

Ms Cassandra Stephenson (Committee Clerk)
Public Administration Committee
Legislative Council
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Ms Stephenson

Recreation Activities within Public Drinking Water Source Areas

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry into Recreation Activities within Public Drinking Water Source Areas.

Recfishwest is the peak body representing the interests of the estimated 645,000 recreational fishers in Western Australia. We are formally recognised and funded by the Government in that role. Recfishwest places the highest priority on preserving the future of recreational fishing and the resources it depends on in Western Australia.

Recfishwest welcomes the opportunity for an objective and transparent review of such an important issue. Recfishwest has consistently advocated in many forums for continued or improved fishing access to water storage dams. We have been continually frustrated by inconsistencies in the approach of the Water Corporation in particular to insisting that the community apply an acceptable risk strategy to water and waste management that is delivered to them, but a no risk policy when it applies to drinking water protection.

Even within the catchments there are numerous inconsistencies; with Alcoa transporting minerals over a drinking supply dam and allowing logging activities without the provision of toilet facilities within the catchment while prohibiting any community benefits from the taxpayer subsidized infrastructure.

Recfishwest is accordingly opposed to arbitrary and unsubstantiated cases for the restriction of recreational fishing access.

Terms of Reference

(1) The social, economic and environmental values and costs of recreation access, where possible, to Perth hills and south west drinking water catchments, including the costs and benefits to public health, water quality, recreation, Indigenous culture and management options.

Recfishwest strongly supports improved access to Public Drinking Water Source Areas (PDWSAs) within the Perth hills and South-west for the purpose of recreation. Recfishwest believes that water storages (i.e. manmade lakes resulting from the construction of dams) and associated rivers and tributaries within these catchments collectively provide significant opportunities for recreational activities based on, or around, water. The demand for water based recreation in the South-west region of W.A. is currently high and is likely to further increase with a growing population.

Recfishwest is concerned that many water based recreation opportunities in the South West of WA are becoming increasingly limited as freshwater dams are progressively closed to recreational fishing and brought on-line as drinking water sources. We are disappointed that the coexistence of recreational fishing (with negotiated restrictions) has been actively discriminated against as a policy despite numerous social, economic and environmental benefits.

The recreation value of water cannot be underestimated. In country areas especially, where other recreation opportunities are limited compared to metropolitan areas, recreational access is highly valued.

For example, Marron are one of the world's largest freshwater crustaceans which are endemic to the State's southwest and the recreational marron fishery holds a unique cultural value to generations of Western Australians. At present, water storages such as Waroona, Harvey, Wellington and Logue Brook Dams are an extremely important component of the recreational marron fishery (especially to family groups). Recently recreational fishing access has been closed in Samson Brook and in Stirling Dam. Access would have been also closed in Logue Brook if not for a community outcry.

Recently, the Water Corporation has, without consultation or reference to pre-existing use (as clearly required in the drinking source protection protocol) attempted to close off public access to Lefroy Brook between Big Brook Dam and the weir upstream of the Pemberton trout hatchery.

Over 20,000 recreational licences are issued annually, enabling fishers to fish for marron and freshwater finfish in these waters. The government's own Recreational Freshwater Fisheries stakeholder Sub-Committee (RFFSS) of the statutory Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee (RFAC) recently released a discussion paper containing a draft management strategy aimed at ensuring a quality future for the recreational marron fishery. This discussion paper highlights the impact that the loss of access to drinking water dams has had on the recreational marron fishery and concludes that the continued closure of PDWSAs seriously threatens the future of this historic and unique pastime.

Social benefits of recreational access to PDWSAs include greater opportunities for family interaction, increased opportunities for physical activities and improved cultural identity. Increased access to PDWSAs will also provide environmental benefits such as reduced pressure and crowding on natural waterways and improved community awareness of and greater support for water conservation initiatives. Furthermore, carefully managed aquatic based tourism associated with improved access to PDWSAs could potentially generate massive income streams for frequently struggling regional areas.

It has also been demonstrated, in places like Googong Dam, that the presence of responsible recreational fishers acts as a deterrent to undesirable behaviour and activities that are known to occur in catchments where recreational fishing is not permitted.

