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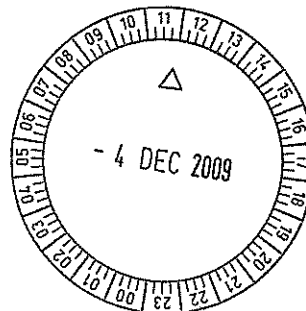
Sub 176



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Swan Canoe Club (Inc.)

PO Box 99
Cottesloe WA 6011
President: Rebekah Manley
Tel:



Attention: Cassandra Stephenson
Committee Clerk
Parliament House
West Perth WA 6005

RE: Inquiry Name: Recreation Activities within Public Drinking Water Source Areas

To the Hons Max Trenorden MLC; Jon Ford MLC; Ken Baston MLC; Jim Chown MLC; Ed Dermer MLC:

Dear Sirs

This is a submission by the Swan Canoe Club (SCC) for the Standing Committee on Public Administration, for the Inquiry 'Recreation Activities within Public Drinking Water Source Areas' (the Inquiry).

SCC members have been, for the past decade, increasingly disappointed about the gradual reduction of access to wild water for recreational paddling, and concerned about the impacts of 'Policy 13'. The SCC hold strong hopes that Policy 13 will be replaced by one that addresses the concerns held by both recreational and competitive kayakers and canoeists. These concerns are outlined below.

Background

Swan Canoe Club is Western Australia's oldest canoe club, and one of Australia's largest. Formed in 1966, SCC currently has almost 500 members, including 85 junior paddlers. The club is affiliated with peak bodies Australian Canoeing (AC) and Canoeing WA (CWA).

SCC members partake in social and competitive paddling activities across the range of kayaking/canoeing disciplines: canoe polo, slalom, whitewater, downriver, sprint, marathon and sea-kayaking. SCC hosts training and racing events, social paddles, and paddling trips to regional locations. We also provide a range of accredited courses for beginners and advanced paddlers. Two evenings per week are devoted to junior training programs on the Swan River adjacent to the clubrooms; the club is extremely committed to our juniors' program: it fosters participation in an activity that is enjoyed by many school-age children, and provides a healthy peer-group environment.

Paddling is an activity highly regarded for both its physical and mental health benefits, and for being enjoyed by a broad spectrum of ages within the community. It is a low-impact, low-cost, family-friendly and inclusive activity. Participation within the general community is increasing; SCC consistently has 10-30 people each month (with seasonal variation) attending information sessions about kayaking and the Club.

One of the excellent aspects of paddling is its scope and flexibility. Participants can be as competitive or as leisurely about their participation as they choose. Paddling can be individualist, or involve teams (canoe polo, for example). Many SCC members train for events such as white water slalom and sprint (both Olympic sports), marathon and wild-water racing – including the internationally renowned Avon Descent. SCC members also participate in regional events such as the Blackwood, Collie and Donnybrook Relay Marathons and the Caffeinated and Great Southern Adventure Races held on the Blackwood and Collie rivers, Glen Mervyn dam, and Blackwood, Kalgan and Denmark Rivers respectively. Participation in these events provide interest and support for local economies.

Some SCC members compete at State and national championships, and several have represented Australia at the Olympics and World Championship events – including Australia’s world slalom champion Robin Bell, a Beijing Olympic medallist.

SCC values its role in fostering community wellbeing, by providing recreational and social networking opportunities for young and old. The majority of SCC members are social paddlers seeking pleasant, low-key outdoor physical activities; many participate in the club’s organised recreational paddle trips to regional waterways. Numerous members have taken up canoeing upon retiring from work, because it is a low-impact activity they can enjoy well into older age. New and lasting friendships, across all age groups, form at the club; these are typically fostered by group paddling activities on, or organised trips to, the Swan, Canning, Avon, Murray, Serpentine, Collie, Blackwood, Denmark and Margaret Rivers.

Information pertaining to the Inquiry and the Department of Water’s Policy 13 (WRC, 2003)

- 1. Regarding the ‘social, economic and environmental values and costs of recreation access 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’:**

Benefits of enabling/reinstating access to water catchments for kayakers and canoeists are the significant health, social, and even economic benefits to the community.

SCC believes the cost of maintaining unreasonable restrictions, and/or instigating new restrictions for recreational access to waterways, will be reduced participation. It will impact on competitive kayakers, social paddle groups, and families, who will have their options for spending quality recreational time together further reduced.

