

# PUBLIC



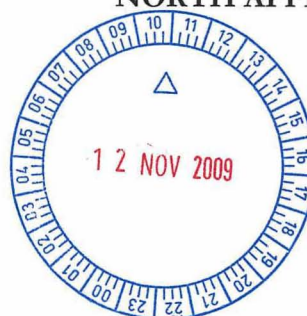
## Perth Bushwalkers Club Inc

President  
PO Box 7017

NORTH APPLECROSS WA 6849

9 November 2009

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

Perth Bushwalkers Club inc has pleasure in making 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 returns to us our historic bushwalking opportunities and at the same time assists in providing safe, secure and high quality drinking water for the public of Western Australia.

Perth Bushwalkers Club inc has some 400 members, with an age spread from 19 years old to over 80 years, with an average age of 49, and slightly more women than men. Members come from a very wide cross section of the population in terms of income, occupation, ethnicity, voting intention and electorate. We join the other 600 members of the organised bushwalking community in WA in being members of the Federation of Western Australian Bushwalkers Inc, which is in turn a member of Bushwalking Australia Inc, representing some 20,000 Australian bushwalkers.

Our members walk for pleasure, recreation, relaxation, and a stimulating challenge. As a result they keep fit and healthy and socially connected. They know from the bottom of their hearts that bushwalking is good for them. For many it has been a life-changing pastime. The connection between walking (and bushwalking) and health has long been recognized. Hippocrates, Greek physician (460 to 377 BC) said, "Walking is man's best medicine". Henry David Thoreau said in the Atlantic Journal in 1862, "when we go for a walk we naturally go to the fields and woods: what would become of us if we only walked in a garden or mall".

We know that the Government of Western Australia appreciates the value of exercise and the bush and has a number of programmes to facilitate this. The three that have most immediate relevance to us are the Department of Environment and Conservation's **Healthy Parks Healthy People programme**, the Department of Sport and Recreation's **State Trails Strategy 2009 – 2015**, and the cross department **Walking Strategy for Western Australia for 2007-2020**. In introducing 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 Trails Strategy specifically recognizes “defined (or formally recognised) and undefined trails”.

Although the now expired Policy 13 allowed Department of Water officers to give specific permission for bushwalking at their discretion, or where the activity had been carried on historically, or with an environment management plan, bushwalkers were never successful in getting permission. The Drinking Water Source Protection Plans for the catchments serving the Metropolitan area, which are said to draw their philosophy from Policy 13, prohibit bushwalking except on designated tracks and prohibit all overnight stays except at designated campsites. This leaves bushwalkers with only the Bibbulmun Track and a few short tracks in the ‘hills suburbs’. We in no way denigrate these tracks. They have been very successful in introducing thousands of people to the delights of bushwalking and the bush, who otherwise would not have the skills or incentive to do so. However they are simply not enough. The expired Policy 13 is a major inhibitor of bushwalking activities. This does nothing further to protect the quality or security of drinking water sources, and it runs in the face of other Government initiatives to get people active, fit and socially connected.

Our members, acting with other bushwalkers through the Federation of Western Australian Bushwalkers Inc, have had numerous exchanges with officers from the Department of Water and the Water Corporation, and eventually succeeded in meeting the Minister for Water in the previous Government, John Kobelke. Our logical, evidence based and common sense argument convinced him that bushwalkers should be granted some relief from the most prohibitive effects, though we are still effectively locked out of Reservoir Protection Zones, and may still have overnight stays only at recognised campsites. That relief was conditional upon the revision of Policy 13. We have also had a meeting with the current Minister for Water Dr Graham Jacobs, who also has deferred judgement until the review of Policy 13 is complete.

We walk in catchments, not only because of their natural beauty but 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 bush, there 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. It is large, near wilderness with scenic and nature qualities. It is accessible by good roads.

The first organised bushwalking group in Western Australia was the Western Walking Club Inc, formed in 1937 (Perth Bushwalkers Club Inc grew out of that club). They had a tacit agreement with water supply authorities that allowed them to bushwalk in catchments – as they were deemed to present an insignificant risk to water quality. In 1993 this tacit agreement was put into writing in an annual agreement between the Water Corporation and the Federation of Western Australian Bushwalkers Inc, then newly formed. This agreement allowed all traditional bushwalking activities, including overnight stays, in all parts of the catchment, to the high water mark of reservoirs. In 1999 the Department of Water rescinded this agreement without consultation or the provision of any scientific evidence, and bushwalking policies became progressively more restrictive. The first version of the Bibbulmun Track ran extensively through drinking water catchments, and had its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary last month. Subsequent versions of the track also run through catchments and the latest passes through the reservoir protection zone near Mundaring Weir. Tens of thousands of bushwalkers have used the track, and not all would be able to use the toilet facilities located at the campsites – some would surely have been ‘caught

short' between huts. During all this considerable period of some 70 years there have been no reports, rumours or evidence of water contamination caused by bushwalkers.

