



# Hon. Jim Chown MLC

Member for the Agricultural Region

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs for the petition tabled by myself, Hon Jim Chown MLC, on 17 May 2018.

## **Ref: Petition No. 066 - Geraldton Camp School**

This petition calls attention to the invaluable opportunity provided to the children of Western Australia by the Geraldton Camp School and all Camp Schools of the Education Department.

It is imperative that the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs holds an enquiry with due haste into the impending privatisation of the Geraldton Camp School for the reasons listed below. This is a matter of urgency, in that the recommendations need be heard and considered by the Government before the end of the current school year.

Geraldton Camp School's site has remained a vital part of the local community and surrounding areas, since beginning as a school in 1913. The camp school has had significant upgrades and additions over the years with 2017 bringing a new flying fox and mini golf course.

The school meets all the Department of Education policies and guidelines and has a record of being a safe school camp. Feedback from staff of client schools indicates that their students had met their camp outcomes and greatly enjoyed the educational experience. Data collected also showed that teachers and students were very happy with the quality of the programs offered.

The Camp Schools are staffed by qualified teachers and sports and recreation specialists who assiduously work with the children to achieve the best outcomes for all attending.

Geraldton Camp School presents an extensive list of programs, all of which achieve an educational outcome that cannot be gained in a classroom setting. All programs are designed to take students out of their comfort zone and to give them experiences of inestimable worth that they will never forget.

The great outcomes and successes they achieve are talked about for weeks after and more importantly, put into practice back at their school and home. These life lessons cannot all be achieved in a conventional classroom environment.

Some of the key focuses and outcomes of these programs are:

- Team building, working together to achieve an outcome
- Resilience, self-esteem and character building
- Goal setting, perseverance and tolerance
- Over coming fears

During 2017, a total of 2114 students attended Geraldton Camp School. Of the 2114 students that attended in 2017, government schools were their main client making up 67%, with private school sector 15% and 18% community groups. The community groups predominantly use weekend slots and school holidays.

Numbers grew significantly in 2017 with a 27% increase in student visitors from the previous year.

Geraldton Camp School makes a practice of putting our public schools first, as do all the government camp schools. The reasoning is to make this facility as available as possible to our public schools that are unlikely to be able to afford the private alternatives.

In fact the government camp schools are the only affordable option for our public schools to experience this worthwhile resource.

Although private camps are available, they do not offer the scope of programs that we see at camps like Geraldton. Private camps also have a much inflated price tag attached to their service, which for the majority of public schools would make them unaffordable.

Below is the current pricing for Geraldton Camp School

Accommodation and catering: \$45.30 per student, per day

Program fees: Range between \$3 to \$10 per student, per program

Fees are set by the Department of Education (Previous year + CPI)

If the Camp Schools were to be taken over by Commercial Enterprise there would be a large increase to these fees.

An example of this is the private facility Forest Edge Recreation Camp in Waroona, their fees are double that of the Geraldton Camp School.

There is a real possibility that our public schools could not afford the experience of a camp school if the costs were to double, as they too have had their budgets restricted of late.

It would be a sad day for public education in this state if we took this fantastic opportunity away from our children, simply by making it financially unattainable. This then becomes an experience that only the select will get access to and that is unacceptable.

Why the Government has not investigated sponsorship possibilities or other solutions seems ludicrous. Our children's education is a worthy cause that our commercial world has always been keen to support.

I am also concerned that the Government's strategy in commercializing our camp schools is to actually make a profit from our children's vital education. One would presume that if a commercial enterprise was to take over the camp schools, there would be a contract requiring payment for lease or usage of the facilities.

Instead of providing high quality education to our children, as is every child's right in this state, the Government would instead be making education into a money making business. This is another 'so called' budget repair measure at the detriment of our children and our education system which has already seen untenable cuts.

Thank you



Jim Chown MLC

The issues described in this petition have not been taken to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations (Ombudsman).