We point out that paddlers are, by nature, environmentally respectful; we take great pride in our conservation values and environmental consciousness. Paddlers have a clear interest in protecting the recreational and environmental values – including water quality – of the waterways we use, including those that will be affected by the current draft Drinking Water Source Protection Plans. We treasure the Western Australian landscape, and abhor pollution on our waterways and in our camping grounds.

SCC recognises that potable water is a community asset, and empathises with those concerns about water quality. However, we assert that natural water courses and catchment areas are also fundamental community assets, as recreational resources. We are convinced that a balance is

attainable, whereby recreational access to waterways co-exists with efficient water monitoring/treatment.

SCC would propose seasonal access for many of the waterways we wish to access, as there are many rivers that are utilised by paddlers only after winter rains. Moreover, at these times, the water level is high and fast-flowing, and the rapid dilution of inadvertent contaminants would prevent water quality being compromised. We therefore propose that management plans for such waterways take into account that winter access is reasonable and summer access can be restricted in order to safeguard water quality.

SCC vehemently opposes the blanket exclusion of access to outer catchment areas. To reach paddleable rivers, kayakers must often use access roads at the beginning and at the end of the paddle distance. This will be problematic if the roads are within catchment areas, or on private land, and access is prohibited. We would like the State Government to identify and establish pragmatic and flexible ways of balancing the needs of various stakeholders.

Health promotion strategies aim to address the decline in the level of physical activity among Western Australians, and encourage participation in physical activities and enjoy our outdoor environments. We submit that many WA policies are over-protectionist, and unnecessarily decrease access to kayaking opportunities across large areas of the Darling Plateau and other water catchments.

SCC has been collating feedback and comments from members for inclusion in SCC's submission to the enquiry;

SCC member Martin Crompton, BSc (Eng) ACGI ex MI MECH.E, MIMC, "sailor, bushwalker, late-entrant white water kayaker", sums up the sentiments of many SCC members:

The water treatment costs of access for kayaking in drinking water catchments would be negligible. Public access in total has not caused water quality problems at source; they have all arisen 'downstream' in swimming pools, fountains, spas, bad plumbing, etc. This includes the 'Sydney water scare' of a few years ago. There seems to be a false choice emerging - "don't allow access OR fully treat the water". There is no evidence validating this. Kayakers are very environmentally responsible, as witnessed by the pristine state of the Avon River, which must get 5000-6000 trips each year connected to the Avon Descent alone. (Entrants paddle the river repeatedly to learn the rapids and to gain fitness, as well as training elsewhere.) The sport is controlled through AC, and club trips must have qualified leaders, whose training includes environmental care. As the kayak culture is extremely environmentally conscious, they seldom need to pass this on to new members, (one kayaker once disposed of a banana skin in a NP, on the basis that "it would quickly rot". The group made him recover it, because the rule is-" take out everything".

Kayaking in WA is already restricted by limited access, few rivers and seasonal flows. Greater access would increase the following social, economic and environmental values:

- social life for the steady flow of new people trying the sport
- social aspects of all the group activities
- income for country towns en route
- introduction of a succession of children (and their parents) to kayaking, based partly on white-water slalom. Not all stay with the sport, but they all develop confidence and social skills, an interest in nature, and alternatives to 'hanging out' in Northbridge, for example

- more Olympic and world-class competitors from WA, to follow Robin Bell (the first Australian to win World slalom Gold medal) and several others.

Within Australia, recreational use of catchments is widespread, but varies with circumstances. While water authorities may pursue 'zero risk to water catchments via zero access', the main catchment threats are from farming, mining, and wildlife – including ferals – and the cost of preventing all of these would be prohibitive. The point could be argued that public access actually reduces risk, because the responsible public will provide free 'security', as they want to protect their environment and water, and they value their access.

Finally, with regard to potential economic benefit, the northern WA rivers are paddled in the summer rains, but only by the cognoscenti and adventurous. Some runs are very demanding, with limited egress; these may well have tourist potential-added to the Avon descent as a summer attraction. Improved access and facilities would attract locals as well. Helicopters have already been rented to take canoes and paddlers to the start of their trip. A day trip is about 15–30 kms, and kayaks weigh less than 20 kg, so a helicopter for four people is quite viable if it's already close by.

