

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

RECREATION ACTIVITIES WITHIN PUBLIC DRINKING WATER SOURCE AREAS

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 24 MARCH 2010**

SESSION ONE

Members

Hon Max Trenorden (Chairman)
Hon Jon Ford (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Ken Baston
Hon Jim Chown
Hon Ed Dermer

Hearing commenced at 10.06 am

PROKOP, MR FRANK
Executive Director, Recfishwest,
sworn and examined:

MATTHEWS, MR ANDREW
Chairman, Recfishwest,
sworn and examined:

STAGLES, MR IAN
Chair, West Australian Fish Foundation,
sworn and examined:

MOYLE, MR KANE
Foundation Board Member, West Australian Fish Foundation,
sworn and examined:

The CHAIRMAN: Welcome and if we can get going, I do not want to chew into your time too much. You are probably aware that there is large interest in this inquiry from large numbers of community groups and we need to try to get your point of view as quickly as we can. However, there are some requirements that I need to go through, so I will get you through the formal bit as quick as I can.

On behalf of the committee I welcome you to the hearing and I need to ask each of you to take either an oath or an affirmation.

[Witnesses took the oath or affirmation.]

The CHAIRMAN: Have you signed the document entitled “Information for Witnesses”?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Have you understood it?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Have you been given a list of the questions we are likely to ask you? I think it might help a bit, because we are not going to ask all those questions, if we can start with any statements that you each, or collectively, want to make. Is there any position that you want to put? This is not meant to be the Gestapo!

Mr Stagles: I suppose, if I may, Mr Chair, the fish foundation is an organisation that was established to conduct stocking, restocking and stock enhancement for recreational and commercial purposes. The view of the foundation is that the man-made impoundments, Water Corporation dams, are a very significant high valued asset to the community, which we would dearly like to see more fully utilised for the community’s benefit. To that end we are in a position to provide support for the community in restocking or stocking these water bodies. One of the points that I should make is that history has shown, certainly in Queensland and I have no reason to think it would be any different here, that the cost of stocking and creating a valuable community asset can be done at no cost to government because the various community groups in the recreational sector are usually happy to contribute to these. It seems such a sad waste of a resource to see a hole in the ground with

water in. It also seems fairly outdated to suggest that world-best practice to stop people conducting harmless recreation in a water supply dam is world's best practice, given the levels of water purification that are available as options these days; if we can treat sewage and make it drinkable, I am sure we can treat water out of a potable dam that somebody has got fish in and can catch fish and enjoy themselves and relax. In this day and age, looking for opportunities for people to be able to go into a rural environment, a pleasant environment, relax and fish is important, especially as saltwater fish are under increasing pressure. So from the foundation's perspective, we would be keen to see some of those water dams opened up and we would then be very keen to engage with the community to look at the stocking opportunities that they present.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Mr Prokop: Recfishwest's main perspective is that water is a common property resource; that it is owned by all stakeholders and all stakeholders have the right and capacity to enjoy that access to the resource. The capital costs associated with the construction of bodies such as dams are met by the community and the community should have the capacity to return a dividend from that. The privatisation of the public good, primarily for irrigators, does not recognise the community as major stakeholders in that resource, and I can see from some of your questions that we will be exploring that a bit later on. Recfishwest has the view that the risk assessment needs to be objective and not tainted by interests, particularly of engineering people who are driven to service a very small number of clientele.

Access is a particularly important issue and we are looking for consistency. We find it irreconcilable, for example, that Alcoa can have a mining operation, which is not only adjacent to but actually transports materials across a drinking water supply, yet recreational fishing is prohibited. We find it inconsistent that logging operations can occur in the catchment without the provision of integrated toilet facilities, yet other recreation activities are prohibited. Recfishwest is of the view that we would like to negotiate for a hierarchy of access to allow people to enjoy the resource and there are a number of obvious examples, most particularly Stirling, Samson and Harris dams, which would allow those opportunities and which can, through the admission of the experts who presented to the Harvey Water Forum, be allowed to rest prior to coming online for drinking water to further reduce the risk. Mr Chairman, we are talking about risk in the order of 10 to the -25 but the impact is enormous and catastrophic. We would like the Water Corporation, for example, to apply the same rules that it has—it spent enormous amounts of money developing the document, which I have tabled for you here, which says amongst other things that little kids swimming in a water slide may be subject to faecal contamination, but they have only been able to cite one case. The Water Corporation itself has been responsible for in the order of nine million litres of raw sewage entering the Swan River; if they applied the same standards to themselves that they expect us to apply, we would not have any water treatment or any authority. At the end of the day, it is about balance and it is about accommodation. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

[10.15 am]

The CHAIRMAN: Do any other groups want to comment?

