



[cstephenson@parliament.wa.gov.au](mailto:cstephenson@parliament.wa.gov.au)

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

**Submission to Legislative Council Standing Committee on Public Administration:  
Inquiry into Recreation Activities within Public Drinking Water Source Areas.**

The Urban Bushland Council WA Inc. is an association of community groups with a common interest in the conservation of bushland in the Perth Metropolitan Region and in or associated with other regional cities, centres and towns in WA. It is the peak group for urban bushland conservation in WA. Members are mostly Friends groups who promote and work to help manage and conserve their local areas of bushland. Other member groups have specialist and statewide interest and knowledge in flora and in fauna. The Council is involved with on ground work and education by initiating and managing projects such as the Perth Urban Bushland Fungi project and the City Bush Guides project. It provides networking opportunities for friends groups. The Council also is active in advocacy for improved protection and management of urban bushland reserves and other areas of significant bushland and their ecological linkages.

The Urban Bushland Council (UBC) is pleased to present the following submission to the inquiry into Recreation Activities within Public Drinking Water Source Areas.

**General comment**

The UBC is firmly opposed to the opening up of water supply catchments to recreation or to increased varieties of recreation. We believe that this is a matter of applying the principle of prevention and the precautionary principle and is the most cost effective and safest approach to management of potable water supplies. We therefore recommend that all catchments that are currently 'closed' to recreation remain closed to all forms of recreation.

Detailed comments follow.

**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.**

The environmental costs of recreation access to surface water catchments in Perth Hills are high and there are no environmental benefits. Access to closed catchments inevitably results in bushland degradation caused by disturbance and erosion from roads, tracks and paths; introduction and spread of weeds and the very serious disease Phytophthora dieback; and decline in water quality in streams and storages. There is also an increased risk of fire from accidental events such as an escaping campfire, from off road vehicles and accidents or from arson.

**Weeds**

Weeds may enter from seed caught in footwear, clothing, bags, vehicles, and especially from horse riding via horse dung. All new disturbance seems to encourage weed invasion which then becomes a management cost and often an increased fire risk from annual grassy weeds.

Weed invasion in bushland usually requires chemical control. Chemicals in a catchment are best avoided as there is a risk of contamination of runoff and streams especially in severe rain events. Chemical contamination of a reservoir for potable supply would be catastrophic as there is no advanced treatment plant in place to deal with this situation and the contaminated supply would have to be removed from public supply. Obviously this scenario should be avoided by prevention of entry of weeds.

### **Dieback**

Opening up hills catchments leads to the risk of dieback infection and invasion resulting in severe degradation of biodiversity and bushland health. DEC has many forest areas restricted to public entry to help control the spread of dieback. The risk of spread of dieback is alone reason for keeping hills catchments closed to recreation. We commend to the Committee the work and advice of the Dieback Working Group via the Chairman Dr Ian Colquhoun.

**We recommend strongly that catchments currently closed remain so because of the risk of the spread of dieback.**

### **Fire**

Increased access to potable supply catchments increases the risk of fire from accidental events (eg escape from campfire) and from arson. The UBC is concerned about the number of fires occurring on the Gngangara Mound P1 intake areas in pine plantations and bushland. This is a common site for dumping of stolen cars which are then set alight. Bushland areas adjacent are thus burnt too often and the cycle of degradation continues. The area is not patrolled adequately by rangers or police and the absence of fencing means access is uncontrolled.

Recreational access to hills catchments would introduce the same problems of increased fire risk.

### **Water quality and health risks**

Catchment disturbance leads to a decline in water quality especially in major rainfall events. Recreational access may require presence of toilets and there is always a risk of contamination with human faecal matter and pathogens.

### **Security**

Increased access to water supply catchments, reservoirs and associated infrastructure opens up the potential for access by terrorists who might plan to contaminate a public water supply. While this may be a highly unlikely event, it is a possibility and the consequences could be catastrophic. Avoidance of this risk by keeping access closed should be a priority.

## **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.**

We are familiar with the CRC for Water Quality and Treatment and their Research Reports no 24, and no 29 and presume the Committee is familiar with them. We commend to the Committee the contents of both reports.

We draw your attention to the guiding principles of the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines on page 12 of report no 24: *'Recreational Access to Drinking Water Catchments and Storages In Australia'* and commend them to you as directly applicable to your deliberations. They provide an excellent summary of the basis for our position that catchments for potable supply should not be opened up to any further recreational use.

Where ever there is increased human presence the risk of contamination by microbial pathogens of the water supply increases.

*'Prevention of contamination provides greater surety than removal of contaminants by treatment'  
'... Protection of water sources and treatment are of paramount importance and must never be compromised.'*

Report no 29 shows the effect of extreme weather events with sudden high runoff. Such events are likely to increase in frequency with climate change which implies that an even more precautionary and preventive approach should be taken in management of catchments for potable supply.

Representatives of the Urban Bushland Council would be pleased to make a presentation to the Committee when public hearings are held. We may be contacted through our office [ubc@iinet.net.au](mailto:ubc@iinet.net.au) or I may be contacted by phone 9271 5707.

Yours sincerely

C Mary Gray  
President