SCC member Cameron Pattrick also responded:

As someone that has spent five years whitewater kayaking, I have personally seen that there is no environmental cost to the practice of it. It is unpleasant to paddle in water that is in any way polluted. I have paddled rivers with algal blooms, and, on rare occasion discarded rubbish. As a group that depends on the waterway for our recreation, we have always cleaned up rather than pollute. We all understand where we are and what we are doing, and treat the environment with the respect it deserves. My favourite part of the sport was actually the pristine environments we travelled through.

In my opinion there is no environmental cost to public use of drinking water rivers, and it is in fact of great benefit to the health of the state's community. We should not be looking at minimising the activity, but instead ways to promote it.

In summary, we ask the Standing Committee to consider the concept of community rights with regards to accessing land in water catchments. Efficient monitoring/treatment programs, if funded adequately, will enable the reinstatement of the use of waterways and catchments for recreational pursuits that promote population health and wellbeing. We are resolute that the population benefits of access to waterways and catchment outweigh the risks to public health.

2. Regarding the '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 urge the Standing Committee to meticulously collate the latest research on policy and best practice relevant to population health benefits and impacts of recreational access to water source areas. We are confident the Committee's research will reveal that, compared with many countries, WA's policies and legislation are antiquated and unnecessarily restrictive for paddling activities on waterways and within catchment areas.

Martin Compton also makes the following points about international practice in this area:

The UK encourages recreation in catchment areas and on drinking water reservoirs. Bolton Water Corporation has allowed a sailing club (for sailing dinghies only, plus rescue boat with inboard engine) on their Delph reservoir since about 1964, with no problems. Currently 'Natural England' is advising the UK government and both the private and public water companies to manage their catchments for broad public benefits, including recreation, carbon absorption, better water retention and collection, etc. This follows the principle of the very popular CROW (Countryside and Rights of Way Act) that allows access for walkers to not only footpaths but also whole mapped areas of "mountain, moor, heath..." – which includes a great deal of drinking water catchment.

The Australian public seems to hold conservative views on water recycling, which is a common and long-established practice elsewhere. Likewise, perhaps there is a need for greater education on the facts about water catchment access.

SCC promotes public education as a key strategy for environmental protection. SCC's accredited paddler training and safety courses, conducted regularly throughout the year, include information about appropriate management of the paddling environment and waterways. We would welcome representatives from the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) at courses we hold for new paddlers, to speak about environmental responsibility.

We would promote the use signage to remind paddlers that the environment they are enjoying deserves the utmost care and respect.

3. Regarding the 'community views on the value of water and recreation in public drinking water source areas'.

Unsurprisingly, this is an issue close to the hearts of many SCC members, particularly slalom canoeists. Long-time paddlers have seen their access to waterways and catchments steadily reduced in and around Perth. We understand that the flow of 10 rivers has been affected by dam construction. Since 1961, six recreational rivers have been lost or significantly impacted as a result of dam: Serpentine (1961); Wungong (1979); South Dandalup (1972); Harris (1990); North Dandalup (1994); Harvey (1998), see Fig.1. Sadly, one result of damming the Harvey River was the demise of WA's International slalom course. For a while the loss to paddlers was compensated for by regular releases from the dam, which enabled intermittent paddling and slalom training; however, the dam releases have been halted.

Few would not argue that the reduced access to wild water has reduced WA's competitiveness in slalom at the national level. SCC is very concerned that wildwater and slalom participation will soon die out in Perth and its regions. Clearly, ensuring reasonable access to waterways, each with their own specific challenges for canoeing, will help enable this State to again foster and develop more champions in the discipline.

Water catchments are historically an integral part of the recreation experience in WA. Inland water catchments, reservoirs and streams across the Southwest land division provide major resources for recreational paddling. However, current policy does not account for the value of recreation activities in water catchment areas, with many areas designated as Priority-1, which limits all recreation within a two-kilometre buffer zone.

