

Federation of Western Australian Bushwalkers Inc.

Presidents Report      Annual General Meeting 21 November 2006

The Club has a new member – Bunbury Adventure Pursuits Club Inc – admitted in February, and a new Club is proposed for membership tonight – Great Walk Networking Inc.

Mel Lintern, Carl Erbrich and I met Steven Watson from the newly formed Department of Water regarding Policy 13 and its restrictions on traditional bushwalking in catchment areas. The meeting concluded along the lines from Watson, “I acknowledge what you proposing adds a negligible additional risk to water quality, however it is an additional risk, and I am not in a position to agree to anything that adds risk, therefore I am unable to give you any concessions”. Faced with this stonewall we asked to see the Minister, John Kobelke. Our request has been acknowledged, but there has been no action.

In the meantime, the Department of Water is looking at the conversion of the Logue Brook Dam from ‘Irrigation’ to ‘Drinking’ water, with the consequent imposition of Policy 13. Mel and I attended a meeting arranged by the DSR aimed at getting all the affected interest groups to work together to come up with some system that would allow recreation to continue in the dam and its two kilometre zone. We found ourselves on the same side as canoeists, trail bike riders, mountain bikers, equestrians, farmers, power boaters, four wheel drivers, and a lot more. The canoeists and us concluded that we were better off with the conversion of the dam to drinking water but with a new management plan that allowed traditional bushwalking and canoeing). Jackie Furby, Edith Thomas, Eddy Schmid and I attended a large public meeting in Harvey to argue for continued bushwalker access to Logue Brook Dam. At the meeting I met with Mr Watson who agreed that two of the scientific papers that are used to justify the restriction on bushwalking in catchments have been misquoted. He said, “It looks like we have to revisit catchment management”. A report of that meeting has been published, but discounts the public’s opinions.

At a ‘meet the minister’ breakfast in July, I and others voiced our concerns about water authorities attitude to access to catchments. Mr Kobelke’s response missed the access issues.

In June I attended the first ever face to face meeting of State presidents and delegates of Bushwalking Australia Inc, held in Melbourne. Hecate Jay, of Perth Bushwalkers Club Inc, has agreed to take on the role of Secretary of Bushwalking Australia Inc. I received a grant of \$1000 from the DSR to attend the conference, but in response was asked to report on the organised bushwalkers’ attitude to the Adventure Activity Standards which have been promulgated in Victoria and have been mooted for publication in WA. I was able to report that we didn’t feel anything about them, because they were voluntary, and because they referred to groups with dependent walkers as in commercial groups, schools and the scouts and guides, rather than the skilled groups that were a function of bushwalking clubs. However it is worth noting that in the event of things going seriously wrong on a walk it is these standards that are likely to be quoted as a benchmark. I was also given \$300 by the Federation to assist with expenses, and I thank you all very much for that.

Federation members completed a questionnaire that showed they wanted the Federation to continue to negotiate with Government on matters affecting Clubs and bushwalking, and recognised the need for us to be represented at interstate meetings from time to time.

We have approached DEC about risk management in National Parks, who have commissioned Outdoors Western Australia to do a risk assessment survey in the Murchison Gorges. Outdoors Western Australia has approached me about getting our organisations closer together.

We had contact with the new Dieback Protection Unit, showed them our anti dieback policies, with the expectation they would recommend any changes they saw necessary.

We have made submissions on five different National Park management plans, and written an article published in the Bibbulmun Track News promoting walking on Class 5 and 6 routes.

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