

Standing Committee on Public Administration
Recreation Activities within Public Drinking Water Source Areas

Submission by

Western Australian Rogaining Association (WARA)

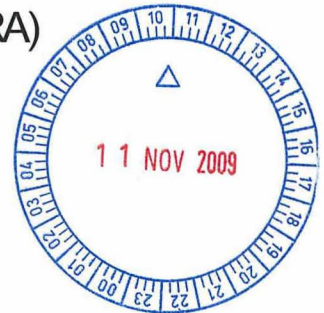
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Introduction

Rogaining is an international bushwalking navigation sport with approximately 1500 members in Western Australia. The benefits to society from sport and recreation are well documented and recognised by the Western Australian Government. We believe that the sport of rogaining is an excellent way to achieve these benefits. It is an activity that is enjoyed by family groups, serious athletes, senior people and other social groups in a friendly social atmosphere.

WARA conducts six events each year. Events last for 6, 12 or 24 hours, and the area required for each event can range from 100 to 200 square kilometres. A central area is needed where administration of the event takes place, and competitors rest and camp for one or two nights. Only existing open areas are used.

A large number of the best rogaining areas in the south west of Western Australia cannot be used for rogaining because overnight camping is not permitted. Additionally the width of the Reservoir Protection Zones around water storages reduces the land available.

A good professional supporting reference to our submission is WARA Reference 1:

State of Play: A Review of Recreation in Drinking Water Catchments in South Western Australia

This report was commissioned by DEC and DSR from Curtin University in 2008 to address divergent views on Policy 13 and to provide an independent, balanced analysis of the information available in relation to recreation in drinking water catchments. The report focuses on legislative and management issues associated with a review of public drinking water supply area (PDWSA) zoning in the Southwest of Western Australia.

Terms of Reference as they apply to WARA

1. *The social, economic and environmental values and costs of recreation access, where possible, to Perth hills and south west drinking water catchments, including the costs and benefits to public health, water quality, recreation, Indigenous culture and management options.*

The benefits to society from sport and recreation are well documented by others.

We believe that rogaining poses no threat to the environment and is not a risk to the quality of drinking water. Rogaining is conducted with the highest environmental management standards and

in over 30 years of events no adverse incidents have been identified. The above review confirms the negligible risk of sports such as ours, and the need for access to the catchments.

Rogaining is a low-impact sport. An average rogaine will have 400 competitors. If all the competitors at a rogaine were on the course at the same time there would be on average two people on each square kilometre of the course. All competitors travel on foot and support vehicles (normally 2-3 per event) only use defined roads. Being able to detect where a competitor has walked through the bush is almost impossible.

WARA provides chemical toilets at all events when the central camp site is on DEC-managed land and has a strict policy of removing all other waste. In the past DEC officers have inspected our camp sites the day after an event. They have stated that without prior knowledge they would not have known we had been there. At present WARA is prevented from camping in water catchments thus greatly reducing the areas that can be used for the sport. WARA will not use wet areas for camping as they are naturally not suitable. In addition WARA is not asking for permission to camp in Reservoir Protection Zones, but believes that a 2 km exclusion zone is unjustifiably large.

WARA's impact is nothing when compared against the effects of forest harvesting operations where heavy machinery disturbs the land to such an extent that its effects can be seen decades later. The activities of feral pigs can be seen in many low lying wet areas where they dig for food. There is also the presence of kangaroos, emus, (illegal) trail bike riders and burning operations. These impacts on the land, although highly visible, do not seem to have compromised drinking water quality. Rogainers travel on foot and whatever they take on the course must return with them, so the potential for adverse effects on water quality are extremely low.

Our members can be a valuable community resource for education about the importance of protecting water catchments if the policies and working arrangements are appropriate. The majority of our members participate because they enjoy the bush for what it is, and actively participate in and promote conservation activities (WARA actively supports the Bibbulmun Track Foundation, and has participated as an organisation in a number of track construction/ maintenance activities).

2 State, interstate and international legislation, policy and practice for recreation within public drinking water source areas, including information relating to population health benefits and impacts

Many national and international drinking water catchments have recreational opportunities. Reference 1 addresses this Term of Reference very thoroughly. WARA understands that some water based activities may require higher levels of water treatment, but not bushwalking or rogaining. These two similar activities are at the lowest end of any risk ranking. The forest country near Perth, which includes the drinking water catchments, is an invaluable resource for those activities and must be shared with water harvesting.