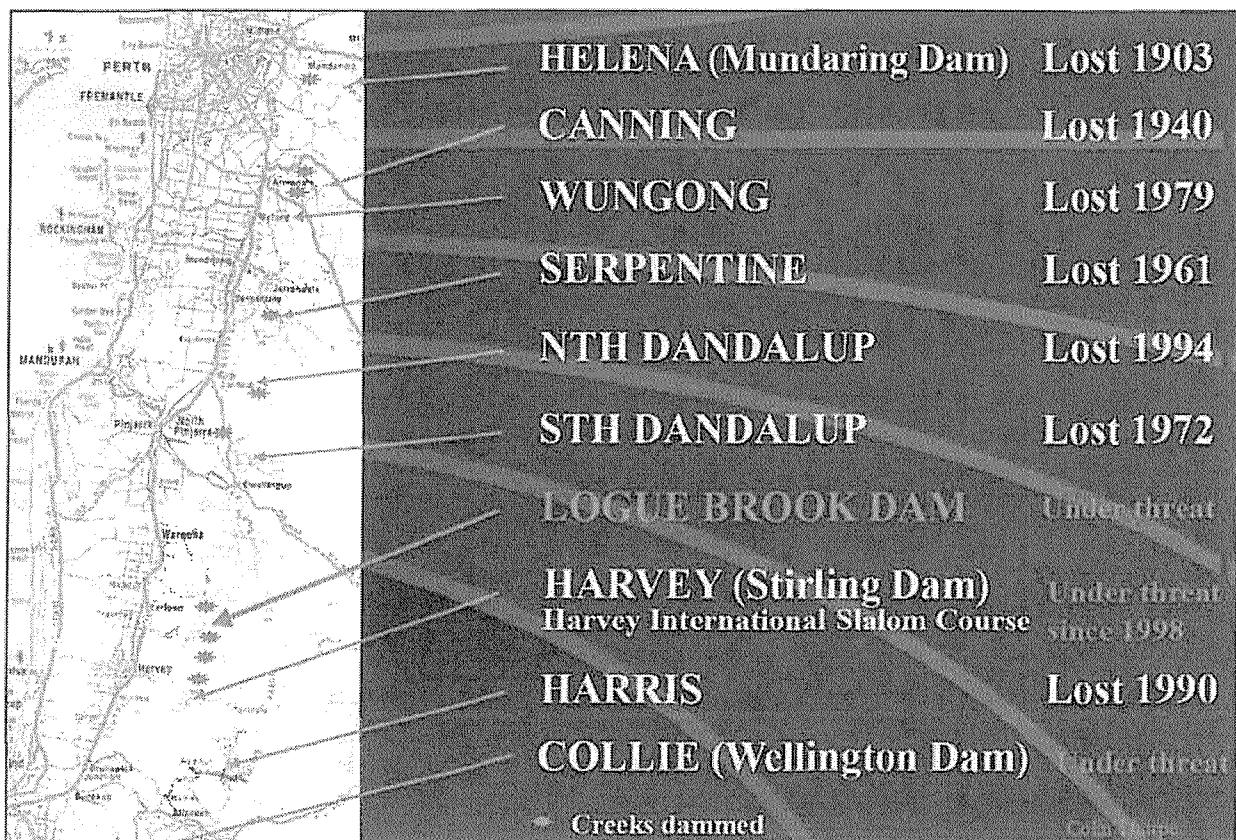


Figure 1. Sporting and Recreational Rivers Lost as a Result of Dam Building in WA, 1903-present.

One member responded thus:

“For many years I’ve enjoyed kayaking on, swimming in and camping around Wellington Dam, which is only being used for agricultural purposes and apparently too salty for drinking. Because motorboats are not permitted, the dam is a pleasant place to paddle. If access to the dam were restricted, it would mean no more fabulous, relaxing weekends on the dam, and a great loss to the many who enjoy its simple pleasures.” (G Benet)

SCC would like the Standing Committee to appreciate canoeists’ dismay at the consistent reduction of water-based recreation facilities, and the effects on established Perth and southwest canoe clubs, and the recreational canoe population.

Much of the following information has been provided by **Bevan Dashwood**, former Australian Slalom Champion, current State slalom coach, director, and life-member, of Canoeing Western Australia, and recipient of the Australian Sports Medal in 2000.

The **Southern/Wungong River** was a beautiful river, which began flowing with the first rains in May. Perth canoeists began paddling on the Wungong river in about 1966; regular Saturday afternoon paddle trips were organised, because of the river’s proximity to Perth. By 1970, paddlers who lived in Perth’s southern suburbs used the river to train for

wildwater and slalom events, because it gave paddlers access to 'grade-2 whitewater', and could be enjoyed after work on weekdays as well as on the weekends. Because of this activity, in the area, the Darling Range Canoe Club was formed. At the road bridge on Southern River Road, there was a winter slalom course that was erected each year for the duration of the season (four to five months). The course was an important training venue during the week, and the State slalom committee ran slalom events on Saturday afternoons at the Southern River Road venue (the section of river used was from the South West Hwy to where the river joined the Canning River at Burslem Drive in Thornlie.)

