human waste by bushwalkers and bush cyclist could potentially increase the risk to pollution of our public water supplies. To effectively eliminate this risk, where possible our members organise their personal needs prior to entering bushland areas and if caught short use catholes (i.e. the digging of a small hole to bury human waste) in areas remote from water sources and public facilities. Overall we consider the risk of bushwalkers and bush cyclists contaminating drinking water sources and adding to the costs of maintaining water quality, is negligible.

As mentioned earlier, we need less restrictive access to the public drinking water catchment areas, as we have little elsewhere to go. From our point of view, the catchment areas are priceless. We are pleased to see the Government recognises that management policy for areas, which are also water catchments, needs to consider the wider community interests, and not just those of the Department of Water, and it is the prerogative of politicians to get the balance right.

Yours sincerely



pp. Sally Fielder
President