

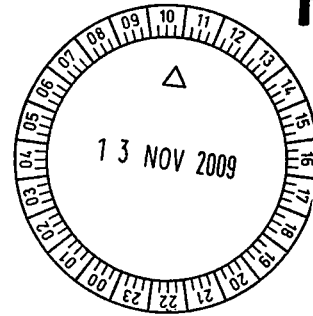


***ORIENTEERING ASSOCIATION  
of WESTERN AUSTRALIA (Inc)***

*P.O. Box 234, SUBLACO, W.A. 6904*

**PUBLIC**

Ms Cassandra Stephenson  
Committee Clerk  
Standing Committee on Public Administration  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
PERTH, WA 6000



Dear Ms Stephenson

The Orienteering Association of Western Australia (OAWA) would like to make the following submission to the Committee's Inquiry into Recreation Activities within Public Drinking Water Source Areas.

**Background:**

Orienteering is a sport involving navigation on foot or mountain bike, using a detailed map of a forested area to locate a series of control points. While the sport can be competitive at the highest level, and has been recognised by the International Olympic Committee, many of our participants are non-competitive and enter our events for recreational reasons.

OAWA has been organising orienteering events since 1974, has over 300 members, and our events are also attended by several hundred non-members each year.

Our events are usually held in the Winter months (April to September) in State Forest, National Parks, and on private land. For events held on Crown land, permission is negotiated with the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC), and they in turn notify the Water Corporation and obtain the Corporation's agreement for any events that are in a water catchment. Permission to run our events is usually conditional on our events being held more than 2 kilometres from any dam (high water mark), and on our providing chemical toilets, as well as a range of other conditions.

Our events are monitored regularly by DEC and Water Corporation staff and since 1974, as far as we are aware, there have been no adverse reports of the effect of orienteering on the forests generally, and on water quality in catchment areas in particular. This is in line with findings in other states and worldwide, where activities such as orienteering, rogaining and bushwalking have been allowed in catchments – even to the shorelines of storage dams – with no reported cases of an adverse effect on drinking water quality.

While we have always complied with the current catchment management provisions, we would like to see some relaxation of these provisions, which we believe to be overzealous and unnecessary.

### **Illegal Activities:**

At the same time, we note that the level of monitoring of illegal activities by individuals, such as trail-bike riding and off-road driving, wood-collecting, rubbish dumping, hunting, etc. is totally inadequate. Any one of these activities by a single individual causes far more problems to water quality and the environment generally, than an orienteering event involving 200 participants. The scale of this problem is huge - it is rare for us to hold an event in a catchment area without sighting trail-bikes and other off-road vehicles driving in prohibited areas, and/or finding evidence of the damage they have caused. Our reports of such activities to the appropriate authorities are usually shrugged off.

We generally hold only one event in each area during a short Winter season – illegal activities are undoubtedly occurring in each of these areas every week of the year.

We contend that participants in sanctioned, organised activities in catchment areas, such as orienteering, rogaining, and bushwalking, could assist in the monitoring of illegal activities. At all of our events we have access to a satellite telephone, and we would like to see a 'hot-line' for reporting illegal activities, with an immediate response by DEC and/or Water Corporation Rangers, together with the Police.

### **Conflicting Government Priorities:**

Orienteering is sponsored by both Healthway and the Department of Sport and Recreation. Both these government organisations expect us to promote the health benefits of activity and recreation through our events and development activities. Against this, we are constantly faced with more restrictions, more bureaucratic barriers (such as lengthy permission procedures), and often outright rejection of our events by government landowners. These include not just DEC and the Water Corporation, but also the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority and many local government organisations. Whether the reasons for these restrictions and barriers are the supposed effects on water quality, or so-called public liability, they are all symptomatic of the ungrounded fears associated with the 'Nanny State'.

We consider that the Standing Committee on Public Administration should resolve this conflict, by requiring all government agencies to give a high priority to the public health benefits of exercise, and therefore remove many of their barriers and restrictions to organisations that are involved in providing healthy physical and recreational activities to the general public.

Another conflict exists with government policy on land use in water catchment areas. Mining, logging, farming and even world championship car rallying are all conducted within catchment areas, yet nothing is ever mentioned about their effect on water quality. On the other hand, the activities of a few people on foot, such as bushwalkers and orienteers are heavily restricted.