Mr Moyle: If I can just make a point from the WA Fish Foundation, I think a lot has been encapsulated there by Ian and Frank, but it has been demonstrated in other jurisdictions that a well-stocked public water resource open to recreational fishing can be an important asset back to the state and generate significant economic value as a result of fish and allowing recreational fishing access to those dams.

The CHAIRMAN: We have got your submissions and I thank you; they are very detailed submissions. I read them again last night, I have to say, so we are up with your submissions. On to these questions, I do not intend to ask whether you like a drink of water or not. We will move on to question three, and that is really the start of the core issue here. Do you have views about what level

of access—as organisations, have you given consideration as to what you would be putting to us what that access should be?

Mr Prokop: Yes. Mr Chairman, it is contained in some detail in the Recfishwest submission about potential options. There are existing examples both around Australia and, indeed, within Western Australia. For example, in Harvey Dam you are not permitted to use outboard motors; it is electric power or manpower only. We believe that consideration could be given to go to the next level, which is at Googong Dam in Queanbeyan where a gate is opened at about seven o'clock in the morning and closed again at seven to reduce access during those times. In that particular impoundment, there are limited rubbish bins made available and the recreational fishers and other recreational users are on their notice that if they litter, the dam will be closed. There have been occasions where littering has been reported and they have closed the dam. So we believe that having recreational fishers present on the dam actually significantly reduces the risk because you have eyes and ears that are looking out for other suspicious activities and behaviours. At the moment with the total prohibition model, recreational fishers and others view it as a contest and a competition to be able to sneak in to the dam. We believe that a small strategic concession will actually benefit the water quality. We believe that you could have artificial fly and lure only access, which would reduce the capacity for bait, and we believe that with the realistic engineering and management solutions that are not just possible but are actually relatively easy to manage, that you could make sure that impoundments such as Stirling, Samson and Harris would be able to be accessed about 10 months of the year. So we would be willing to look at strategic concessions to allow recreational fishers to get some access.

But as Ian alluded to and Kane has brought up, there are many millions of dollars in potential economic benefit to regional economies, which are suffering quite substantially; for example, Copeton Dam near Inverell has calculated that it is about \$7 million per annum through direct economic benefits from recreational fishing being available in Copeton Dam. If you add that amount of money to a place like Collie, you could have a very significant positive economic benefit to a very challenged regional economy. We think that you need to look at this as an opportunity rather than as a threat. The dogma of locking people out is also going to be under very serious threat from the population advances that we have. Surface water is diminishing in its importance as a water source for Perth and we believe that multiple use, as in most jurisdictions and in everything from marine parks to national parks, is the right way to go.

The CHAIRMAN: Any other comments on that area?

Mr Stagles: Yes. That multiple use, Mr Chairman. I did a study tour to Queensland several years ago and presented a short paper to the Department of Fisheries and with it was the management plan for Lake Tinaroo in the Atherton Tableland. It is a multi-use facility; they have yacht racing, powerboat racing, fishing, it is irrigation water, it is potable water—you think of a water use, that is what they have on that dam. It is all very compatible and the water quality is of a high standard.

I actually pick up on Frank's point: I think what we are actually dealing with is dogma that says that we cannot go near a dam because it presents a risk, whereas, you have probably heard it from other people, feral pigs and dogs are as big a risk and unfortunately they cannot read the signs, so they do not worry about whether they should go in or not. But I think that going forward, the way that we treat water is obviously going to be different in the future because if we are going to be drinking processed sewage, it says to me that the technology in treating water has advanced significantly since the world-best practice dogma was developed by Water Corp.

The CHAIRMAN: The committee has been to Queensland and, Jon, do you want to comment?

