



Bushwalking WA (Federation of Western Australian Bushwalkers Inc)

Feedback on DLGSCI “Sport & Recreation Common Ground” discussion paper

30 November 2018

Our interest

Bushwalking WA (BWA) is the peak body for bushwalking / hiking in WA. It directly represents the interests and concerns of about 1100 members of bushwalking clubs in Western Australia, and indirectly represents the wider bushwalking community in WA comprised of more than 65,000 Western Australians.

Context

The ‘Common Ground’ discussion paper outlines the progress to date on the DLGSCI Sport and Recreation Strategic Funding Review. The review is intended to provide an understanding of the essential areas that provide sport and recreation with the greatest value so that the Department’s programs and financial resources can be prioritised on those areas.

DLGSCI advises that *“a series of meetings and workshops with the sport and recreation sector have taken place and that through these discussions it became apparent that there were many issues and views on which the department and industry agreed”*.

Bushwalking WA (‘BWA’) has not been a participant in the review process or workshops to date.

BWA (as the Federation of Western Australian Bushwalkers Inc) was the recipient of a \$10,000 DSR grant in 2014 which assisted the organisation to carry out a successful organisational and strategic review which is having benefits for BWA today.

Feedback Comments

1. **The review process to date appears to be heavily ‘sports-centric’ with little specific focus on recreation.** e.g.
 - i) **The discussion paper** (page 3) refers to an **“alignment of thinking at State and Commonwealth Government level, about reviewing investment in sport and recreation”**, yet Australia’s National Sport Plan focuses almost exclusively on sport (undefined?), with little specific consideration of “recreation” other than very indirectly under the general, less specific descriptor “physical activity” which could also be taken to be in the context of sport alone.
 - ii) **References are made to the non-defined term ‘industry’** throughout the review documentation. The word ‘industry’ in wider usage is most often used in relation to economic activities, so the usage here reinforces an impression that the focus of the review is on the needs of the more commercialised sports sector and the commercial operators of recreation activities, thus potentially failing to address the specific roles and needs of the voluntary recreation sector.
 - iii) **The paper frequently refers to “sport” on its own without including “recreation”** (eg *“Sport in Western Australia thrives in its diversity and its variety of choice. A greater balance in the funding of, exposure for and promotion of all sports, big and small is required”*.) This reinforces the impression that the focus is primarily on the sports sector.
 - iv) **Little attempt to engage voluntary recreation organisations in the review process to date** – The short timeframe provided for feedback and the timing and focus of the workshops will have disadvantaged voluntary recreation organisations more greatly than organised sports bodies with regard to providing input.
2. In view of the above, the **“many issues and views on which the department and industry [have so far] agreed”** presumably mainly refers to issues and views agreed with the organised sports and commercial sectors, and cannot be taken as being adequately representative also of the recreation interests of the non-commercial, voluntary recreation sector and the wider community.

3. **Definitions of 'industry' and 'sport' are required**

- i) the meaning of the word "**industry**" needs specific definition for the purposes of the review to avoid ambiguity of the intended focus. Or it may be better replaced by the word '**sectors**' (eg sports and recreation sectors).
- ii) the meaning of the word "**sport**" needs specific definition:
 - a) to avoid ambiguity in the review as to whether "sport" is intended to be inclusive of "recreation", especially in the many cases which make reference to "sport" alone without mention of recreation; and
 - b) to clarify whether there is alignment between the Commonwealth and State definitions of "sport".

4. **"How can we prove that sport and recreation activity makes a difference?"**

How much more evidence should be required to substantiate what seems to be already reasonably proven? There is a now widely-recognised need for a sense of urgency in achieving expanded sport and recreational opportunities, especially in light of the huge predicted "health and social costs over the next 10 years if people don't get moving" (ref. Sport Australia, Aug. 2018).

The combined economic, health and educational benefits to the community of increased physical activity and engagement in team or group activities appear indisputable. The benefits appear to be confirmed in part by studies such as the ActiveSmart programs in Rockingham and Geraldton which have demonstrated the cost savings on health, transport and environment over 10 years. There appears to be ample other evidence-based research indicating the benefits to the community of physical activity. Given the recognised urgency of getting people active, seeking yet more corroboration could only be interpreted as procrastination on the part of Government and the Department.

5. **How can we prove that the promotion of sport and recreation activity makes a difference?**

This question is whether funded programs promoting increased physical activity have achieved positive outcomes.

e.g. Counters on promoted trails - In the particular case of bushwalking, one easy and obvious measure would be for Parks and Wildlife Service to install many more counters on trails that have been the most recently promoted.

But another more direct and obvious means of obtaining relevant information is to obtain feedback on the outcomes of all funded projects from the funding recipients themselves:

Reporting of funded project outcomes - Too often when funding has been provided, recipients have not been required to report on outcomes at the time of project completion/grant acquittal, nor over a longer term. As a result, aside from an issue of accountability for outcomes, opportunities have been lost for valuable learnings for the granting body, for the grant recipient and for the wider sports and recreation sectors. Grant applications should be required to include Measures of Success for the project and subsequent reporting of project outcomes should address those measures. Tracking and reporting on the outcomes of funded projects could provide valuable learnings and would not need to be onerous on the granting body or the grant recipient.

