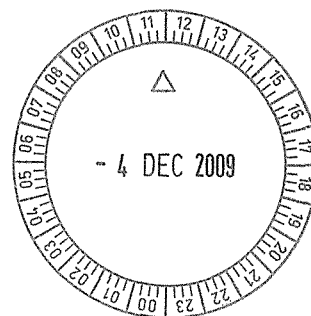


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PUBLIC

CONSERVATION COUNCIL
OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA INC.



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

Email to CStephenson@parliament.wa.gov.au

2 December 2009

Re: Inquiry into recreation activities within public drinking water source areas.

The Conservation Council of WA (CCWA) are Western Australia's peak non-government environment organisation. We represent more than 95 affiliate groups across WA. Environmental sustainability is an underpinning of our operations, and our chief policy goals are to seek policy reform to set WA upon a sustainable environmental and social agenda for the future.

Critical to this end is seeking strong measures to ensure water quality is maintained with a multiple barrier approach to public health and environmental health outcomes. Groundwater drinking water source areas are often overlaid with large areas of remnant native vegetation. Management of these areas is subject to prohibitions on various forms of human recreation and industrial activity. These management measures ensure water quality and environmental health outcomes are managed economically to deliver social and environmental outcomes. Any relaxation of prohibitions would see environmental health suffer along with public health. Surface water drinking water source areas are located on watercourse that have undergone substantial modification to 'normal' riverine processes. Historical protection of catchment areas has always been conducted based on exclusion policies. This has had the effect of ensuring environmental dividends in an economically sustainable way.

The past policy of strong prohibitions on activities within Reservoir Protection Zones has delivered a multiple barrier approach for all drinking water customers of the Water Corporation, from small groundwater schemes and surface water catchments distributed across the State, to large surface water catchments and groundwater schemes for the Integrated Water Supply Scheme for Perth and Goldfields and Agricultural Waters Supply Scheme. Close to two million people across Western Australia have safety and public health preminent through the application of world's best management practice. It is quite clear from epidemiological studies that risk avoidance management framework for the management of drinking water delivers cost effective outcomes for all consumers of the drinking water.

Positive environmental outcomes include: restrictions on spreading of dieback and disease; reduction of interruption to ecological processes; contamination; limiting erosion; reducing the risk of loss of biodiversity; identification of rare and endangered flora and fauna, with appropriate

measures to reduce further loss of threatened species. Limiting access to the water body removes a significant vector for the spread of enterococci and other water borne disease; reduces mixing of the stratification of the water body and limits algal blooms and hypoxic events.

Most recreational activities have some detrimental impacts to the environment, even those of seemingly low impact such as unrestricted and unmanaged bushwalking bring a degree of risk that in the considered submission of CCWA should be accepted.

CCWA considers any relaxation of the policies and guidelines contained in Department of Water Statewide Policy Number 13 'Recreation within Public Drinking Water Source Areas on Crown land 2003' to be a retrograde step and will unnecessarily compromise public health, environmental assets and economic sustainability.

Particularly CCWA reject any reduction of restrictions placed upon recreational trail bike riders, organised motor rallying or powered water craft. Additionally CCWA consider the terms of reference as they are limited to recreational use does not adequately consider the destructive and damaging processes of mining, forestry and catchment thinning activities. Justifications by representatives from recreational groups that restrictions on their use should be tempered with a close examination of the far more destructive practices of forestry and mining are superficially accurate. Rather than easing access to drinking water source areas and thereby increasing the total load of damaging processes and total risk to water quality, all destructive and damaging practices should be phased out in order to further protect public health and environmental assets.

Additionally the Conservation Council of Western Australia would seek further opportunities to present evidence directly to the committee. Should further information be sought please contact Steven McKiernan on 9420 7266.

Steven McKiernan
Water Policy Officer