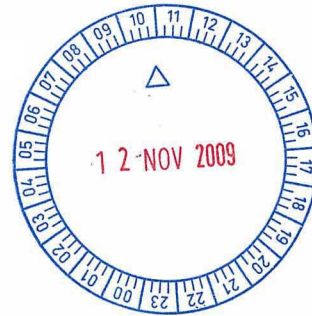


PUBLIC

C.R.Oakeley



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

November 9 2009

Dear Madam

I am making a submission with reference to the enquiry into recreation in public drinking water catchments in Western Australia. I ask that bushwalkers who are members of organisations that subscribe to a proper code of conduct be permitted to walk off-track, as well as on tracks, in public drinking water catchments and be allowed to camp in these areas at places chosen by these organisations.

I submit that:

Bush walking needs to be encouraged as:

- It promotes a healthy lifestyle for all ages, promoting exercise, enjoyment of fresh air, and healthy avenues to make achievements in life.
- Encourages knowledge and respect for the environment and nature, and love for the country we live in
- Provides a challenge for young people in an ever more cosseted society
- Encourages correct practices and self-sufficiency in the bush and remote areas, which breeds confidence and esteem for everyday living.
- Provides a healthy and socially safe environment for people to meet

Bush walking off track needs to be encouraged as:

- Mankind needs to explore, particularly young people but also older people who are no longer able to do so in the work-place.
- Bushwalkers off-track are the ears and eyes of what is happening in our environment – far beyond the range and reach of paid rangers.
- Off-track bushwalkers discovers new (to the enthusiast and to the world) plants, geology, rock-climbing challenges, aboriginal artefacts, photographic opportunities (-my passions!), and beauty in all its forms.
- WA has a wonderful and rich variety of plants, birds, woodland and terrain, and governments should encourage everyone to explore and experience this richness and build and restore their roots in this land.

Bushwalkers should not be excluded from water-catchment areas, except in the very small number of places where there is an environmental or some cultural reason for not doing so, as:

- Bushwalking is a very benign and environmentally safe activity.
- Bushwalking is perfectly compatible with drinking water catchments. There has never been a recorded case, anywhere in the world, of bushwalkers being the cause of water quality problems.
- Regulation that keeps bushwalkers out does not stop people who do not care about the law - and some of them may not care about water quality, and may even intend to damage it.
- Members of eg. Perth Bushwalkers Club and predecessors have been walking and backpacking in the catchments for many decades. Water quality has not been affected. Claims that the good cleanliness of our water is a result of a policy of exclusion is actually a vindication of this historic free access for most of the history of the water supply.
- Elsewhere in Australia, overnights are also permitted in catchments for all bushwalkers with no effect on water quality.
- The Perth Bushwalking Club (eg) members are trained in minimal impact bushwalking techniques and leave no trace to their presence – ‘take out nothing except themselves and leave nothing but their footprints’
- The water catchment zones cover a large area unreasonably excluding bushwalkers from some outstanding places in which to walk and explore.

I have recently returned from a ten day expedition on foot in the Prince Regent Nature Reserve in the Kimberley (not a catchment area, I know) and been bowled over by the beauty, our botanic and art discoveries, and the challenges. We were given a 36-point code of conduct to which we had to, and did, conform. I submit that responsible organisations such as the Perth Bushwalkers and individuals can conform to a code of conduct and can walk through even the most sensitive areas in our catchment areas without leaving a trace of their passing.

Most of the exquisite orchids and places of outstanding of beauty I have experienced in the Darling Range have been off-track (but also acknowledging some wonderful places on the Bibbulmun track). I submit that where these are in catchment areas they should not be out of bounds to responsible people who have the skills and energy to visit them, and that regulation should not be introduced to prevent other similar places from being discovered and shared.

In summary I submit that bushwalkers who are members of organisations that subscribe to a proper code of conduct be permitted to walk off-track, as well as on tracks, in public drinking water catchments and be allowed to camp in these areas at places chosen by these organisations.

Yours Faithfully

C.R.Oakeley