The learnings from such projects should then be shared by the grant-provider so that other organisations planning to seek funding support have the opportunity to learn from, and build on, the experience of other grant recipients, thus leveraging the potential value to the wider community of each grant.

Without an obligation for such reporting, the original grant recipient is likely to be the sole beneficiary of the learnings from a project. In the case of a successful project, that may well be the grant recipient's preference; Due to the successful completion of their project they will have increased their prospects of obtaining future grants from the same source; whereas sharing of the learnings may only encourage competition from others for the limited available funding.

Examples of successful grant-supported projects

i) Club website development project

One of our member Clubs, Perth Bushwalkers Club Inc, in 2014 obtained a Lotterywest grant to undertake a re-build of its website, including a new online membership and activities management systems. The project was completed very successfully, having very positive outcomes; being the key factor in a subsequent increase in the club's membership (by almost 50% from 270 to ~400) within 2 years, and a substantial decrease in the administrative workload on the voluntary committee members.

The grant conditions however required no subsequent reporting of the project outcomes, so the learnings and benefits from the project fail to be known to the granting body or to reach the broader voluntary recreation sector.

ii) Peak body organisational and strategic review project

In 2014 an organisational and strategic review was carried out for BWA (the Federation of Western Australian Bushwalkers Inc) by an independent consultant funded by a \$10,000 grant from DSR. As a result of the review, changes proceeded under a 2015-2017 strategic plan as part of which the organisation implemented a modern governance model and established a new Board replacing the former Council of Delegates. These changes have enabled BWA to now represent the wider bushwalking community in WA, beyond our traditional Club base and so pursue a broader, more comprehensive and more inclusive vision for bushwalking in the State.

The outcome of this grant-funded project has been very positive but again the grant conditions required no subsequent reporting of the project outcomes, so the knowledge of the learnings and benefits of such a project again fail to be known to the granting body or wider community.

6. "How does the department engage with the industry and how does this need to evolve to [...] cater for the breadth of the industry?"

Broader and more inclusive recognition of voluntary recreational organisations - The Department historically has appeared to engage quite narrowly and preferentially with those organisations to which it has provided most funding and/or promotional support in recent years and which it therefore appears most keen to see flourish. Much of the department's visible support has been for just a few apparently 'select' or preferred outdoors recreation or trails organisations, including Trails WA, Outdoors WA and Bibbulmun Track Foundation, plus Tourism WA, optimising opportunities for those organisations to promote themselves to the community at forums etc and effectively providing endorsements of those orgs. This has the effect of reducing the visibility and opportunities for promotion and growth of other voluntary organisations in overlapping spaces. Promotion of a few select bodies by the Department may also give a misleading and confusing impression to the community that those bodies are peak bodies representing and speaking for all sectors, including bushwalking / hiking.

The Department needs to support the recreation sector more broadly, equally, and proactively in the future. More encouragement and support needs to be given to less publicly known, but credible organisations to raise their profiles in the community.

7. "Are there any gaps in what the department currently delivers?"

i) Greater recognition needed of outdoor recreation versus sport

Funding and other support for outdoors recreation - aside from mountain biking - has been minimal relative to the support given to sports organisations. Yet the various statistics (e.g. AusPlay "Participation data for the sport sector", Australian Sports Commission, Dec. 2016), show that activities such as recreational walking and bushwalking are very popular and make a greater overall contribution than sports activities in keeping people active. Bushwalking is ranked seventh among the top twenty nationwide sport and recreation activities and ranks above sports activities such as golf, tennis, basketball and cricket, yet has received negligible support from government.

Bushwalking/hiking has potential to contribute much more substantially in WA to keeping people active and engaged. It is not only popular, but is very widely accessible across the community; It

offers minimal entry cost to participants, attracts participation across a wide age range, and appeals about equally to the genders. Just like sports clubs, bushwalking clubs and other voluntary outdoors organisations need to be proactive and to adapt to change, yet most lack any external encouragement and support to do so. Recognition and help in the form of the types of support listed under item 8 below would strengthen and increase the effectiveness of recreation clubs.

ii) **Greater recognition needed of the recreation preferences of the older age sector**

The recreation focus within WA in recent years has been overwhelmingly on promoting and expanding the opportunities for the relatively young, such as mountain biking. e.g. Promotion and support for recreation in our parks today focuses on opportunities for the young, families and the under 40's. In the case of bushwalking, this results in an emphasis on activities such as short, family-oriented walk trails and mountain biking. Minimal specific attention is given to growing and broadening opportunities for the active older sector e.g. that ~30% of the local population in the 40-70 age bracket. Most of Perth's bushwalking clubs would confirm that typically over 80% of their active members are aged over 40 and see bushwalking as their primary recreation activity.