(2) State, interstate and international legislation, policy and practice for recreation within public drinking water source areas, including information relating to population health benefits and impacts.

In Western Australia the Department of Water creates Drinking Water Source Protection Plans (DWSPP) to ensure catchment protection and the provision of a safe drinking water supply. While some of these plans strictly control access and recreation activities within some PDWSA, others, particularly those developed to be compatible with existing land and recreational uses, do not. Although all water source protection plans are developed to ensure the provision of safe drinking water, many are contradictory and inconsistent due to proclamation under different legislation. **By-laws of the *Metropolitan Water Supply, Sewerage and Drainage Act 1909* explicitly prohibit any attempt to catch fish or marron within a catchment area, whilst the *Country Areas Water Supply Act 1947* refers to the *Health Act 1911* in an attempt to minimise risks to public health.**

For example, the Brunswick Catchment Area Water Source Protection Plan developed to protect the Brunswick Junction Regional Water Supply (Beela Dam), which serves the towns of Brunswick Junction, Burekup and Roelands states that:

“Current activities that involve only minimal body contact with the water (such as fishing) pose a lesser risk to water quality. These activities are considered acceptable to continue in the catchment, with management conditions.”

Recfishwest considers that this position is reasonable, responsible and defensible from a management perspective. We would be pleased to work with proponents to develop future management plans that allow controlled and low impact recreational fishing and marroning.

A further example of inconsistent management of a PDWSA can be seen in Pemberton where the town water supply is sourced from Lefroy Brook Weir (a pipehead dam on Lefroy Brook), which is recharged from Big Brook Dam, a storage reservoir upstream. Fishing and marroning are actively promoted at Big Brook Dam (four fishing platforms are provided). In fact fishing in the Lefroy Brook Weir reservoir and feeder streams for redfin perch occurs year round, while trout and marron fishing is restricted to seasons (typically 8-9 months and 2-5 weeks per year respectively).

Despite this, the drinking water supplied to Pemberton is deemed good quality and complies with Australian Drinking Water Guidelines (ADWG) microbiological, health and aesthetic requirements. The raw water is treated by flocculation, clarification and filtration followed by chlorination.

Recfishwest welcomes any inquiry into the double-standards which abound within the management of water resources in W.A. The opportunity for many water based recreation opportunities in the South West of the state is becoming increasingly limited. Recreational access at Samson Brook reservoir has recently been prohibited on the basis that it poses an unacceptable risk to water quality. Yet, incredibly, Alcoa is allowed to drive their mining trucks and transport crushed bauxite across Samson Brook Dam and as well as mine within the Samson Brook Catchment Area (Appendix 1).

This company was recently found guilty of environmental breaches yet continues to work over the top (i.e. a purpose built causeway) of a drinking water supply that is considered too sensitive to allow even day time fly fishing activities. Similarly, timber production, including the harvest of pine plantations, is considered to be *“compatible with conditions in Priority 1 source protection*

areas” within drinking water catchments. In contrast, bushwalking, picnicking, fishing and orienteering are deemed to “*represent significant risks to water quality*”. The hypocrisy is difficult to comprehend or explain to any impartial observer.

The Department of Environment’s state-wide policy No. 13 ‘*Policy and Guidelines of Recreation within Public Drinking Water Source Areas on Crown Land*’ stipulates that recreational fishing may be allowed in these areas if the activity has been approved historically and the risk to the resource is accepted following community consultation (Table 2. Compatibility of water based recreational activities). It is important that this option is considered in order to alleviate the disenfranchisement that freshwater fishers have over recent years through progressively closures of recreational areas such as Samson, Harris and Stirling Dams and the Harvey River upstream of Stirling Dam.

Managed recreational activities including fishing already co-exist in many drinking water supply dams across Australia, totaling approximately 119,000ha in NSW and Queensland alone (Appendix 2). Over the last 100 years we have learnt much about risks and how to deal with them. Mixed use catchment should now be viable because of this. For example, Southeast Queensland Water, supplying Brisbane, allows for land and water based recreational use on all of their dams though power boats are not permitted on some. Water from the dams is fully treated prior to supply.