Hon JON FORD: Yes. I think Kane and Frank talked about the significant value to the community in an economic sense. When we were in Queensland we visited two of the most significant recreated dams that they had over there, which are Somerset, which is their big one, and Wivenhoe, which it feeds in to. What we were told there was that the reason they have recreational access is

that it is a legacy issue because all these dams in history were originally looked after and maintained by local government authorities and then it was eventually taken over and taken under a whole department when they nearly ran out of water, basically. Now, they are saying that in Somerset, where people have motorised boat access on the Somerset dam, they have 100 times higher level of E. coli parts per million than in Wivenhoe, which is down below, and there are a number of reasons for that. So you could not actually drink the water safely out of Somerset, certainly by international standards and the Australian standard. They are also saying that for those two dams it costs them \$4 million a year to run the place from managing the recreational sector—not the water, just managing the recreation—and they get \$200 000 back in fees. So that is paying for services, so it is a net loss to the public purse.

Mr Prokop: So it is a net loss to the organisation that is responsible for the management. It is a net benefit to the community of Queensland to have access to that resource and for the multipliers that are generated throughout the system. One of the major weaknesses of the systems that we have in Australia where water management authorities do not consider recreational users to be stakeholders is that they only count the direct costs and the direct income. The community has subsidised the construction of those dams; the irrigators do not pay for the depreciation of those assets. Our firm belief is that if you took into account the depreciation of the assets that were constructed and included that against the benefits in income on the recreational sector, you would find, in fact, that it makes an enormous profit because you are returning a direct and measurable benefit back to the community for access.

Now the point about the levels of E. coli is always a concern and that is one of the things that we are discussing here. But we believe that it is almost at the level of nonsensical to be suggesting that by denying recreational access that the risk from E. coli infestation from other sources does not require the same level of management with or without very controlled recreational access. Our very biggest concern when discussing these matters with the Water Corporation is that their belief is that no E. coli is not just possible, it is desirable. Our firm belief is that they have a responsibility to manage the water for the health of all Western Australians and that the inclusion of additional recreational access will not significantly increase that risk and will have enormous flow-on benefits. Yes, even if we had a recreational dam licence to access some of those dams, which they do have in Queensland, there would probably still be a net cost, if you are taking direct costs; if you are including economic benefits and social dividends, then the equation is completely different.

Hon JON FORD: Well —

The CHAIRMAN: Yes, go, that is fine.

Hon JON FORD: Because Frank decided not to let me finish what I was saying —

Mr Prokop: My apologies, Mr Ford.

Hon JON FORD: Now, Frank, those figures that I gave you were specifically about recreational management. If I was to say to you that for access to somewhere like Logue Brook, if we were going to have dual use for drinking and recreational use of that and therefore have a single barrier, it would cost around \$50 million to build an effective water treatment cycle and probably in the vicinity of between \$4 million and \$6 million a year recurrent to run that. Which schools are we going to not open up, which new hospital are we not going to build, and how many recreators—I am just putting the counter argument to you—so you split those costs between the users of the dam compared with the two million people across the state, and that is one dam, so would you be willing to pay for that to access the dam?

[10.25 am]

Mr Prokop: Mr Ford, it seems that since you have been in opposition, you accept public service submissions much more readily than you once did.

Hon JON FORD: I did not say that. I am asking you to answer the question. You should not make assumptions about me.

Mr Prokop: In our view, the \$50 million is a necessary cost, irrespective of whether it is recreational access or not. We think it is irresponsible of the Water Corporation to pretend differently. In my view, the capacity for the additional \$4 million to \$5 million is something that has never been independently costed. We can discuss names of people who can examine that, if you would like, but I believe that that is a largely nonsensical figure based upon the information that was provided to the Harvey Water Forum from water experts who suggested the additional management costs were effectively nil. I would also point out that Logue Brook Dam has traditionally had public access up until the time where suddenly they are inventing a \$5 million cost. Somewhere somehow they were able to find the funds to undertake the same management that now suddenly goes to an infinitely greater level of accountability. Similarly, Stirling Dam was accessed from the day it opened until about 2007 with not a single incidence. The only incidence, I understand, of public health risk related to recreation and water was in 1927 or thereabouts, so we are talking about a realistic risk of the number of people who have recreated times 73 years, which is effectively zero, in order to put that into its realistic context. I understand that. We need the \$50 million. The Water Corporation needs to tell the people of Western Australia that we have to have a certain level of control.

