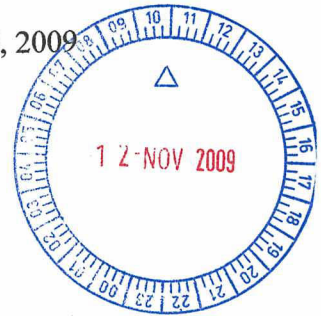


PUBLIC

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

November 10, 2009



Dear Cassandra,

I am an avid bush walker and a member of the Perth Bush Walkers Club.
In response to your committee's call for submission regarding the enquiry into recreation in public drinking water catchments in WA I wish to submit the following.

- Nearly all the good land for bushwalking within 'days drive' proximity of Perth is also drinking water catchment.
- Bushwalkers have had open access to this land for traditional bushwalking since organised bushwalking began in WA about 80 years ago, until it was steadily restricted in the late 1990s, and finally, restricted to designated trails and designated campsites only. That is effectively the Bibbulmun Track, plus a few tracks in the hills around Mundaring and Kalamunda only!
- This very unfair policy derives from the Department of Water Policy 13, which allows mining, forestry, farming, orchards and public highways in areas that we are not allowed to walk in.
- Bushwalkers appeal to the Minister of Water (then John Kobelke) resulted in permission to walk off designated trails, but overnight stays only at recognised campsites and still exclusion from reservoir protection zones, **but the relief was conditional upon the revision of Policy 13**

I urge the committee to consider the following:

- Bushwalkers walk for recreation, for relaxation and leisure, for a stimulating challenge, and while doing so keep fit and healthy and socially connected. We all know of someone who will tell you bushwalking has saved their life.
- Hippocrates, Greek physician (460 to 377 BC) said, "Walking is man's best medicine". His is probably the earliest professional thought on the issue.
- 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 continues to leave catchments open to 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.
- Water Department Rangers have much smaller ranges than do bushwalkers. (They are very small in number, in vehicles on roads - we are on foot off roads.). We could be eyes and ears for the water quality, but how can we be 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.
- Elsewhere in Australia, overnighers are also permitted in catchments for all bushwalkers with no effect on water quality.
- 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 be able to walk anywhere in catchments except in the very small number of places where there is a 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

Yours sincerely



Dr G C Mullins MBBS FANZCA