

Submission re: Petition No. 049 –Pemberton Camp School. This complaint has not been taken to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations (Ombudsman).

- **Outdoor education is now seen as core education business - not an optional extra**

We submit that outdoor education has never been more important for an increasingly urbanised, digital, obese population. Camp schools are set up to offer students a safe, but challenging experience. The value of any Department of Education (DoE) camp school is in the educational experience provided and this is dependent on the experience and expertise of the qualified teacher managing it. The Pemberton Camp School manager is a qualified teacher who specialises in environmental and outdoor education. He has managed the Pemberton Camp School for over twenty-five years and has an intimate knowledge of the area and the curriculum opportunities within it.

The camp school manager works closely with each incoming school, guiding the teacher-in-charge through all pre-camp *program development phases*, to ensure an individual, tailor-made quality program achieves the schools desired values and outcomes. The support provided to teachers during camp enables them to take care of their students' day to day needs and wellbeing; to attend to medical, homesickness and other pastoral care issues as they arise. Other inherent benefits in schools choosing to use the DoE administered Pemberton Camp School include:

- Assurance that all camp staff have WWCC, DoE Clearance and are suitably qualified;
- Provision of up to date Excursion Management Plans for all activities offered including copies of Certificates of Currency from external providers;
- Provision of Camp School Bushfire and Emergency and Critical Incident Management Plans;
- Strict adherence to DoE policies, guidelines and procedures especially relating to Excursions and Outdoor Education and Recreation Activities resulting in an exemplary risk management record;
- A One Stop Payment Invoice and Booking System for all accommodation, meals, activities and excursions; the provision of low cost camp school staff run activities; a non-profit driven catering service that is internally managed and caters for all special dietary requirements;
- Operational structures and routines within the camp that emphasise personal and social development.

It has been suggested that Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries camps could be used instead of DoE camp schools. Schools and Managers of Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSCI) camps, as well as owners of private camp sites such as Forest Edge, are unified in their concern that if suitable "alternate operators" are not forthcoming and DoE Camp Schools do in fact close there simply are no spaces available to fill the void.

Most DLGSCI camps are within the metro area (Point Walter, Ern Halliday, Woodman Point) while Bickley is on the outskirts. Only Quaranup in Albany is not Perth centric. These camps cannot provide a rural camp experience similar to that provided at Pemberton.

- **The camp school residential facility provides unique opportunities for personal growth and social development**

Due to the increasing sedentary lifestyles of students *experiential education* has once again become valued and relevant and is the current catch cry of education as is *nature play*. Both strategies are at the heart of the camp school experience. Dr Donna Barwood, President, key association for Health and Physical Education (HPE) teachers in Western Australia, ACHPER WA Branch Inc. asserts "*that the opportunities created via camp schools build social and emotional capabilities, support cross curriculum capabilities and perhaps, more importantly, challenges young people to strengthen a resilient and growth-oriented mind-set.*"

To: The Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs

Research shows that connecting students to the natural world can: boost performance in reading, writing, maths, science, social studies. It can enhance critical thinking and problem solving. It has been shown to increase focus and decrease ADHD symptoms. There is increased enthusiasm and greater engagement with learning and it also leads to better behaviour with more impulse control and less disruptive behaviour. These are all qualities we desire in our educational system. We do not want to risk a return to the antiquated system of "classroom only" school based education.

Dr Michael Crouch, ambassador for Outdoors WA, supported this view, by stating, *"Camp experiences provide not only a valuable social experience, but help school children to explore and appreciate outdoor experiences, with the hope this stimulates a lasting love for outdoor recreation. It is a much needed antidote to the current trend of insisting every child at school needs a screen and needs more time connected to the internet."* We really should be doing everything possible to get MORE STUDENTS OUTDOORS MORE OFTEN!

- **The importance of Pemberton Camp School (PCS)**

The school and its staff are firmly embedded in the culture of Pemberton. Besides the adventure and team building activities available at most camps, students have the opportunity to see directly where their food is grown and to experience the biodiversity of our surrounding world famous forests. PCS provides nature-based activities, whatever the season.

- **The importance of affordable school camps for disadvantaged families**

Principals of many schools who use the Pemberton Camp School have already indicated that other camps are too expensive for their families to afford. Private camps most commonly cost 30-40% more for accommodation and meals and are at least double the cost for activities. In addition, most private camps also have a minimum group size requirement, normally 60.

- **The negative economic impact on the local area**

Pemberton is a small rural town. If closed, seven permanent jobs will be lost and five other casual employees affected. The excursion providers who benefit greatly from the presence of a quality camp in the district will also be negatively affected. There will also be an adverse economic impact on the many local suppliers of goods and services currently servicing the Pemberton Camp School.

Darrell Church of DJ Communications has stated "The work I complete for the Pemberton Camp School is a big part of my income to keep my business going. We service, supply and maintain equipment including coolroom and fridge cabinet repairs, two-way radio service and supply, repeater rental, electrical maintenance on the whole site, TV and video maintenance, gas stoves and BBQ maintenance. As you can see, the closure of the Pemberton Camp School will affect my income."

Governments have long urged country towns to sell themselves to tourists. After their children have attended camp, many parents and teachers visit to have their own experiences. The money they spend in the town and greater region has immediate benefits to local businesses, and also indirectly encourages tourist infrastructure and investment which sequentially attracts even more visitors.

Closing camp schools will discard years of facilities and professional experience in an area of education that has never been more necessary. Once taken, this decision will take years to reverse.

Yours sincerely,



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