

Federation of Western Australian Bushwalkers Inc.
Annual General Meeting Tuesday 18 November 2008

President's Address

In the last 12 months membership of the nine member clubs of the Federation has remained steady at about 900.

I thank all the Club delegates, who make up the management council, and especially Steve and Jackie, very much for the work that they have done. I am glad to hear that they are again standing for election. I think that together we have all served our member Clubs well

The Federation has a number of roles. We of course have better insurance cover. We assist in sharing ideas between Clubs, to help us learn from each other. As a result we have better governance, better walks, and better risk management than we would perhaps otherwise have been the case.

In February our website was up and running, thanks to Hecate Jay who did much of the work as a love job some of the work on a 'mate's' rate commission. We are all now much more visible. Thanks also to Steve for his input. The website has a copy of our agreed documentation such as dieback procedures. It has a copy of our risk management policy. I suggest all of you who haven't seen it have a look and give us your feedback. It is supposed to be a living site.

There are also very important things we do that have an indirect outcome. We need to take control our own future.

We have engaged with the Department of Sport and Recreation, who have been very supportive of our difficulties with access issues. They are sharing personnel with the Department of Conservation, the managers of the land on which most of our walking takes place. They are paying much more attention to the "recreation" part of Sport and Recreation. I received a grant from DSR to attend the Tracks and Trails conference in Queensland which made a major contribution to my expenses. Hecate and I received a grant to attend last years face to face meeting of Bushwalking Australia Inc. We expect a grant to attend this years.

I attended the annual Minister's breakfast at the Department of Sport and Recreation, where Minister Kobelke listened to the recreation 'industry'. We made our views heard on access issues and 'walkability' of the environment.

We have a seat on the State Trails Reference Panel. We continue to champion the cause of Class 5 and 6 tracks, which often get neglected in planning. Originally John Lang attended the meetings, but due to pressure of his other commitments I have taken the position.

I attended meetings of the evaluation panel of a DSR sponsored programme to identify and market the State's major trails. The Stirling Ridge walk and the Bald

Head walk, as well as some circuits in the monadnocks were nominated. Risk management issues stopped any of the Class 5 and 6 trails making it onto the list, however all panel members are in no doubt of the need for more class 1 to 4 trails, and also of the existence of Class 5 and 6 tracks, and of the issue of catchment access.

As a community representative I attended several meetings of the State Trails Strategy Steering committee. The Federation made a submission (written by Dave Osborne) to the planning committee, for which I was widely complimented. I have not yet seen the final strategy, but expect it to firmly recognise the existence of Class 5 and 6 walks – of course in addition to all the other marked trails. I expect it also to raise and promote the concept of a walker's 'right to roam'.

We have a major issue with traditional bushwalking in drinking water catchments, which as you know contain a very large part of the good bushwalking country near Perth. The latest drinking water catchment management plans from the Department of Water exclude traditional bushwalking in catchments. I reported last year, that following our limited success with the DoW we had allied with the lobby group WARSTA, of which Mike Wood of the Bib Track Foundation and Mountain Designs is the highest profile representative. In WARSTA we have some new allies –mountain bikers, trail bike riders, canoeists, rock climbers, equestrians, tourism industry commercial operators, recreational anglers, etc, etc.....

In March this year I attended the 5th Tracks and Trails Conference at Mooloolabar on the Sunshine Coast, and made a presentation on our access difficulties, concentrating on the Department of Water, but mentioning other issues such as fire, removal of trail heads and the possible imposition of draconian Adventure Activity Standards. This presentation was widely circulated in Western Australia.

In April, likely as a result of pressure by WARSTA, perhaps as a result of my presentation, and perhaps as a result of pressure from the Department of Sport and Recreation, Mel Lintern and I met Minister Kobelke, then Minister for Water. We were successful in capturing his empathy and within weeks we had meetings with senior DoW personnel, resulting in a letter giving us the right to bushwalk anywhere in catchments outside Reservoir Protection Zones. We were led to believe that we would shortly receive authorisation for overnight stays anywhere in catchments, again outside RPZs, but unfortunately that has not arrived, and we understand that DoW decided to consider the matter in the rewrite of the Statewide Policy 13.

Statewide Policy 13 provides the philosophical authority for the drinking water catchment management plans. The review of the Policy was originally scheduled for 2009, but for reasons we can only speculate on was bought forward to this year. Mel Lintern, Bob Chard and I attended preliminary meetings on the issue, however, with the calling of the last election all work stopped.

On October 24 Mel and I met with the new Minister (Dr Jacobs) and offered, in return for the right to do overnight stays and for rational RPZs, to be the eyes and ears for the DoW in catchments where their staff cannot go. We are awaiting the Minister's ruling.

Following continuing concern with our representation on the Conservation Council we were successful in appointing Mr Don Allanach, a long term member of Perth Bushwalkers Club Inc, to regularly attend Conservation Council meetings and to promote the bushwalkers interests.

The anticipated Adventure Activity Standards eventuated, driven by Outdoors Western Australia. A number of people from this council attended the development meetings and were successful in ensuring that the Standards are a help to our activities rather than a hindrance, and that by and large our activities can continue as before.

We joined Outdoors Western Australia, in April, to promote bushwalking, three of our member clubs (Western Walkers Club Inc, Perth Bushwalkers Club inc and Bushwalkers of Western Australia Inc) took part in “Av a go Day” with Outdoors Western Australia. We laid the foundations for a bigger and better result next year, and earned \$1000 for the Federation.

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.

Jackie Furby coordinated Federation response to a plan by Western Power to build a switchyard in Hacketts Gully in Kalamunda, which would have removed some hectares from public access, despite alternative sites being available outside catchments and outside bushland. The Federation responded to the Kalamunda Shire’s Trails Mater Plan, and also voiced its concern to the proposed switchyard. The latest advice is the Western Power is reconsidering the plan.

Jackie has also been the insurance convenor for the Federation, a role she does not wish to continue with next year. This evening you will be asked to elect a Insurance Convenor as a coopted member of the council.

Just as we Western Australian bushwalking clubs are learning from each other, our exposure to the other state bushwalking club federations through Bushwalking Australia Inc has allowed much inspiration. We get a direct benefit from our membership of Bushwalking Australia in that through them the insurance cover we all enjoy is purchased for Australia’s 195 clubs and 21,000 bushwalkers as a block. Many of you will know that Hecate Jay is the Secretary of Bushwalking Australia Inc, and I am the President. The experience has been invaluable for the two of us, and for this Federation.

Unfortunately, despite us being very frugal, all this activity cost money. Our income is from your subscriptions, from Government grants, from service fees from organisations like Outdoors Western Australia, and very often from the pockets of the people doing the work. We have recognised that we need sponsorship, and Mel Lintern has had preliminary discussions with potential sponsors. This programme will continue next year.

In thank you for the opportunity of being your President. I have enjoyed the good fight, as I hope have the council members who have been involved in it. There's much more to do yet.

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