The damming of the Wungong destroyed a beautiful section of river enjoyed by many club and recreational paddlers, and local residents. With a lack of winter flow to flush the river above Kent Street Weir, algae blooms over summer began to close or limit river usage. It has also affected the permanent slalom course on the Canning River at Hester Park – home to the Darling Range Canoe Club). The winter flow on the Canning has dropped about a metre; and low water in the upper reaches of the Canning caused by the damming now limits training up river of Hester Park. From late-April, when the weir at Kent Street is removed, the river level above drops about a metre, and makes many areas of the river too shallow to paddle comfortably; before the Wungong was dammed, its winter flow was sufficient to keep the river at a level similar to the summer height. Thirty kilometres of grade-one and grade-two rivers were lost to the Wungong Dam. This affected hundreds of local recreational, club and CWA paddlers who used the river two to three times a week for training or recreation. It was a major blow to the Darling Range Canoe Club, resulting in continual loss of members and, eventually, the demise of a recreational club.

The **North and South Dandalup Rivers** (grade 1–3) were first paddled in 1963 by the then YMCA Kayak Club (which became the Swan Canoe Club). They were excellent rivers for recreational canoeing, as different sections of the river could cater for novice or experienced paddlers. As other canoeing clubs were established, and canoeing became more popular among the wider public, the patronage of the river increased, and it became a popular training area for the local Peel Club. With the damming of both the North and South Dandalup another two recreation rivers were lost to the people of Perth and the southwest.

The **Harvey International Slalom Course** on the **Harvey River** was a venue well documented worldwide as a place you had to visit at least once in your lifetime. It was renowned for its beautiful bush setting; crystal-clean, unpolluted water; the high-standard slalom course and white water; and the friendly Harvey townsfolk. Richard Fox (five-times world champion) who is now the AIS Canoeing National Performance Director, first visited Harvey in the early 1980s with a number of world-ranked international paddlers. From this visit Harvey was placed on the world map, and many international paddlers then came to WA to train and compete. This resulted in many WA slalom paddlers gaining coaching at an elite standard, and advancing their slalom career to represent Australia at an international level. Of note is Perth's Robin Bell achieving 4th place at the Athens Olympics, and Bronze at Beijing. The decision by the Water Corporation to construct the Stirling Dam destroyed WA's International Slalom and white-water course. (It would have also removed a substantial income from the town of Harvey that resulted from paddlers and their families, friends, coaches and officials visiting Harvey each year.) Many canoeists felt there was no consideration by Watercorp to the impact of the decision on the sport of canoeing, or the impact on the people of Harvey, and the wonderful relationship that existed between the two communities.

A selection of comments sent as contributions to this submission from concerned SCC members are listed below;

SCC member Cameron Patrick comments that:

Kayaking was my only sport; I had no interest in doing anything else, and having this option available to me was the reason that I did regular vigorous exercise while in school. My level of fitness improved dramatically and I was able to compete on a national level, with friends that were internationally competitive. I was never a fan of mainstream ball sports or athletics, and would not have achieved what I did were paddling not available to me.

On that note, Western Australian kayakers were always at a disadvantage in national competitions, as we have no year-round whitewater. New South Wales has the Penrith whitewater park and Victoria and Tasmania have dammed rivers with controlled release. Tasmanian rivers are a beautiful example of frequently used waterways with no loss of quality. New South Wales, of course, has no such risk by having a whitewater park, and it doubles as a tourist attraction and site for international competition.

SCC member Paul Browne notes that:

Paddlers can be viewed as 'the protectors of the waterways' - we are one of the few groups who actively monitor the water's condition, flow, access and surrounding environment on a continual basis. Controlled Restricted Access to waterways is generally not a problem for paddlers, subject to the restriction being manageable. For example, on the 'middle' Murray River, access is restricted through rangers, who are provided with name and car registration details for paddlers prior to any paddles; this ensures no unofficial, and therefore uncontrolled, use of the river, and ensures responsible use of environment. It also has added benefit of increased safety for river users. In general, people with a vested interest in the condition of the water and surrounding environment (paddlers, anglers etc) are far less likely to cause damage to the environments from which they gain the most pleasure.

I have paddled the Murray and Swan/Avon rivers, and I intend to paddle as many of the other rivers as possible within WA.

