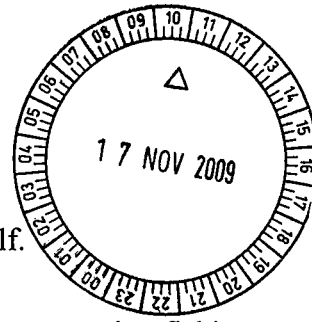


To whom it may concern,

**PUBLIC**



As part of my submission allow me firstly to introduce myself.

I am the editor and part-owner of *Western Angler*, WA's longest running fishing magazine, about to enter its 25<sup>th</sup> year.

I am also the fishing columnist for *The Sunday Times*, having previously worked as a journalist for *The Australian* and Australian Associated Press.

We at *Western Angler* take a very serious view of our responsibility to stay involved and informed in management debates, believing it is important recreational fishing has a genuine voice in the media.

As part of that duty, we dedicate large chunks of our time to involve ourselves in management issues that affect the recreational fishing community and this parliamentary review committee considering greater recreation access to dams, water courses and catchment areas that provide drinking water for West Australians is certainly one of those.

Obviously, my interest in this discussion is from a recreational angling viewpoint and I personally am also a very keen freshwater fisherman, and have been for more than 20 years.

I applaud Minister Graham Jacobs for having the foresight to put the issue of recreational use of water supply dams back on the table.

For too long, those that control water supply in this state have operated with an exclusion mentality and treated water supply dams as something like their personal kingdoms, with almost ludicrous restrictions on access for all but a fortunate few.

Strangely, it seems most people outside those in charge at Water Corp can see the benefits of dual-use of water supply dams in WA.

No one questions the importance of clean drinking water, but let's not forget the water is treated to remove pathogens before entering the piping system.

It seems the concept of maximising the public value of these resources (of which recreational fishing is just one part) hasn't entered the equation – which staggers me in this enlightened age.

Meanwhile, elsewhere around the world the dual-use of water supply dams continues unabated, and without the devastating impacts on world health some in WA would have us facing.

Last year I travelled to New Zealand and fished in several water supply dams, and you only need to use Google to discover how many water supply dams on the east coast can be used for recreational purposes, including fishing.

In fact, Recfishwest's submission on the proposed Logue Brook Dam closure, identified over 119,000 hectares of water which was available (or had been until recently) for domestic water supply that was also allowed to be fished in NSW and Queensland alone.

In many cases on the east coast, free permits are issued to anglers, or even angling clubs, by local authorities to allow them access and limitations include bans on boating, wading and fishing from structures.

And this dual-use scenario is repeated all around the world without major incident.

Earlier this year, a Curtin University study commissioned by the Department of Conservation strongly recommended that controlled recreational use of water supply be considered in WA.

It said: "A blanket ban of all recreation does not recognise the potential for low risk activity and runs counter to international good practice and an integrated approach to total catchment management."

Pretty straightforward, I would have thought.

I believe the economic and social value of recreational fishing has been grossly understated in WA for far too long.

Just last weekend, four of us spent more than \$1500 on a weekend in Pemberton, and for our money kept just three redfin perch.

None of that money was spent on fishing gear, rather it went over the counter at the service station, pub, accommodation, bakery and local cafe, but we wouldn't have been there were it not for the fishing.

A sustainable tourism resource where the economic return per unit extracted is so high must be a massive boon to local economies if managed effectively.

Yet we have gone the other way in WA, preferring to slowly strangle freshwater fishing opportunities.

Some of our water supply dams have boasted good stocks of trout many years and would offer first-class angling opportunities, but we've always come up against an exclusion mentality access, apparently because of the dire danger to water quality of angler access, despite the other activities that already go on in water catchments.

To make matters worse, important trout fishing locations like Stirling and Samson dams and the Harvey River upstream of Stirling Dam have been lost to new restrictions on access to "protect" water quality.

And, if my trip to Pemberton last week was any indication, we can add the Lefroy Brook upstream of the town weir – WA's best trout fishing location – to the list.

To get an idea of where WA anglers are sitting on all this, we recently ran an online survey on our website, [www.westernangler.com.au](http://www.westernangler.com.au), asking people about the freshwater fishing scene in WA.

Not surprisingly, almost 100 per cent of respondents favoured access to water supply dams, and 75 per cent said they would be willing to pay for the privilege – these funds could be used for management and infrastructure.

What was interesting was that 82 per cent said they would do less saltwater fishing if there were better freshwater fishing opportunities.

At a time where we are looking at ways to reduce offshore fishing pressure, surely this is an ideal way to do so, some may even say a no-brainer.

We have a golden opportunity now to create more freshwater opportunities and take pressure off other fisheries.

That has certainly been the case in Queensland, where there has been a massive shift in recreational effort from pressured saltwater stocks to sustainable stocks of big barramundi in several impoundments.

These impoundments have become an attraction to people from all over Australia and are generating millions of dollars in fishing-related tourism each year for the local economies.

I would expect there would need to be controls in place in water supply dams to ensure water quality is maintained.

They could be some of the restrictions I have already mentioned as being in use on the east coast and could also include: no boating access (or at the very least no motorised vessels); access to the impoundments only by foot from a specific carpark; a sign-in, sign-out system; artificial lures only; an entrance fee with the capability to fine anyone who breaches guidelines.

But clearly it can be done, as it is elsewhere in the world, and the benefits could be massive.

It should also be said that, in general, I have found freshwater anglers as a whole to be at the higher end of the scale when it comes to caring for their natural environment, so I think you can expect a large degree of compliance with any guidelines put in place.

This assessment has also been backed up by experiences at Googong Dam, in the ACT, which is used for water supply and recreational use.

Rubbish bins are not provided at Googong and people are expected to take their rubbish with them, and unlike in most scenarios at various popular public locations, they invariably do so.

In closing, I think this a great opportunity to show some foresight and make a change from “risk avoidance” to “risk management” that will have wonderful long-term benefits for everyone in WA, including recreational anglers.

It is to be hoped we can finally get past the current bizarre “one size fits all” approach when it comes to water supply management in this state.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into this review.

Regards,

Scott Coghlan (editor – *Western Angler* magazine)