Recfishwest strongly advocates a range of management options for drinking water supply dams. This may include daytime access only, use of electric or non-powered craft, a closed period to allow the dam to ‘settle’ prior to coming on-line, or open access for all craft. Recfishwest believes that empowering groups like bushwalkers and recreational fishers to ensure that there are not significant environmental impacts from their activities will promote a sense of stewardship and will ensure that people take responsibility for the actions of the wider community as access can be temporarily or (in extreme and ongoing cases against objective performance criteria) permanently taken away.

The access allowed on Harvey Dam is an example of a negotiated outcome, but it is important to point out that the Water Corporation clearly reneged on an agreement to manage the timber in the dam and required public and political pressure to be brought to bear before a reasonable compromise would be considered.

(3) The range of community views on the value of water and recreation in public drinking water source areas.

There was comprehensive public consultation on the proposal to close public access to Logue Brook Dam. There was originally an agreement that the views of the stakeholder forum would form the basis of the access decision. When the access forum voted strongly in favour of controlled continued access (in spite of the numerous presentations from the anti-access government groups), a supposedly independent consultant reported that the views of the group should be dismissed as they were biased and unrepresentative. Instead a random sample of people were asked leading questions inferring that their health would be put at risk if recreation were allowed at Logue Brook and the resultant predictable favourable result was used to ban all access. This was ultimately overturned by Minister’s who asked what the real risk was compared to the inevitable catastrophic risk that was projected by those who had a vested interest in keeping access closed.

Allowing direct access to drinking water dams will increase public awareness of water conservation issues as dam levels are likely to be subjected to more public scrutiny.

The community has not been able to get objective assessments of the real risk associated with well managed recreational access. Historical, third world or unique circumstances are portrayed as typical or inevitable. The community is not told whether in fact the risks are statistically identical with or without public access. Indeed, the Sydney *giardia* scare, which is often used as an excuse for ongoing, primitive and exclusion based management, was found to have been caused by wild dogs and was totally unrelated to human activities.

This review has an obligation to assess the risk of public benefit from controlled recreational access against the cost of exclusion strategies.

The water resources of this state are precious that are highly valued (and certainly by recreational fishers as fish do require water and good quality water) and is a community resource. The wider community has subsidized the construction of many of these massive dams (many of which have provided a privatized benefit to irrigators) and deserves the right to derive some benefit from them as part of a coordinated and diversified recreational strategy.

(4) The costs and benefits of alternative water quality management strategies and treatment for water catchments containing recreation.

Many locations have proven management strategies that allow for recreational activities such as fishing to co-exist in a public drinking water source area. Almost every jurisdiction in Australia allows recreational fishing in some or most drinking water supplies. In other parts of the nation, recreational fishing is permitted in public drinking water dams including Hinze Dam in Queensland (Gold Coast) and Googong Dam in Canberra. In these impoundments several strategies have been employed to minimise any adverse impact on water quality. The concept of ‘risk management’ rather than ‘risk avoidance’ in public drinking water source areas in Western Australia must be considered as a strategy.

Risk management could include some of the following measures for recreational activities;

- controlled access within public drinking water source areas;
- restricted access to licence holders only (sign in and sign out basis);
- public amenities and waste collection points below the dam;
- only allowing the use of naturally occurring baits or artificial lures;
- prohibiting the use of petrol powered vessels;
- measures supported by a comprehensive education program;
- ongoing water quality testing, and
- secondary or tertiary water treatment as a safeguard.

Recfishwest supports a balanced and graduated approach towards increased access to PDWSAs. We understand that in some instances strict management strategies will be needed to match specific catchment circumstances, however we believe that a fair and transparent risk assessment process to determine levels of access will led to beneficial management outcomes for the community. For example, access levels may range from the approval of fishing and water craft use such as at Harvey

Dam with launching ramps, down to very limited access such as shore based use of artificial lures only.

The Department of Environment state that the risk from recreational fishing is small, but that it is unacceptable. If the Department of Environment were truly concerned about the real risk of any form of contamination, they would be urging real water treatment responses as the risk with and without recreational fishing access is virtually identical (in the order of 1:10,000,000,000 without fishing versus 1.05:10,000,000,000 with this activity). In both cases the risk is small but the impact potentially extremely large. To ignore the wider risk puts all who use the public drinking water potentially at an almost identical (but unmanaged) risk.