Mr Stagles: Mr Chairman, am I to understand that we currently take drinking water from Logue Brook?

Hon JON FORD: No.

The CHAIRMAN: Logue Brook is part of the reason why the committee is here. We need to concentrate a little on Logue Brook. I also want to be conscious of the time.

Mr Stagles: I do have a point that I think is quite valid that I would like to make to the committee if I may. If Logue Brook is currently not potable water and not processed by the Water Corporation, will it have to put some kind of infrastructure in place to make that potable water?

Hon JON FORD: If they were going to —

Mr Stagles: There is a fixed cost of some sort.

Hon JON FORD: Fixed and recurrent.

Mr Stagles: I suppose where the foundation is coming from relates to the difference between just processing it because of the perceived low risk because there is no recreational fishing or other activity on that area and processing it to the optimum level to actually meet world best practice. Really and surely, what we are talking about is not the cost of treating that potable water; it is the difference between just treating it and treating it properly. Is that reasonable?

Hon JON FORD: It sounds reasonable but there are other risk factors involved and costs associated with public health. Unlike what Frank suggested, there is lots of evidence out there of outbreaks of disease that are directly attributed to water within Australia and overseas. The argument I was hoping you would come forward with is perhaps when we are talking about drinking water, governments of the day should not be considering taking away existing assets and perhaps should be considering building new water sources. You sort of hinted at it, Frank, when you spoke about developing other water sources.

The CHAIRMAN: We have a water authority that is promoting a desalination plant and a water authority that is proposing a second use process. Maybe there is a changing scene. Our task as a committee is to look at both sides of the argument and report. That is what we are trying to do.

I move to question five. Do you see any difference between the recreational groups? Do you see yourselves as the most likely larger polluters as against walkers, motorbike riders and a whole raft of recreational users? Do you see yourselves at the top of the spectrum or halfway?

Mr Prokop: We are nowhere near it. The important thing to point out is that a wilderness bushwalker who ignores the symptoms of swine flu or BSE and defecates at the wrong point within a catchment is as likely to have a catastrophic risk as a waterskier who tips fuel into the water at the water's edge. At the end of the day, we are not talking about groups; we are talking about individual behaviours within groups. All groups that have more than one participant have a potential risk for impact on the environment. In terms of recreational fishing, we are great believers in peer pressure, driving responsible behaviours. At the moment the responsible behaviours are not being encouraged because it is viewed as a competition to teach the Water Corporation a lesson by sneaking into an asset which they think they should get access to. While recreational fishing, by virtue of its direct contact with the water, does present some more significant global risks than, for example, wilderness bushwalking, it is still compatible with drinking water access in almost every jurisdiction in the world. The myth-busting thing from the Water Corporation is inaccurate because, for example, Sydney water supply does allow recreational fishing in Fitzroy Falls Dam, which is not included here. There are a number of places where that is there.

We believe that if you want to talk about risk, each and every person has risk; so, too, do the loggers, the wild pigs, the wild dogs, dieback transfer and other things. At the end of the day, we need to manage overall behaviours to an educative rather than an autocratic system.

The CHAIRMAN: Any management scheme should look at all access being equal.

Mr Prokop: That is not what I necessarily meant.

Mr Stagles: It is probably stating the obvious that from a recreational fishing perspective, along with the Audubon Society, we are probably going to want to see improved habitat. We want to see sedges and peripheral landscape and all the rest of it, because fishing in a clear mud hole is not what we want to enjoy. I think there are certain groups that would be looking to enhance the quality of the experience and therefore take greater care of habitat. If you take the other extreme—please excuse me if you like riding motorbikes through the bush—unlicensed off-road vehicles screaming around are probably not a good idea because they are probably significantly incompatible with some of the other users. It is really a matter of horses for courses. Limiting the extent of the access and the duration of the access is a good way forward.

The CHAIRMAN: Later this morning we will be talking to the walkers. Their argument is just the same as yours—their qualitative view, access to the water, to have a resting place of some merit.

Mr Stagles: They would have similar objectives.

Mr Prokop: We do go to the bottom of the dam, for example. We need trees and habitat for marron.