## Issues for Orienteering:

The essence of orienteering is challenging navigation across unknown terrain. The most suitable terrains for orienteering are forested and undulating, with many small landform features including small spurs and gullies, and rock features. Areas that have a thick understorey or are uniformly flat or steep are unsuitable because either difficult to traverse or lack of challenging navigation.

In Western Australia, most of the accessible terrain suitable for orienteering lies in the Northern Darling Ranges, particularly in areas where Wandoo (*Eucalyptus Wandoo*) predominates. These areas coincide with the catchments of the Helena, Canning, and Serpentine rivers. Further South, the catchments of the Dandalup, Murray and Collie rivers are all very steep, have a thick understorey, and have fewer small landforms, and are therefore mostly unsuitable for orienteering.

For several years, DEC has been seeking to restrict our use of areas in the Helena and Canning catchments. When pressed, they can only advise us that their desire for fewer orienteering events in these areas is due to other usage factors arising from population pressure. We suspect that the real pressure is coming from the Water Corporation to restrict access in these catchments.

Neither DEC or the Water Corporation has a real understanding of the needs of our sport. Without access to challenging, but relatively crossable terrain, orienteering as a viable sport in Western Australia will effectively be strangled.

Most of the areas we use are several kilometres from storage dams, although we believe orienteering should in theory be allowed adjacent to dams, as it is in other states/countries with no recorded cases of water quality issues. There are some areas that we believe would be highly suitable for orienteering close to the Mundaring and Canning Dams. We were previously able to use one of these for several years (Lesley State Forest) to within 1 km of the Canning Dam, but after this was changed to 2 kms by the Water Corporation, the more suitable part of the area was denied to us.

In some areas, often several kilometres from a storage dam, there are nevertheless restrictions on crossing streams. We find this to be rather ludicrous, as the streams are dry for most of the year, and when flowing most orienteering participants will in any case choose a route that takes them over a suitable crossing point. There might be a small number of participants unavoidably crossing a stream on foot, and again there is no evidence anywhere to suggest this has an effect on water quality.

In some catchment areas, DEC has installed long drop or environmental toilets, and we would like to see more of these at popular state forest areas, eg near the junction of Yarra and Ridley Rds in the Flynn block, and at the junction of Flynn & Abercorn Rds in the Gorrie block. The requirement for us to provide chemical toilets at many events is expensive, but more worryingly it is a major drain on the valued support of our volunteers who have to collect and return them on weekdays, and tow them to a weekend event. A commitment of three separate towing drives on three days, and to also house the toilet at their home for those three nights is one that fewer and fewer of our members are able to make, and should not be necessary week-in, week-out. OAWA is prepared to assist in the funding, construction and maintenance of new toilet facilities in State forests.

## **Mountain Bike Orienteering:**

Mountain bike orienteering (MTBO) is a more recent development of our sport, with some special issues relating to water catchments. In MTBO participants must ride on roads and trails at all times, and terrain with a good trail network is therefore required. As the sport relies on making navigation decisions quickly, the more trails, the more route options, the more challenging is the navigation requirement.

Some of the Southern catchment areas are therefore suitable for MTBO, but sometimes the best trail networks are adjacent to the storage dams, such as at Waroona or Harvey.

MTBO events are sometimes hampered by the restriction on crossing streams; if there is a ford across a trail that route option is denied, making the event less navigationally challenging. At the same time, we have witnessed trail-bikes, four-wheel drives, and even DEC or Water Corporation vehicles driving through these fords! We would like to see evidence from the Water Corporation that crossing a ford several kilometres from a water storage dam on a bicycle causes any effect on water quality.

### **Summary:**

Orienteering around the world has no proven ill-effect on water quality, and should be allowed in catchment areas, with fewer restrictions. This could include adjacent to water storage dams with appropriate conditions and monitoring.

We would also ask the Standing Committee to consider better monitoring of illegal activities in catchment areas, and to reinforce public health initiatives through fewer barriers to physical recreation across government.

Yours sincerely



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For John Toomey (President)

11<sup>th</sup> November 2009