

Federation of Western Australian Bushwalkers Inc.

Annual General Meeting Tuesday 20 November 2007

President's address

The Federation has spent the last 12 months consolidating its position. Membership stands at nine clubs and a collective membership of about 900 people.

I am delighted to hear that all the current office bearers are again standing for election, and thank both Steve and Jackie very much for the excellent work that they have done on your behalf.

The Federation's work has been concentrated in two main directions. Pushing access issues for bushwalking on drinking water catchments, and generally increasing the profile of the Federation.

As you know a very large part of the good bushwalking country near Perth lies on drinking water catchment areas. The Department of Water has published management policies that list traditional bushwalking as a non-acceptable activity in these regions, except on designated trails or camping areas. We continue to negotiate with the Minister's department to have the DoW's policies softened - on whatever basis we can use - and this is a moving feast; and we are seeking legal advice on the issue on a pro bono basis. We have a small subcommittee of board members and co-opted people, Mel Lintern, Dave Osborne, Carl Erbrich, John Lang, Hecate Jay, and me, who are doing most of the work. Margaret Mathews did an excellent job as secretary at one of our formal meetings.

As part of this work Mel Lintern successfully collected water quality data from the Water Corporation under Freedom of Information Laws.

I attended a Minister's breakfast at the Department of Sport and Recreation, where Minister Kobelke was given a very clear message about adverse effects the DoW policies were causing on forest users. In this we find ourselves with some interesting companions: canoeists, trail bike riders, mountain bike riders, horse riders, water skiers, fishermen, wheel chair sports people, four wheel drivers .....

The DSR and the DEC are prevailing on the DOW to soften their policies. We are helping wherever we can, and hopefully we will end up with a favourable outcome.

We have joined with a new community group set up to get a 'fair go' for recreation in catchments. It was organised by Mike Wood, Chairman of the Bibbulmun Track Foundation, and Managing Director of Mountain Designs; and it has the support of the DSR. The new group is chaired by Ron Colman, Chairman of the Munda Biddi Foundation.

This year we have been granted a seat on the State Trails Reference Panel. I think we are the only party pushing for recognition of Class 5 and 6 tracks, and I think that this probably why we have the position. So far, John Lang has represented us on this

panel, but pressure of work means that he must step down. I think this work is very important, and we cannot expect any rapid results, so I will replace John.

The Trails Reference Panel has won a grant to identify and market the State's 30 major trails, and I have accepted a place on the evaluation panel, whose role is to ensure that any nominated trail is worthy of being listed. The challenge is to get trails like the Stirling Range Ridge Walk. I have attended two meetings of this group and Hecate Jay has attended one meeting.

I have also accepted a position as a community representative on a State Trails Strategy Steering committee, no doubt because of my position on the Federation. Again the challenge will be to get class 5 and 6 tracks recognised in the strategy.

Tonight we will vote to confirm that we will build our own website. This website will increase our profile, certainly on the web, will allow us to interface with the National bushwalking body Bushwalking Australia Inc, and will allow us to record some of our favourite walks. One of the problems with these walks is that few of the land managers know where they are, so they close off areas that we use as trail heads and as secure parking areas without knowing of our interest. This has recently happened at Boulder Rock picnic area where several Club walks start.)

The World in which we walk continues to change. The threat of litigation caused us to take insurance and to look at managing risk. The insurers, with an eye to their own exposure have asked us to get involved in risk management. The land management authorities, recognising their own exposure, are moving to establish Adventure Activity Standards. These Standards are coming, whether we like it or not, and will not go away if we ignore them. The upside of the standards is that our Clubs will have useful set of standards against which their activities might be judged if something goes seriously wrong. It is important that when the time comes the Clubs get involved in writing a set of standards that enhance their activities rather than the reverse. The fee for doing nothing is a set of policies that make life more difficult for our leaders, and ultimately the possible death of Club walking as we know it. The Government has commissioned Outdoors Western Australia to develop these standards in WA, and we have been lumped in with all the other groups, including the professionals, hence the repeated reference to us as being part of an industry. We need to ensure that we are differentiated, and earlier this year we joined Outdoors WA as an associate member, to assist in this?

In February I was approached to support a group of people from the Western Suburbs who are building walk trails from the beach to Kings Park through areas of remnant bushland. These walks have excellent potential as sites for summer walks and should be encouraged. I duly wrote a letter of support.

IMD 080402