3 The range of community views on the value of water and recreation in public drinking water source areas.

The Department of Water's "Policy and Guidelines for Recreation within Public Drinking Water Source Areas on Crown Land. 2003", and also the Department of Environment and Conservation's (DEC) recreation policies are both critical to our sport.

During the 2003 review of the Department of Water Policy 13, there was poor representation of the recreation groups, and poor cooperation between the two agencies. As described in Reference 1, the two policies are not aligned and the result is making approvals for our sport extremely difficult.

DEC has a more rational and balanced approach to recreation and Crown Land access, it also has a Division charged with visitor access, providing contacts for sporting bodies.

If WARA plans one of its events in land managed by DEC, an application is forwarded to DEC. If the land is also drinking water catchment DEC refers the application to the Water Corporation. DEC is also responsible for checking clashes with other activities at the same time such as controlled burning, timber harvesting or other events. This process can take many months. The DEC Application Form has 15 conditions, and both DEC and the Water Corporation often apply arbitrary conditions at a local level, not based on science or on an understanding of our sport.

There is an urgent need for the Department of Water Recreation policy to be fair and soundly based. The Department of Water and the Water Corporation do not own the land - they only have a charter to harvest water. Their rigorous application of "Precautionary Principle" and "Multiple Barrier" approaches is contrary to any sensible risk assessment and management, and attitudes are entrenched. Neither agency feels any responsibility to recreation users.

4 The costs and benefits of alternative water quality management strategies and treatment for water catchments containing recreation.

In the case of rogaining and bushwalking, there are no costs of additional water treatment as rogaining has no potential impact on water quality. Government and the government agencies responsible for drinking water catchments would gain by having a more community friendly policy in the use of its catchments, by the education and example set by responsible sporting bodies.

5 Possible recreation sites or opportunities available outside the Perth hills and south west drinking water catchments

Events require an area approximately 12 km by 15 km with a centrally located site (Hash House) for administration, catering, toilets and overnight stay for competitors. Usually a number of years will pass between events being held in the same general area. The event areas are typically in the Darling Scarp in wooded spur/gully terrain – the same land required for drinking water source catchments. Without access to these areas rogaining could not exist in Western Australia.

WARA does use areas outside the water catchment areas. Because rogaining involves navigating using maps with topographical features it is difficult for us to use areas outside the Perth hills and adjacent areas. We rely on the goodwill of farmers to use their land and many of them invite us back. However there is a limit to how often we can use an area. Unfortunately some farming areas are becoming difficult to use because of the increasing number of hobby farmers and small holdings.

Distant sites are difficult because most members are Perth-based, and we stress the importance of not driving when tired, especially long distances.

Conclusion

It is important that government agencies be seen to be assisting people enjoy healthy activities. Barriers should not be put in place unless there are demonstrated reasons based on sound science for doing so. WARA believes that its events are of value to the community. We are convinced that our activities do not pose a threat to drinking water catchments.

In summary WARA needs:

- Recognition that rogaining is negligible risk to a water catchment. That must include the essential overnight camp
- Permission to camp in water catchment areas (not in Reservoir Protection Zones)
 - up to six times per year

- for 450 people
- for one to two nights.
- A more streamlined process for gaining permission to use an area of forest or water catchment.

WARA believes that the following steps would produce a fair and workable process for recreation in general, and for rogaining events in particular.

- 1 A rigorous re-write of the Department of Water Policy 13, removing the rogaining constraints. WARA is prepared to make detailed submissions on any redraft, and other affected sporting bodies should be well represented. The Department of Water should not be the arbiter. Alternately, as discussed in Reference1, a different resolution of Government agency responsibility could be developed.
- 2 DEC Recreation policy could be updated to cover water catchments, and then be substituted for the Department of Water Policy.
- 3 The DEC Non-commercial and Leisure Activities Approval form also requires review to better cater for volunteer-run recreation groups.
- 4 Event approval should be by DEC alone, with the knowledge of a revised water catchment policy. The Water Corporation adds no value and has no recreation liaison structure.
- 5 For each sporting body, a single agreement showing compliance with any necessary conditions should be possible, with individual event approvals simplified, and extra conditions rarely necessary. DEC should concentrate on efficient checking for no clashes with logging, prescribed burns and genuine disease risk areas (DRA).