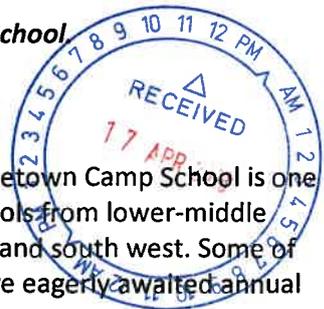


To: Hon Matthew Swinbourn MLC, Chair of The Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs.

Submission re: Petition No. 048 – In relation to the closure of the Bridgetown Camp School.

Dear Committee Members,

**Re: The importance of affordable school camps for disadvantaged families.** The Bridgetown Camp School is one of seven Department of Education (DoE) Camp Schools. It predominately services schools from lower-middle socio-economic areas of the: southern metropolitan area; wheat belt; great southern; and south west. Some of the user schools have been visiting the Bridgetown camp for 15 years or more. They are eagerly awaited annual events and are viewed by many parents and children as a “rite of passage”.



We have indeed been fortunate to have lived in a state which has a *culture of school camps*. The Principals and teachers from the schools that visit the Bridgetown Camp School, however, are extremely concerned this *culture* is about to be lost, most likely forever. They are concerned that the current governments proposed changes to DoE camps will either result in the closure of the Bridgetown Camp School or in a handover to an unsatisfactory alternative service provider. Most are saying that other non-DoE camps are just too expensive for their families to afford and that they fear this year’s camp would most likely be their last.

The current rate for food and accommodation at all DoE Camp Schools is slightly less than 75% of commercial rates and thus is GST-free. This subsidised rate ensures affordability and equity of access to camp schools for all school students throughout WA. Most current alternative camps such as Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSCI) camps and private camps not only cost more for food and accommodation but charge significantly more for the activities they conduct. Privately operated camps also have minimum group size requirements, normally 60. As DoE camps do not have to discriminate according to group size, Bridgetown is able to accommodate all schools on an equitable basis.

Camp School education should, in the name of social justice and social equity, be subsidised to some extent by the government so that it is affordable to all WA schools. If the current proposed change to DoE camps goes ahead school camps could soon become the realm of private and large schools, beyond the reach of schools from small country towns and low socio-economic areas.

**Re: That the camp school residential facility provides unique opportunities for personal growth and social development.** Due to the increasing sedentary lifestyles of students *experiential education* has once again become valued and relevant and is the current catch cry of education as is *nature play*. Both strategies are at the heart of the camp school experience. Dr Donna Barwood, WA Branch President, Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER) asserts that, “*The opportunities created via camp schools build social and emotional capabilities, support cross curriculum capabilities and perhaps, more importantly, challenges young people to strengthen a resilient and growth-oriented mind-set.*”

The Minister for Education, Sue Ellery, stated earlier this year, “*The running of camp schools is not the core business of the Department of Education.*” Research shows, however, that connecting students to the natural world can: boost performance in reading, writing, maths, science and social studies. It can enhance critical thinking and problem solving. It has also been shown to increase focus and decrease ADHD symptoms (Frances & Taylor, 2008). There is increased enthusiasm and greater engagement with learning and it also leads to better behaviour with more impulse control and less disruptive behaviour. These are all qualities we desire in our educational system. We do not want to risk a return to the antiquated system of “classroom only” school based education.

Dr Michael Crouch, ambassador for Outdoors WA, supported this view, by stating, “*Camp experiences provide not only a valuable social experience, but help school children to explore and appreciate outdoor experiences, with the hope this stimulates a lasting love for outdoor recreation. It is a much needed antidote to the current trend of insisting every child at school needs a screen and needs more time connected to the internet.*”

Residential camps, like Bridgetown, provide a unique environment where each week a temporary community is formed. Whilst living within this community teachers and students get to see each other in different ways. Teachers often comment on seeing a different side of a student whilst on camp. Many students that struggle

academically, within the theoretical constraints of the classroom, thrive and show more resilience in the practical living environment that DoE camps provide.

The Commissioner for Children and Young People recently released a report on **Engagement in Education in WA** and if the commissioner is correct, then what camp schools provide is CRITICAL to education because it is the development of these student and teacher relationships that form the foundation for student learning across all year levels. This means that above and beyond any curriculum delivery the relationship development role is invaluable to ongoing academic achievement.

**Re: That there are no other comparative facilities or services to replace the camp school experience.** All excursions are of greater value to schools when the education officer in charge is a teacher. The manager of the Bridgetown Camp School is a qualified teacher who is a specialist in environmental and outdoor education. He has managed the Bridgetown Camp School for over three decades.

He does not use a *one size fits all model*. He works closely with each incoming school, guiding the teacher-in-charge through all pre camp *programme development phases*, to ensure a tailor made quality program achieves the schools desired outcomes. Having access to his expertise on a day to day basis is invaluable as it frees teachers up to take care of their students' wellbeing; to attend to medical, homesickness and other pastoral care issues as they arise.

Schools are extremely concerned that should the Bridgetown Camp School close or be leased to an alternate operator this and other inherent benefits a DoE administered camp school currently provide will be lost or severely diminished. These include: assurance that all camp staff: have WWCC; have been DoE screened and are suitably qualified; provision of up to date Excursion Management Plans for all activities offered including copies of Certificates of Currency from external providers; provision of Camp School Bushfire and Emergency and Critical Incident Management Plans; strict adherence to DoE policies, guidelines and procedures especially relating to Excursions and Outdoor Education and Recreation Activities; the provision of professional and legally sound pre-camp information services such as websites and booklets; a One Stop Payment Invoice and Booking System for all accommodation, meals, activities and excursions; operational structures and routines within the camp that emphasise personal and social development; the ability to provide low cost camp school staff run activities; and, a non-profit driven catering service that is internally managed and meets DoE's Healthy Food and Drink Policy.

Managers of DLGSCI camps as well as owners of private camps, such as Forest Edge, are unified in their concern that if suitable "alternate operators" are not forthcoming and DoE Camp Schools do in fact close there simply are no spaces available to fill the void. Unfortunately for those seeking a rural camp experience similar to that provided at Bridgetown, most DLGSCI camps, i.e. Point Walter, Ern Halliday, and Woodman Point, are city based. The only non-metro DLGSI camps are Bickley, located on the outskirts of Perth, and Quararup, in Albany.

**Re: The negative economic impact on the local area.** If the Bridgetown Camp School did close, seven permanent jobs will be lost and sixteen other casual employees affected. The excursion providers who benefit greatly from the presence of a quality camp in the district will also be negatively affected. There will also be an adverse economic impact on the camp schools many local suppliers of goods and services.

Furthermore, tourism will be affected. Many parents and teachers visit Bridgetown after their kids have attended camp to have their own experiences. The money they spend in the town and greater region not only has immediate benefits to local businesses, but, indirectly encourages tourist infrastructure and investment which sequentially attracts even more visitors and much needed benefits in regional towns.

*Yours sincerely,*



**Wendy Bernice Menghini**  
**(Petition Holder: of 2 Cutmore Cressent, BRIDGETOWN WA 6255)**  
**13/04/2018**

**Please note:** This complaint has not been taken to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations (Ombudsman).