The CHAIRMAN: They argue they should go to the water's edge as well.

Mr Prokop: We agree with them when it comes to that.

Mr Moyle: Mr Chairman, I would like to build on that point. Recreational fishers rely on healthy clean water just as much as anyone. Our fishing pursuits require good water for fish to be in there. We are almost conservationists and we are eyes and ears on the water to make sure that there are no entry risks to what is an important asset to recreational fishers. There are also varying levels of access for recreational fishers that can be considered as part of that risk assessment in terms of the risks that it can pose to the resource.

The CHAIRMAN: If you go to question 4, could you work out a management scheme for large numbers of different people who want to recreate in these areas?

Mr Prokop: We do and we believe we would be looking at an empowerment model rather than a bureaucratic type of model. In other words, we would be saying, as we put in this solution, there should be limited access that is controlled and developed by recreational fishers on the basis that that access is a privilege, which is in recognition of responsible behaviours. We would put in place

action plans, not just codes of practice, that would result in changes to management if behaviours do not meet acceptable standards.

[10.25 am]

Mr Matthews: If I may add to that also—the national park system has a management system already in place that most visitors who visit those areas understand the rules straightaway on entering that area. The privilege of actually being in there has a small cost but there is also other responsibilities attached to that—open fires, rubbish and that sort of thing. You will find that no national park in Western Australia has rubbish bins. You have got to take all your rubbish outside.

The CHAIRMAN: This is not a debating forum, but I am a regional pollie and I also know what you are speaking about does not happen. When I go there, there is no-one there to check on it and there are lots of people doing the right thing but, as we all know, there are a lot of people not doing the right thing. I think that becomes the competing interest. I know there are some further questions, but I want to ask one other question, which is question 6 in this: if you are able to pick Mundaring Weir, then BankWest decides to put on an international rowing event for two weeks, are those sorts of issues manageable?

Mr Prokop: We believe that they would be. The second part of the question is how easy or difficult is it to obtain permission? Impossible. The response is that they are dismissed completely; not even considered. We believe that you could put in place operational plans. There are things like tournaments that are run for bream and other things where it would be more likely to have that occur. But Recfishwest, for example, encourages a wider community use of the asset, as does WAF in terms of going forward. The short answer is: yes, sir, we could do that but we would rather be negotiating for more general access if that were possible.

The CHAIRMAN: Who with, though?

Mr Prokop: The Water Corporation or the stewards of the resource.

The CHAIRMAN: That becomes the question, though, because we do not have that process here in the west at the moment. There are processes, as you say, in Queensland and New South Wales, and around the world. Do we create a new agency?

Mr Stagles: It may well be possible for the local community, the council, the local authority that may have a desire to say, “We would like to see this particular area open for certain times for recreational activity.” The local authority takes on the responsibility to coordinate. Again, the Queensland example is very much that. From a fishing perspective, they have stocking groups for various water bodies. They look after a whole suite of other issues along with the stocking requirements of that water body. I think if the local community, of which the local shires and councils would be clearly a good example, were interested in taking on the day-to-day responsibility, perhaps Water Corporation could transfer that responsibility to them.

Mr Prokop: Or the Department of Sport and Recreation, that has global overseeing of that wide variety of activities and is not made up of an engineering dogma, would be seen as an advantageous situation.

Hon JON FORD: I have to be careful not to criticise another agency. How many Western Australians do you think would like to fish in fresh water? How many do you think currently do it?

Mr Prokop: Through the licences, it is between 40 000 and 60 000. As you know, Jon, from your previous ministerial portfolio, there are a number of umbrella licences so we are not able to determine actually how many people partake in freshwater marron activities, but it is in the order of 40 000 per annum. How many would like to? If you look at a wider perspective such as access to Lake Kununurra, everyone in Western Australia would like to do it. If you look at the *Field of Dreams* model—which is if you build it, they will come—my firm belief is that if, for example, you put golden perch into Wellington Dam you would get between 20 000 and 30 000 new recreational

fishers making use of a new resource, injecting many millions of dollars into the regional economy around Collie. But some of this is speculative. There have been economic studies done on Lake Kununurra, for example. The challenge we have, as you know, with respect to marron—which is an iconic Western Australian species—is that salinity is pushing the range further west and the Water Corporation is pushing the access further east. It is a realistic option within the next 10 to 15 years that marron fishing will disappear from the Western Australian culture. We need to be aware of whether that needs management. There are opportunities, such as at Stirling Dam, Samson and Harris. The truth, sir, is if you drive to Harris Dam just before the marron season, there are probably more people fishing on Harris Dam than there are not, yet it is illegal to do so. We also have a firm belief that making something illegal twice does not solve the problem.

