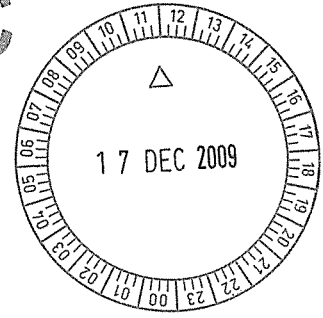


PUBLIC



SUBMISSION:

Standing Committee on Public Administration

- *Recreational Activities within Public Drinking Water Source Areas*

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Recreational Activities within Public Drinking Water Source Areas

Recommendation: increased public access to water catchments should only occur if there is adequate and ongoing investment in a comprehensive and effective Leave No Trace minimal impact public education program to ensure i) sustainable use, and ii) that biodiversity values are maintained.

The balancing of recreation demand, amongst many other demands, and security of water resources is one of the real and immediate challenges of our time.

The physical and mental health benefits of outdoor recreation are increasingly acknowledged. Outdoor recreation is also a significant and increasing component of both domestic and international 'experiential' tourism.

Whether it be in high recreation use areas or perceived high rainfall areas such as the Hobart water catchment, the critically stretched waters of the Murray Darling Basin, or the south-west of Western Australia, human use demands are increasing rapidly and secure, quality water resources are now regarded as very limited rather than abundant.

For this submission on recreation needs and impacts on water catchments to be of any value it should be able to reference relevant planning frameworks that address conflicting land use demand. The particular challenge of increasing recreation in the south-west water catchment is that this region is part of the internationally acknowledged South West Ecoregion bio-diversity hotspot, and which is predicted to have massive population, extractive industry, and other developments over the next 40 years. The wider, real, context is evidenced by the resource industry growth which is a precursor to the realization of projections in the tourism / global recreation outbound market that has been quantified by the World Tourism Organization at 100m Chinese and 20m Indians by 2020.

Critical to addressing the access and recreation demand / use conflict is robust, effective community education. Long-term sustainable access for recreation and the acknowledged benefits will be assured only through an informed and educated public aware of minimal impact practices. Experience has shown that behavioural change is achieved by education prior to people accessing recreational sites. Enabling access without adequate and ongoing education and awareness leads to non-sustainable use i.e. degradation of the areas natural and cultural heritage values and the recreational resource and experiences.

Any change to current catchment management practices should be of net positive benefit to biodiversity values so that sustainable recreational use is a real outcome and not an aspirational cliché.

The key risks, if recreation is permitted in water catchments, needing to be addressed will be

- Water quality
- Biosecurity – particularly *Phytophthora dieback*
- Fire

Water Quality

- The risk to water quality is greatest from escaped campfires / wildfires resulting in diminished vegetation cover and consequent diminished water quality. Campfire escapes are real events as evidenced by the fire at St Marys Tasmania December 2006 ("60% of the Scamander water catchment has been devastated – estimated that runoff this year will be four times the normal rate and water quality will be useless" – see attached initial assessment from Tasmania Fire Service), and the Mitchell Plateau (WA) August 2005.
- Inappropriate toilet and other waste disposal behaviours leading to illness via drinking and

cooking water contamination, diminished experiences, and threatened economic outcomes (as a result of compromised experiences) can be immediate outcomes of recreational access. Experience on the Overland Track in Tasmania has shown that a lack of on-going robust minimal impact education results in deterioration of minimal impact behaviours over time. Currently there is a marked deterioration of both human waste and fire behaviours from people recreating in natural areas across the protected area estate in Tasmania.

Biosecurity

- Terrestrial
 - the most evident, immediate threat to the biodiversity values of the catchment area through increased recreational use will be the spread of *Phytophthora dieback*. Recreation is identified in the South Coast NRM *Phytophthora dieback* management plan as one of the five key vectors.
 - *Phytophthora dieback* is subject to a national Threat Abatement Plan
 - The attached map of the Stirling Range National Park shows (in red) *Phytophthora dieback* infestation from the ridgelines (bushwalking track) down as water has carried and dispersed the infestation.
- Water
 - to date in Western Australia the biosecurity threat to the aquatic environment, from the non-agricultural public, has probably been through access to natural areas to dump aquarium species. The most likely threat in the near future will be from a species such as *didymo*. *Didymo* is an alga first identified in the southern hemisphere in New Zealand in October 2004. It now infests well over two hundred catchments on the south island, and absorbed NZ\$24m in 2008 (<http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/pests/surv-mgmt/mgmt/economic-impact-of-pests> page 44). Recreational water sports and fishers returning from New Zealand to Australia are surprised to find their equipment impounded – it seems more surprising, given the real dollar expenditures likely to be incurred by land and water managers, that there is no comprehensive education program to ensure *didymo*, having traversed the hemispheres, does not traverse the Tasman.
 - Economic Impact Assessment for *didymo* (NZ) – “An economic impact assessment in 2006 estimated the potential impacts of *didymo*, in the absence of Government intervention, at between \$58 and \$285 million over the eight years from 2004/05 to 2011/12. This type of assessment is a tool that provides a general picture of the economic impacts to guide decision-makers on appropriate management actions. An economic impact assessment is not intended to reflect the exact impacts on all sectors.” New Zealand Department of Finance.
 - A Biosecurity New Zealand map showing *didymo* infestation of South Island is attached