Recfishwest requests that our recommendations for the parliamentary inquiry into Recreation Activities within Public Drinking Water Source Areas be given the credibility which our status as the peak body representing Western Australian recreational anglers warrants.

Please feel free to contact our office directly on 9246 3366 if you require any further clarification or information relating to this submission. As we are one of the largest user group impacted by the policy decisions under review, Recfishwest would appreciate the opportunity to appear before the committee to explain or elaborate our position.

Yours sincerely

Frank Prokop
Executive Director

17 November 2009

CC Kay Webber, Chair, Recreational Freshwater Fisheries Stakeholder Sub-Committee

Appendix 1

Crushed bauxite ore is transported to the Wagerup Alumina Refinery by conveyor through the Samson Brook Catchment Area. A causeway built for this conveyor belt and a mining haul road crosses the southern arm of the Samson Brook Dam.



Appendix 2

NSW WATER SUPPLY DAMS

| Dam | Water Supply | Nearest Town | Special Rules |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Beardy Waters Dam | Town Water Storage | Glen Innes | No boating permitted |
| Ben Chifley Dam | Town Water Storage | Bathurst | No boating restrictions |
| Burrendong Dam | Town Water Storage | Wellington/Mumbil | No boating restrictions |
| Captain's Flat Dam | Town Water | Queanbeyan | Unpowered boats only, canoes allowed |
| Cargelligo, Lake | Town Water Storage | Lake Cargelligo, Condobolin | No boating restrictions |
| Chaffey Dam | Water Supply | Tamworth | Speed restrictions |
| Clarrie Hall Dam | Town Water Storage | Murwillumbah | Unpowered boats only, canoes allowed |
| Copeton Dam | Town Water Storage | Inverell | No boating restrictions |
| Crookwell Dam | Water Supply | Crookwell | Unpowered boats only |
| Danjera Dam | Town Water Storage | Nowra | Unpowered boats only |
| Dry Dam | Town Water Supply | Adaminaby, Khancoban | No boating permitted |
| Dumaresq | Water Supply | Armidale | Powered boats limited to 5hp engines |
| Endeavour, Lake | Water Supply | Parkes | Unpowered boats only |
| Fitzroy Falls Reservoir | Water Supply | Moss Vale | Unpowered boats only |
| Flat Rock Creek Dam | Disused Town Water Supply | Nowra | Unpowered boats only |
| Glenbawn, Lake | Town Water Storage | Scone | No boating restrictions |
| Glennies Creek Dam (Lake St Clair) | Water Supply/Irrigation | Singleton | No boating restrictions |
| Googong Dam | Water Supply | Queanbeyan | Unpowered boats only |
| Gosling Creek | Disused Town Water | Orange | Canoes only |

| Reservoir | Storage/Recreation | | |
|------------------------|---|---------------------------------|---|
| Dam | Water Supply | Nearest Town | Special Rules |
| Grahamstown Dam | Town Water Supply | Raymond Terrace | Unpowered boats only |
| Hume Dam | Water Supply /Irrigation/power generation | Albury | No boating restrictions |
| Jerrara Dam | Disused Water Supply | Jamberoo | Canoes only allowed |
| Jindabyne, Lake | Water Storage | Jindabyne | No boating restrictions |
| Keepit Dam | Water Supply/Irrigation | Manilla | No boating restrictions |
| Manly Dam | Disused Water Supply | Sydney | Restricted boating access, canoes allowed |
| Mulwala, Lake | Water Supply/ Irrigation / Power generation | Mulwala/Yarrowongga | No boating restrictions |
| Oberon Dam | Water Supply | Oberon | No boating permitted |
| Parkes Recreation Lake | Disused mining water supply / recreation | Parkes | Boating & canoeing not permitted |
| Parramatta Lake | Former water supply | Sydney | Unpowered boats only, canoes allowed |
| Pejar Dam | Town Water Storage | Goulbourn | Unpowered boating only, canoes allowed |
| Pindari Dam | Town Water Storage / Irrigation | Inverell, Ashford | No boating restrictions |
| Rylstone Dam | Town Water Storage / Irrigation | Rylstone | Unpowered boating only, canoes allowed |
| Tallowa Dam | Water Supply | Kangaroo Valley township, Nowra | Unpowered boating only, canoes allowed |
| Three Mile Dam | Former Water Supply / Recreation | Adaminaby | No boating permitted |
| Windamere Dam | Town Water Supply / Irrigation | Mudgee | No boating restrictions |
| Wyangala Dam | Town Water Supply / Irrigation | Cowra | No boating restrictions |
| Yass Weir | Town Water Supply | Yass | No boating permitted |

