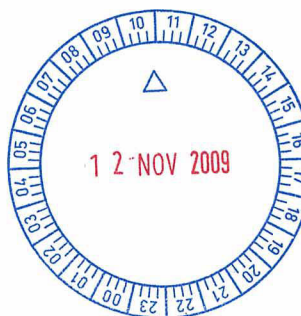


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Committee Clerk
Standing Committee on Public Administration
Legislative Council
Parliament House
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RE: RECREATION WITHIN WATER CATCHMENTS – REVIEW OF POLICY 13

Thank you for requesting public submissions on the review of Policy 13 which governs the public access to drinking water catchments around Perth.

My husband and I are active bushwalkers and during traditional bushwalking season between autumn and spring we generally walk at least every second weekend. Most of our walks are around Perth with the Perth Bushwalkers Club. We walk for recreation, relaxation and leisure as well as to keep fit and healthy, to find new challenges and to meet like-minded people who enjoy similar activities.

As I understand it bushwalking in water catchments has been increasingly restricted over the last ten or so years, which has limited bushwalking to designated walking tracks such as the Bibbulmun Track and some short tracks within the hills suburbs of Mundaring and Kalamunda. While there is value in providing these tracks, walking on designated tracks provides for few learning experiences such as navigation skills which are required when undertaking bushwalking activities in other parts of the State. I therefore see off-track walking as a valuable training ground for skills and experiences that can enlighten the recreational value of bushwalking immensely.

At the moment members of the Perth Bushwalkers Club are only permitted to walk off-track within water catchments courtesy of a special permission from the previous Minister for Water, John Kobelke, who recognised that traditionally bushwalking activities have taken place within water catchment areas without any significant adverse affects on the quality of drinking water. However, the permission given by the then Minister for Water was conditional on the review of Policy 13 which is currently being undertaken by the Standing Committee. Furthermore, we are still not permitted to camp outside designated camp sites within catchment areas. Again, this has limited the range of activities for our club.

The review of Policy 13 needs to take account of the nature of bushwalking and the benign impact of bushwalking on the environment in general and drinking water quality in particular. Bushwalking is a very old activity that has been undertaken

within drinking water catchments for generations, whether permitted by government policy or not. Most members of the public are completely unaware of the existence of Policy 13 and would therefore have walked within drinking water catchments unaware that they are breaking the law. Yet water quality has not been adversely affected by bushwalkers within catchment areas. Furthermore, government policy in other States permits bushwalking, including camping, within water catchments without any negative effects on drinking water.

Permitting bushwalking activities within catchment areas would not result in a significant increase in bushwalkers' presence within catchment areas as most walkers would still walk on designated walking tracks. However, opening up catchment areas for bushwalking would allow people with the required skills, such as navigation skills, and the necessary fitness to explore areas within our State that were off-limits under Policy 13.

It is therefore important to permit bushwalking activities, including off-track walking and camping within catchment areas. This will ensure that legitimate bushwalkers are present and can assist Department of Water officers in ensuring that environmentally damaging activities are kept to a minimum by reporting offences. Bushwalkers can be the eyes and ears for water quality. But how can we if we are not supposed to be there?

Claims from various Government Departments that the good cleanliness of our water is a result of a policy of exclusion is actually a vindication of our free access for most of the history of the water supply. Our members and predecessors have been walking and backpacking in the catchments for many decades. Water quality has not been affected. Our members are trained in minimal impact bushwalking techniques and leave no trace to their presence. We dig catholes well away from water bodies and streams to bury our wastes.

We ought to be able to walk anywhere in catchments except in the very small number of places where there is an environmental or some cultural reason for not doing so.

The Government wants us all to walk more, to get fit, to get socially connected and to lose weight – Bushwalking should be encouraged – closing catchments is not encouraging!

These catchments aren't just valuable for recreation – to bushwalkers they are priceless!



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