Fire

- The changed climate and diminished rainfall over the water catchments of the south-west have resulted in substantially changed fire conditions. Diminished moisture levels mean that once dangerous campfire escapes are now potentially catastrophic. As populations increase, urbanized and uneducated in outdoor skills and ethics, and with increased means to access natural areas, there is a very real need to ensure that the areas now managed for water catchment maintain their integrity
- It is unavoidable that, if access is granted for recreation, there will be campfire escapes. (Data on campfire escapes has been requested from FESA and will be made available when received. Also of concern are the figures on arson. FESA

data on arson would encourage caution be applied to extending access to areas currently providing limited access to the public.)

- Campfire escapes, such as the Mitchell Plateau fire of August 2005 (see attached file), also have the potential to disrupt fire management regimes aimed at establishing and enhancing mosaics, and public investments aimed at biodiversity management.
- Campfire incident data – although not accurate due to capacity for campfire escapes to be classified under ‘other’ – and arson data are available on written request from FESA.

Leave No Trace Australia is willing to discuss this submission in more detail if requested.

Attachments:

Stirling Dieback Map pdf

Didymo Affected Waterways pdf

Kimberley Fire avi

4 St Mary's Fire pdf

Leave No Trace – a national minimal impact environmental education programme

Leave No Trace Australia Ltd is a not for profit initiative that promotes essential minimal environmental impact skills and ethics to those pursuing recreational and traveling experiences in natural and cultural heritage areas, in both remote and residential locations.

Leave No Trace Australia's mission is to promote and inspire responsible outdoor recreation and travel through education, research and partnerships. Leave No Trace achieves its vision through partnerships with land managers, educators, user groups, youth organisations, guides, outdoor equipment retailers and manufacturers, the travel industry, and individuals interested in maintaining and preserving natural and cultural heritage areas for future generations.

The natural world in which we recreate and travel sustains us. We are drawn to nature by its beauty, naturalness, and uniqueness. Most of us seek to leave these natural and protected areas as we found them. Yet it takes a certain set of skills and an awareness of the different characteristics of an area to be able to do this in a range of environments or while undertaking various recreational activities, whether this is close to home, across the country, or overseas.

The increasing pressure of tourism and recreation creates a danger of our natural and cultural capital ‘being loved to death’.

Leave No Trace Australia has MoUs with Parks Forum (www.parksforum.org), and the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) and works with the Department of Sport and Recreation and Outdoors WA (and other partners) to deliver minimal impact education in Western Australia.

The LNT Programme

The Leave No Trace program is based around seven principles that can be applied to specific environments and recreation activities.

The Leave No Trace seven principles, recognised internationally, are:

- *Plan ahead and prepare*
- *Travel and camp on durable surfaces*
- *Dispose of waste properly*
 - *Leave what you find*
- *Minimise the impact of fires*
 - *Respect wildlife*
- *Be considerate of your hosts and other visitors*

St Mary's Fire, Tasmania 2006

Initial assessment

- Started from a campfire at a bush camp on Forestry Tasmania land. Not known if the fire was attended at the time.
- Started on 10 Dec 2006 and burnt for 2 weeks until rain slowed it enough to contain it
- Burnt 30,000 ha, including:
 - 14,000 ha State Forest Reserve
 - 6,500 ha Private land
 - 5,000 ha Forestry Tas plantations
 - 2,500 ha National Park
 - 500 ha Other public land
- Volunteer fire fighter killed (by falling tree)
- Burnt 29 dwellings,
 - Scamander 17
 - Four Mile Creek 10
 - German town 2
- Burnt hundred's of cars & caravans
- Burnt businesses include Art gallery, restaurant, jeweller, nursery,
- Burnt local government assets – signs, playgrounds, etc
- Burnt out a wildlife reserve bequeathed to Parks has been
- 60% of the Scamander water catchment has been devastated – estimated that runoff this year will be four times the normal rate and water quality will be useless
- Significant stock losses (uncounted)
- Cost:
 - Structural \$8m
 - State Forest \$50m
 - National Parks \$ millions – not finalised (\$60-70,000 in signs alone - plus bridges, boardwalks etc)
 - TFS \$ millions - not finalised