

WalkGPS commentary on CRC Research Report # 24, 2006

- "Recreational Access to Drinking Water Catchments and Storages in Australia"

DoW often refers to CRC Report #24 in attempting to justify its current approach and recommendations.

The following quotes (italicized) are from a summary of the CRC report (for full [Executive Summary](http://www.waterquality.crc.org.au/publications/resreport24_execsumm.htm) see: http://www.waterquality.crc.org.au/publications/resreport24_execsumm.htm):

Quote:

"A risk based decision making framework is proposed that can assist those faced with the challenge of deciding whether or not to permit recreational access, and the nature and extent of any recreational activities permitted within water supply catchments. This report is limited to consideration of drinking water supply issues although it is noted that there are range of other factors, e.g. ecological impacts, security concerns and legal aspects of recreational access, that can be major concerns for decision-makers. The approach proposed in the report provides a systematic and rigorous basis for decision making and planning in relation to recreational access in drinking water catchments and storages."

However,

"The information gaps that exist are very difficult to fill. The qualitative cause and effect and conceptual relationships between recreational access and impacts on water quality are now well established. However, there is only limited quantitative data on the impact of any particular type or level of recreational activity on drinking water quality. It is unlikely that the costs involved in quantifying these relationships will be justifiable by any agency or organisation. Therefore, a precautionary approach is proposed whereby the ecological integrity of Australia's remaining conservation and wilderness areas are protected and the quality of the yielded water is secured." - End quote

DoW has referred to the CRC report as if it is an independent, authoritative document. That is not the case. Consider the following:

1. **CRC project participants** - Six (or 66%) of the total of nine participating/cooperating organisations were State Water Corps/Catchment Authorities, the other three being the CRC itself, one University, and one State Department of Human Services (ref. Section 2.2 of the Report). No independent community-based recreational organisations were involved.
2. **National workshop participants** - The Report "aimed to outline the key outcomes of a key national workshop held in 2004". The 28 individuals who attended the workshop were similarly limited to the participating organisations and their "invited expert guests". The guests were also evidently drawn from the same organisations and State Government Departments. Again no guests from independent community-based recreational organisations were present at the workshop (ref. Appendix 1 of the Report).
3. **Lack of consultation** - In referring to "past research" on community attitudes to existing and potential recreation uses, the Report refers primarily to a dated 1986 report on Sydney's drinking water catchment (ref. p.5, Section 5, para.1). The CRC 'researchers' were seemingly intent on "understanding the impacts of recreational access" without reference to the key recreational stakeholders themselves. Ironically the Report itself manifestly lacks the rigour which it purports to provide in relation to matters of recreational access. e.g. It includes sweeping generalisations and assumptions with regard to increased recreational pressures on the catchments due to increased population, without any reference to the increased range of recreational pursuits available today, many of which draw the community away from the forested catchments rather than toward them.
4. **The Report Disclaimer** - Paragraph 3 of the Report's "Disclaimer" (ref. p.2) while possibly standard, could reasonably be read as a candid acknowledgement of the Report's serious limitations. Quote : "The research report does not purport to be a comprehensive statement and analysis of its subject matter, and if further expert advice is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought."

Report # 24 was initiated at a time when State Government's around Australia were grappling with how they could use their potentially powerful new regulatory tool, the 'precautionary principle'. Their challenge was captured in the following extract from a submission of the Conservation Commission of W.A. to the Department of Premier & Cabinet (One can only assume the language wasn't intentionally self-deprecating!):

Quote : "...the 'precautionary principle'. While the concept appears as one of the 11 core sustainability principles, its operationalisation needs to be spelt out to clarify how the principle would play an active part in the policies and day-to-day operations of Government agencies."

(Source: www.sustainability.dpc.wa.gov.au/docs/submissions_to_draft/Conservation%20Commission%20.pdf undated, prob ~ 2003).

The CRC Report's ultimate recommendation of a 'precautionary approach' and the DoW's endorsement of that approach and its subsequent recommendations are extremely disappointing but in no way surprising given the make-up of the CRC project participant organisations combined with the prevailing regulatory group-think.

Report # 24 is neither independent, nor authoritative, nor rigorous, nor objective. It appears to satisfy the self-fulfilling objectives of the participant regulators, including the DoW in W.A., but also justifies the recreational community's lack of confidence in the DoW and its current over-zealous approach to water resource management.

Read the full 44-page Report and judge for yourself. It is available from some State libraries; ref. ISBN 1876616482. Alternatively you can buy your own copy of the report (for \$70!) from the CRC via http://www.waterquality.crc.org.au/publication_occppr_resrpts.htm.