Hon JON FORD: I feel very uncomfortable with Frank calling me sir! Let us say we have 100 000 people accessing recreational activities. What do we say to the other 2.1 million Western Australians who end up paying and they see it as subsidising that activity? What is the response to that?

Mr Prokop: One is we can talk about other forms of cost recovery but, as I said before, the Water Corporation has to recognise that the capital cost of those constructions were met by all taxpayers. The irrigators do not have to pay irrigation fees based upon an amelioration and discount rate for that construction. That construction cost can translate directly into recreational amenity. We do not put enough value on the social and lifestyle benefits that come from living in those country areas where these facilities could be available and are currently not available. So the truth, Jon, is I do not think that they would be subsidising them to the same extent because the equation is not being opened up into an objective debate.

Hon JON FORD: It is not the capital cost, Frank; it is the recurrent cost. The recurrent cost is what everybody pays on an ongoing basis.

Mr Stagles: If I might, Jon—the paper that we referenced in our submission by Rolfe and Prayaga from the University of Queensland, their analysis on the benefits related to what they term “total consumer surplus”; which an economist might understand, I confess I do not. As far as I understand, it is a sort of all-up figure; the total commercial benefit all added together. If they are looking at some of the dams, like Boondoon Dam, at \$3 million per year, that is a fairly good ongoing recurrent recoupment. I would tend to agree, depending on the water body. If it was a large water body and there is a large capital cost, I would look to the beneficiaries who end up accessing that, whether it be recreational fishers, hikers, waterskiers, sailors or whatever. To get them to meet all of that cost would obviously be unrealistic in the short term. The point that Frank has made repeatedly is there is this community good. I know these days in government you look very closely at costs, but I believe there is a community good there that can be translated into some dollar value down the track.

Hon JON FORD: In Queensland, we spoke to Queensland’s department of sport and recreation and they do calculate a community benefit for recreation in general but, interestingly enough, they do not bear any of the cost. Whilst they will say, “This is fantastic —

Mr Stagles: It is very easy to be enthusiastic when you are not paying!

Hon JON FORD: That is exactly right. The water department said to us, “The department of recreation suggested all these activities and we end up bearing all the cost there of that nominal agency interaction.” Anyway, that was a good response. Whatever we come up with as recommendations, we have to put together the argument and say why we have come to the conclusions that we have. It is not good enough just to say we have all borne the capital cost. We have to explain to people, if we were to recommend access to these water bodies, why mum and dad over there who might go marroning once in their lifetime have to pay. I would like to fish every day but the reality is I fish about four days a year. That is a reality for me. In fact in your submission here, Frank, you talked about most mums and dads are like me and are hopeless at fishing. That is a

reality. You might say that there are 40 000 or 50 000 people accessing it, but for most of them their idea of fishing is to chuck a line in, sometimes without any bait on it, and wonder why they cannot catch any! We do have to justify all these costs. That is the sort of argument we have to consider. It is not an attack; we have to be balanced in whatever we recommend.

[10.45 am]

The CHAIRMAN: I will add to that: I love fishing too, but one of the great advantages of going fishing is actually not catching fish. It is about being on the water and enjoying where you are.

Hon JON FORD: Is there a disagreement with that?

Mr Stagles: There is.

The CHAIRMAN: There is a huge variation.

Mr Stagles: Absolutely.

The CHAIRMAN: I have heard you speak often, but I am not sure whether we have met before. There are people who are passionate about fishing and on a daily basis they catch a feed. On the other hand, there are others, like Jon and me, who are delighted just to be there to fish, let alone catch a fish.