The Bibbulmun Track provides a well-known through trail, but the opportunities for typical circuit day walks (i.e. around 15km) on developed tracks which are known to be the preferred choice of many bushwalkers are limited in the Perth metropolitan area to just one trail (Eagle's View Trail in John Forrest National Park). Though trails development is largely the concern of Parks and Wildlife Service, the recognition and promotion of the need for more trails for recreation must also be a responsibility of DLGSCI-Sport and Recreation.

8. **"How can the department help to make the industry more effective?"**

- i) **Encourage and support organisations, projects and activities that cater to older people as well as the young** (see also item 7 above). The health and cost benefits of keeping older people active are well-known;
- ii) **assist voluntary organisations to adapt organically to change by encouraging and supporting organisational and strategic reviews** in cases where it is apparent that an organisation and the community should benefit (see also example in 5 (ii) above);
- iii) **assist voluntary organisations to promote themselves and their activities to the community and encourage grass-roots involvement.** Grants and other support can assist peak bodies, clubs and other voluntary orgs to expand their reach, grow their membership, and reduce their administrative burden e.g. through upgraded websites (see also example in 5 (i) above);
- iv) **assist the voluntary recreation sector with specific initiatives that can promote existing and new recreation opportunities** to encourage greater participation and to better-satisfy end-user expectations and demands for a range of opportunity types. e.g. BWA's current "Adventurous Walks of the Southwest" project is one currently unfunded example with potential to benefit the wider community by increasing awareness of opportunities for experienced bushwalkers beyond the well-known Bibbulmun Track.
- v) **assist the recreation sector to provide relevant skills training to its volunteers** in cases where lack of relevant skills and/or prohibitive training costs are barriers to an organisation's effectiveness.
- vi) **in parallel with Lotterywest and Parks & Wildlife Service, encourage and support the recreation sector in promoting and developing the infrastructure** needed to create adequate opportunities to meet end-user expectations e.g. additional new circuit bushwalking trails in the Perth region, and a wider range of types of bushwalking experiences beyond the limited existing trails such as the Bibbulmun Track.

9. **"What can the department do differently?"**

Refer to items 6, 7 & 8 above.

10. **"How does the sport and recreation industry expand its reach, while recognising that there will always be people that wish to participate outside of the traditional club model?"**

As an example, BWA has responded in part to the emergence of 'disruptor'-based delivery models in the bushwalking / hiking sector - such as meetup groups and increasing numbers of independent

walkers - by broadening its Rules of Association in 2015. As a result, BWA today has a mission of promoting and fostering bushwalking across the entire bushwalking / hiking sector within WA and is no longer limited to primarily representing the narrower interests of its member clubs alone. This has greatly increased BWA's relevance to bushwalking within the state and will be to the benefit of the wider community.

11. **“Clubs have long been the backbone of the delivery of sport and recreation in Western Australia.”**

Regardless of the emergence of disruptors such as the meetup groups and the increase in independent walkers, some of the positive aspects of the club environment are weaker or missing in other delivery models. Clubs can continue to make an important contribution to the community, enhancing social connectedness, personal development (including practical skills) and wellbeing, including mental and physical health, etc.

12. **“Western Australia, from a geographical size and population distribution point of view, is different to the other States. However, are the challenges for the sport and recreation industry in Western Australia fundamentally different to other States?”**

Some of the challenges known to recreational bushwalkers/hiking orgs in WA are not unique to this state. As a member of the national peak body, Bushwalking Australia, BWA is aware that traditional clubs in other states today mostly share the following challenges:

- i) Attracting and retaining younger people (under 35) as new members.
- ii) Attracting members to take on voluntary roles as committee members and activities leaders.
- iii) As a result of i) and ii), club membership is aging and the scope of activities available to members tends to narrow as experienced older, retiring leaders are replaced by fewer younger members.

Through a shared knowledge of the benefits of the traditional club model and the challenges it faces today, peak bodies such as Bushwalking WA and the national body Bushwalking Australia, can contribute to new initiatives that will help our member clubs respond and adapt to maintain relevance and thrive.

13. **“Promoting and protecting the ground-up nature of [...] recreation in WA, reinforcing the importance of grassroots and community-level participation within the wider State and national landscape.”**

Despite lip-service being paid to the importance of grassroots and community-level participation, the Department has done little to specifically help encourage and promote involvement by the community at the recreational club level and outside of the few 'select' organisations (as in item 6). The ways suggested in item 8 above, by which the department could help, are also relevant to promoting and protecting the roles of our clubs.

14. **“Recreation” needs must not to be conflated and confused with the needs of “tourism”**

Recreation has its own funding priorities, needs and benefits quite separately from those of tourism.

Tourism attracts funding support much more substantially and readily than recreation. As a result tourism considerations are a key driver in most strategic trails discussion within WA today while recreational interests tend to be ignored or fobbed-off with the notion that the needs of recreation can be addressed through tourism development.

The needs and benefits of recreation often overlap with tourism needs, but they are manifestly not identical and are often mutually exclusive. A funding-driven focus on tourism alone, without proper, separate consideration of specific, local recreational needs and benefits will leave recreation languishing and unprotected and will not adequately address the urgent need for increased physical activity across the community.