The policy of exclusion does not stop people who ignore the law, some of whom may have no concern for water quality, and the policy certainly would not stop anyone who had malevolent intent for water supply. Bushwalker's presence might inhibit the activities of this latter group. We are told that Department of Water rangers are very few in number, only work week-days, and stay in their trucks on roads. Our members are a little larger in number, and are on foot and off roads, but who do they tell when they see circumstances hazardous to drinking water if they are not supposed to be in the catchments?

There is something ironic in claims that the quality of Perth's water is a vindication of the Department of Water policy of exclusion. Perhaps, because of bushwalkers presence in catchments for a great part of the time that there has been a public water supply, it actually vindicates the opposite.

We are puzzled that the paper **Cilimburg, A., et al, "Wildland Recreation and Human Waste", (in Environmental Management, 2000, Vol. 25, pp. 587-598)**: is on occasion cited to suggest that improper disposal of human waste by bushwalkers, and recreation in general, presents an insurmountable risk to water quality, and hence is a reason to ban bushwalking. The paper actually says "...there is little evidence to suggest that the health hazard to humans is great enough to impose further regulation in areas currently using catholes." Our members use catholes (i.e. the digging of a small hole to bury human waste) in areas at least 100 metres remote from water sources and public facilities as a recognised means of safe human waste disposal. The paper actually encourages properly managed bushwalking.

Again we are puzzled that the paper **Cole, D.N. and Spildie, D.R., "Hiker, Horse and Llama trampling effects on native vegetation in Montana USA", (in Journal of Environmental Management, 1998, Vol. 53, pp 61-71)** has also been quoted to suggest that bushwalkers, and recreation in general, in W.A. pose a major risk of damaging vegetation through trampling and this can adversely affect water quality because of increased turbidity, and thus should not be permitted. In the paper's concluding paragraph there is actually the appropriate caution that "*The experimental data...can only be applied to the vegetation types and trampling intensities included in the experiment.*" Those more familiar with traditional bushwalking areas in WA water catchments know the impact of off-track walkers on vegetation in the catchments is negligible (see also under 'bushwalkers and water quality above). Finding any evidence that walkers have even recently visited an area would generally be impossible. In any event any possible trampling effect from traditional bushwalking in Perth's catchments would be infinitely less than the impact of bulldozers used on occasions by the catchment managers to thin vegetation to increase runoff into the reservoirs, and also less than the impact of mining and forestry operations.

Objectively, the risk of bushwalkers contaminating drinking water sources and adding to the costs of maintaining water quality is negligible, especially compared to, for example, the obvious potential for contamination frequently seen at public picnic areas and adjacent to public parking areas along the major highways that traverse the catchments.

In NSW, the authorities controlling the Warragamba Dam catchment (Sydney water supply) allow overnight stays by bushwalkers within most of the catchment outside of the 'Schedule 1' Inner Catchment area (the equivalent of RPZs; see Sydney Water Catchment Management Regulation 2000 under Sydney Water Catchment Management Plan Act 1998; Clause 21). They

recognize that bushwalkers' overnight stays do not pose a significant risk to water quality and that most of the catchment provides a valuable recreational opportunity in those circumstances.

The last Tracks and Trails conference was held at Maroochydore in Queensland. Maroochydore and the Sunshine Coast area get a major part of their water supply, if not all of it, from Lake MacDonald, where bushwalking is allowed right to the water's edge, and canoeing is allowed on it. We understand there are some 50 drinking water dams in New South Wales and Queensland that allow fishing, and bushwalking.

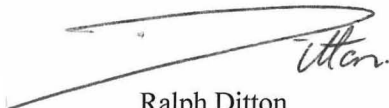
In WA, bushwalking is allowed to the water's edge of the dam of Lefroy Brook, that supplies water to the town of Pemberton.

As said earlier, we have nowhere else to go. Other people may put their value on these catchments, but to us they are priceless. We are pleased to see the Government recognise that management policy for areas which are also water catchments needs to consider more interests than those of the Department of Water, and it is the prerogative of politicians to get the balance right for all of us.

In the revised policy we would like to see:

- All bans on traditional bushwalking in catchments removed except in places where there is some obvious and scientifically proven threat to the environment or water, or some cultural reason for not doing so.
- Priority given to studies that determine the required size of Reservoir Protection Zones, as there is no logic in the current arbitrary two kilometres above the high water mark.
- The physical management of walking in catchments placed in the hands of the Department of Environment and Conservation, who we know are liaising closely with the Department of Sport and Recreation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'R. Ditton', is written over a horizontal line.

Ralph Ditton  
President