Mr Prokop: I like to get there too, Mr Chairman. The public good argument extends also to, if we were to apply the same rule, we would never have a cricket oval, we would never have an Australian Rules field, and we never have the arts, because all those things are a net cost to somebody in order to provide that service. If we are serious about addressing childhood obesity—as serious as I know we are about having family values, because fishing is an activity that fits that, as does many of the recreation activities that are available—then we should also be looking at having some of that greater-good component. One of the reasons that people go fishing is because it is relaxing. We do have opportunities. Again, could I stress that Recfishwest is not saying that it wants Mundaring and the core Perth water supply dams treated the same. Primarily, we are looking at Sampson, Stirling, Harvey and others.

The CHAIRMAN: I come to my final question. In your submission you go through quite a few Western Australian locations. After you leave today I wonder whether you would give some consideration to the areas that you think would be a debatable process and come back to us with your answer. If you are saying that you do not really have an eye on Mundaring, for example, what do you have an eye on? If we are to get into that debate, that is one of the areas that we need to look at.

Mr Prokop: I believe that we could answer that now, but we do not have the time.

The CHAIRMAN: A lot of people want to talk to us and we may have to repeat this process in the future. There is no point in running these programs forever. We will give people as much access as is possible to us. However, we will look at the broad spectrum, as Jon and other members have pointed out.

Hon ED DERMER: I am aware that evidence exists to suggest that the quantum of bodily contact with water relates to the risk of the transmission of human pathogens into the water. I am very impressed by the enthusiasm of your advocacy. However, for me, that would result in a very large number of extra people being involved in the activity and that would appear to increase the risk.

Mr Stagles: I will respond to that question. Is there some logic in suggesting, therefore, that if one person covered in *E. coli* has a plunge illegally and irresponsibly in a water supply dam—to pick up from the point I made earlier, Jon—that the level of processing will not be adequate to deal with that?

The CHAIRMAN: In the Mundaring circumstance the answer is, yes, the level is not adequate.

Mr Stagles: So are we not taking a risk anyway?

Hon ED DERMER: There is a quantum character to the risk, but how much E. coli any one person might transmit may vary from one person to another. If we are going from a small number to a large number, logically, and you have to go a long way to satisfy us that this is not the case, you will be increasing the level of risk. When I hear the suggestions being made with the very creditable enthusiasm that you, as a group, have for increasing the number of people involved in the activity, it does not provide me with confidence.

Mr Prokop: Firstly, recreational fishing does not necessarily have to be a primary contact sport; for example, they are either in boats on the shore. Secondly, when you look at the history—for example, Harvey Dam is a particularly good case and it had open recreational access from the day it was constructed to the time that it was, basically, taken off line with no impact on public health. So while I understand the logic of your argument, history shows that the risk is still in the order of 10 to –25 to 10 to –30. It is an extraordinarily small risk, even with larger levels of E. coli. There are other activities that are not managed, such as logging activities within the catchment, that also provide risk. Ian's point is that the risk of one E. coli versus a million E. coli is almost identical in a statistical sense. We have to be managing for the one E. coli. Mr Chairman, if you are saying that our current measures are inadequate—we have said this to the Water Corporation for the past 15 years—then we need to educate the public about what is required. If you take a step back and look at what our catchments will look like in 20 years, when Perth's population increases dramatically, the sole use of exclusion zones within the catchments will not be possible through the mere weight of human activities, not the least of which are the flight paths and other things that go right over the top of those dams. What we are saying is: take a broader picture; view this as an opportunity to educate the community. Trying to pin it all on recreational fishing, bushwalking or whatever is not now the most responsible way to go forward. We must look then at what is possible in terms of overall economic benefits and community dividends.

Hon ED DERMER: Your understanding of quantitative microbiology is very different to mine. The opportunity exists for you to provide further evidence to backup the statistical claims that you have made in the past five minutes.

The CHAIRMAN: We do need to conclude. It does not mean that we will not have further contact with you—we may or may not. This a substantial public debate. Our responsibility is, as you just outlined, to look at the broader spectrum of the debate, which we will do. We will take as much time as we need to do that.

Thank you for your time. The one request I make of you is that you look at what you would consider to be some sort of management list. That might be of some use to us.

Mr Prokop: We would be happy to do that. Thank you for your time. We are available, formally or informally, at the committee's pleasure.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you for the quality of your submissions as well.

Hearing concluded at 10.51 am