

Petition No. 073 – Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre

The President, Professor Kevin Kenneally AM, and the Council of the Western Australian Gould League respectfully request that the Standing Committee on the Environment and Public Affairs of the Legislative Council use whatever influence it has to ensure that the funding cuts to the WA Gould League are reversed. We have not taken our complaint to the Parliamentary Ombudsman.

Our reasons for requesting this reinstatement of funding support acknowledges that the WA government is required to show fiscal restraint in economically challenging times. However, we reject the premise that this constraint should adopt a shortsighted focus on educational programs that are entirely for the benefit of future generations and would remove education opportunities for the children of Western Australia.

Key points for the consideration of the Committee:

- We are seeking the reinstatement of annual funds of \$165,000 from the Department of Education to the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre to continue support for a teacher and administration officer to undertake the essential environmental and indigenous education programs conducted by the WA Gould League. We emphasise that these funds only cover staff positions, with all other funding (\$60,000) required to support the Centre being raised by the Gould League from fee for service, grants and running community events.
- Environmental education and access to nature are vital for the health and well-being of all sectors of the community and especially children. The Centre's inner-city location makes it an accessible destination for city schools to provide this experience for their students.
- The WA Gould League is an iconic community organisation that was formed in 1939 at the behest of the Department of Education as an adjunct to teaching environmental science outside the classroom. Its first President was the then Director General of Education, Charles Hadley. The Western Australian Gould League has been, and remains, a not-for-profit organisation with its own constitution and strategic plan, as well as applying for recognition federally as a Registered Environmental Organisation.
- For the past 80 years the Gould League has maintained its very close association with the Department of Education and has a committed history of teaching Western Australian schoolchildren the importance of environmental science under its mission statement to *"Nurture a passion for nature through education, innovation and communication"*.
- In 1984, the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre was constructed with funds raised from community and business donations. The WA Gould League was appointed managers of the Centre by the then State Government with a Memorandum of Understanding to *"Work closely with the Department of Education and to specialise in the environmental education of the State's school children and the general public"*.
- The Council of the WA Gould League consists of scientists, business leaders, environmental consultants and specialist teachers; all are volunteers. The synergistic experience of this Council underpins and contributes to the award-winning education programs offered at the Wildlife Centre, acknowledged by peers across Australia as being innovative and inspiring. These environmental programs support the Department of Education's STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) curriculum.

- The environmental sciences are specialist subjects that require educators with specialised skills and a passion to teach them. Teachers of the WA Gould League have included natural history icons such as Harry Butler, Vincent Serventy and Eric Mccrum who have been internationally recognised for their outstanding contribution to natural history.
- Each year over 6,000 primary and secondary students from across Western Australia attend our environmental education programs. These environmental programs are based around the importance of the freshwater ecosystem and its composite food webs and life cycles of the plants and animals comprising them. This learning experience is crucially important as it provides hands-on experiential learning at one of the few remaining large wetlands on the Swan Coastal Plain, Herdsman Lake, which is a living scientific laboratory that simply cannot be replicated in a classroom or elsewhere.
- A major component of the program is *Ancient Science*, a science engagement experience where contemporary science and traditional Aboriginal wisdom and culture are explored. The Indigenous Education Program, delivered by Noongar elders at Herdsman Lake (a culturally significant location), provides a key, specialist service for the Department of Education by helping schools to cover State and National curriculum priorities for Aboriginal education as well as training opportunities for indigenous presenters.
- The Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre provides a hub for Professional Learning for educators involved in the West Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative. It also supports the Department's Outdoor Classrooms model by coordinating the Tadpole Exchange program and providing advice to schools.
- The WA Gould League has been instrumental in inspiring thousands of young people each year for many decades, with students going on to very senior positions in science, academia and teaching. The partnership with the Department of Education is a unique exemplar model of effective out-sourcing of specialist services by the Department of Education. The Gould League has leveraged sponsorship with other education stakeholders, such as Catholic Education Office (WA), The University of Western Australia and State and Federal grants through the efforts of its Council.
- Finally, the Gould League provides engaging community education opportunities by hosting regular special events at the Wildlife Centre that help the wider community appreciate and value the natural environment of Perth.

In a letter from the Premier of Western Australia dated 6 February 2018 he stated that the Gould League would receive "*assistance from the Department of Education*" in seeking alternative funding. No such assistance has been forthcoming except a suggestion from the Minister of Education to contact Conservation Volunteers Australia who cannot offer the alternative funding promised, but only 'in-kind' support (see Appendix 1.)

Securing the future of the WA Gould League is essential to continue to provide environmental and indigenous education opportunities to the children and the wider community of Western Australia, in order to facilitate a continued experiential connection with nature and culture in this era which has become highly focused on digital screens. It is incumbent on us all to ensure our kids have access to specialist, passionate teachers, subjects and facilities they need to support their wellbeing, obtain jobs and further their careers.

APPENDIX 1 Petition No. 073 Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre

From: Tristan Duke

Sent: Wednesday, August 15, 2018 2:51 PM

To: Kevin Kenneally

Subject: RE: Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA)

Hi Kevin

Thanks for the email and the question.

Yes, you are correct. I am willing for CVA's *Rio Tinto Earth Assist* (RTEA) program to support The WA Gould League's operations through providing our program in-kind.

Yes, you are right in that CVA is not in a position to fund \$165,000 for staffing positions at WA Gould League. My offer is to support the WA Gould League education program that you operate by providing in-kind support of CVA's student education program. In turn, this support and collaboration would allow for further gravitas to the WA Gould League's funding opportunities that you seek.

The in-kind contribution on offer I hope is of value to your program by the dollar figure incorporated to operate RTEA program days. I am happy to compose a Letter of Support to th WA Gould League stating RTEA's support to your operations. I am happy to formalise an number of RTEA Program days engaged at the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre. Please let me know.

Happy to discuss further.

Kind regards

Tristan Duke

Regional Manager - Perth | Conservation Volunteers Australia

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