SCC member Phil Harris also comments:

I have been paddling and camping on Wellington Dam for more than 20 years. With my family and kayaking friends we average three trips a year and camp on average two nights each trip. Most often we will launch at the back of Alanson Township (outskirts of Collie) and finish up at Potters Gorge (near the dam wall); depending on how we meander, the distance can be about 24km. This is a lovely, scenic area. Some of the remote places are under-utilised by paddlers, but, sadly, trashed by 'quad' bike and 4WD 'hoons'. We usually camp in three regular camping spots, and each time we carry out a large bag of trash left by hoon campers. There is a kayak hire business operated by the Kiosk at the dam wall that would be affected by any access restrictions. Access restrictions for paddlers to Wellington Dam would be a tragic loss.

Many long-time Perth canoeists believe the Water Corporation has made ill-informed, poorly researched decisions and that the State Government can now rectify many of those decisions and reinstate the community's recreational access rights that were removed.

This enquiry has the capability to initiate an overdue reform of a vital part of the State's recreational and environmental management and governance – a reform that could impact positively on the lives of Western Australians for decades to come. SCC believes that Western Australians (and visitors) should be enabled – encouraged, in fact – to explore and connect with the State's landscapes and environments through access to waterways and catchment areas. We maintain that efficient management will allow access to certain types of water-based recreational pursuit, and enable water quality to be upheld at the same time. Paddling is a community activity to be promoted – not discouraged through unnecessarily restrictive legislation.

4. The costs and benefits of alternative water quality management strategies and treatment for water catchments containing recreation.

SCC is pleased the Committee will thoroughly investigate alternative water quality management strategies and treatment for relevant water catchments. The management and planning of recreation in water catchment areas must recognise that kayaking provides extensive physical and social benefits, and that policies must reflect the appreciation and value of kayaking within our communities. We believe that improved water quality management strategies exist, and can be fully assessed and implemented in Western Australia. SCC acknowledges that we do not have expertise in water quality management. However, we propose there are effective initiatives, management practices, and monitoring strategies that could be implemented in order to protect both potable waterways and the communities access to recreational activities in these areas. We strongly encourage the Committee to fully investigate the options available before instigating a blanket ban on access to public drinking water catchments for recreation.

5. Possible recreation sites or opportunities available outside the Perth hills and southwest drinking water catchments.

SCC favoured the development of the Champion Lakes as a training and competition facility. We are, therefore, *extremely* frustrated and disappointed that the pledged 'white-water park' has not eventuated. A purpose-built white-water facility will be a useful and valued location for paddlers; however, we would not favour a purpose-built facility being offered in return for loss of access to natural water courses; wildwater paddlers enjoy the remoteness and the unpredictability of wildwater systems (reasons why many take up the pursuit).

We recognise that some of the land we use to access rivers and water bodies are within designated water catchment areas, and are community assets that face pressure from multiple users. However, we submit that enabling controlled access by kayakers is not incompatible with the protection of water quality within the catchments. Often, to reach paddleable rivers, kayakers must use access roads at the beginning and again at the end of their paddle; this may be problematic if the roads are within catchment areas, or on private land.

SCC appreciates that in WA access must be modified seasonally to account for water level variations, and that access must be assessed and balanced with issues such as water quality. However, we maintain that total exclusion is not necessary. We strongly believe the community needs – and deserves – reasonable opportunity to pursue active, healthy, and stimulating lifestyles. We believe that this State under-utilises its fresh water resources for recreation, and that identified environmental impacts can be managed through effective strategies, rather than via blanket bans on access. Thus, we expect the State Government to identify a pragmatic and

flexible way of balancing the community demand for safe drinking water with the recreational needs of kayakers and canoeists.

Summary

- Kayaking is a highly valued and worthwhile recreational activity. SCC requests that the management and planning of recreation in water catchment areas recognise the social and physical benefits of recreational paddling.
- Current policies have had a regrettable effect on competitive and recreational whitewater paddling in Western Australia, particularly due to the loss of the Harvey International Slalom course. The SCC request that the regular release of water from the Stirling Dam be re-instigated for the recreational use of kayakers.
- Paddlers are extremely respectful towards their paddling environment, and that planning policies for water catchment areas should reflect this along with the social and physical benefits of kayaking. The SCC therefore requests that:
- the WA Government legislate to allow for recreational activities such as kayaking to (strategically) co-exist with potable water requirements

Yours truly,



Rebekah Manley
SCC President