QLD WATER SUPPLY DAMS

| Dam | Size (ha) | Water Supply | Nearest Town | Special Rules |
|-----------------------|------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|--|
| Awoonga Dam | | Industry/Town Water | Gladstone | Boating restricted to dam basin |
| Baralaba Dam | | Town Water | Baralaba | No restrictions |
| Baroon Pocket | | Town Water | Montville | Electric motors only on dinghies, not canoes |
| Beardmore Dam | | Irrigation/town supply | St George | No restrictions |
| Bedford Weir | | Industrial/town water/irrigation | Blackwater | No restrictions |
| Bowen River | | Town Water | Collinsville | No restrictions |
| Caboolture River Weir | | Town Water | Caboolture | Combustion engines prohibited |
| Charters Tower Weir | | Town Water | Charters Towers | No restrictions |
| Chinchilla Weir | | Irrigation/town water | Chinchilla | No restrictions |
| Connolly Dam | | Town Water | Warwick | Boating prohibited |
| Cooby Dam | | Town Water | Hampton | Combustion engines prohibited |
| Coolmunda Dam | | Irrigation/town water | Inglewood | No restrictions |
| Corella Dam | | Town Water | Cloncurry | No restrictions |
| Cressbrook Dam | | Town Water | Crows Nest | Speed limit 8 knots. |
| Ewen Maddock Dam | | Town Water | Mooloolah | No boating permitted |
| Fairbairn Dam | | Irrigation/town water/industry | Emerald | No restrictions |
| Fitzroy Barrage | | Irrigation/town water | Rockhampton | No restrictions |
| Glenlyon Dam | | Irrigation/town water | Texas | No restrictions |
| Goondiwindi Weir | | Irrigation/town water | Goondiwindi | No restrictions |
| Gordonbrook Dam | | Town Water | Kingaroy | Speed limit 4 knots combustion |
| Hinze Dam | | Town Water | Nerang | Combustion engines prohibited |

| | | | | |
|------------------|--|-----------------------|--------------|---|
| Kinchant Dam | | Irrigation/town water | Mackay | No restrictions |
| Lake Julius | | Town Water/Industry | Mt Isa | No restrictions |
| Lake Macdonald | | Town Water | Cooroy | Combustion engines prohibited |
| Lake Monduran | | Town Water/Irrigation | Gin Gin | No restrictions |
| Lenthalls Dam | | Town Water | Howard | Power craft limited to 6HP & 4 knots |
| Leslie Dam | | Irrigation/town water | Warwick | No restrictions |
| Miles Weir | | Town Water | Miles | Power boats less than 10HP permitted |
| Moondarra Dam | | Town Water/Industry | Mt Isa | No restrictions |
| Mount Morgan Dam | | Town water | Mount Morgan | Limit to 4HP |
| Moura Weir | | Water Supply | Moura | No restrictions |
| North Pine Dam | | Town Water | Petrie | Restricted number of manual or electric power boats. |
| Peter Faust Dam | | Irrigation/town water | Proserpine | No restrictions |
| Somerset Dam | | Town Water | Esk | No restrictions apply |
| Storm King Dam | | Irrigation/town water | Stanthorpe | No restrictions |
| Sura Weir | | Town Water | Surat | No restrictions |
| Teemburra Dam | | Irrigation/town water | Mackay | Powered craft limited to 25HP motors, skiing prohibited |
| Wivenhoe Dam | | Town Water | Fernvale | Combustion engines prohibited |