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Bushwalking (/ Hiking) Trails Strategy Development

DISCUSSION PAPER

Bushwalking WA
(the peak body for hiking / bushwalking in Western Australia)

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1. The Strategy process & terminology

1.1 The Strategy is covering both Bushwalking and Trail Running

There will be some overlap and synergies in the needs of the two activities but there are also some fundamental differences which cannot be ignored in the strategy development as they impact on a range of issues. e.g.

	Bushwalking	Trail Running
i)	Recreational & non-competitive	Sport (part recreation) & competitive
ii)	Activities mostly involve very small groups	Large events with many participants
iii)	Mostly volunteer-run, less structured activity	Mostly commercialized & structured
iv)	Weak funding & weak promotion	Stronger funding & stronger promotion
v)	Trails range across a wide spectrum from short walks on well-formed surfaces to long distance (including multi-day) walks along unmarked 'routes'	On formed trails

1.2 Terminology: Bushwalking or Hiking?

For all practical purposes the term 'hiking' has become synonymous with 'bushwalking' and is now more universally used in Australia. A younger generation of walkers now almost exclusively describe their activity as "hiking" and regard 'bushwalking' as the preserve mainly of the long-established clubs. In the interests of being inclusive in promoting the activity, staying relevant to our times, and engaging with a much larger proportion of walkers, the Strategy title may be better to refer to Hiking / Bushwalking. Bushwalking WA itself is considering a name change to Hiking WA.

1.3 Role of online surveys

The consultant will need to assess objectively whether online survey responses obtained can be taken to be representative, particularly in the case of a survey of more than one type of recreational/sporting activity. (e.g. The bushwalking community was badly under-represented in online survey responses during the Perth Hills Master Plan development in ~ 2012, in contrast to a very large and effective lobbying response from the mountain biking (MTB) sector. The unnaturally skewed survey results were interpreted without consideration of sample size and achieved much for mountain biking in that Master Plan and quite the contrary for bushwalking. Among the curious results from the skewed responses was that the popular Eagle's View Trail in John Forrest National Park was ranked in the bottom 3 trails (out of 70 in the area) in terms of trails condition, and the Kattamordo Heritage Walk Trail could be tied back into the very busy MTB Kalamunda Circuit.)

2. High level priorities for better bushwalking in WA

A key element of the Strategy vision must be to encourage all West Australians to walk more and develop environments in which the decision to hike/bushwalk is easier.

Easy access to a greater range of quality bushwalking opportunities, along with suitable trails support and infrastructure, is needed to meet and grow local and visitor demand and to provide walkers with rewarding experiences.

The Strategy should identify the particular attributes that can differentiate the broad trails experiences within WA from what is available elsewhere. e.g. The potential of the more remote and primitive trails must be considered.

The ultimate outcomes sought from the Strategy implementation should be:

- i) WA will be increasingly recognised for its diversity of attractive hiking / bushwalking opportunities and quality trails;
- ii) Bushwalking organisations will be able to support the growth in responsible hiking / bushwalking activity; and
- iii) More Western Australians will participate in hiking / bushwalking as a healthy, environmentally responsible and safe activity.

3. Current state of recognition and support of bushwalking in WA

The significant health and other benefits to the community gained from more people walking more often in natural places are today widely recognised. Making the decision to walk easier for the community, and creating more opportunities to walk, requires not only effective bushwalking organisations, but also vision among politicians, regulators, planners, and champions within the community, plus collaboration among all of the following stakeholders:

- Government agencies;
- LGAs/Shires;
- Bushwalking WA, as the bushwalking peak body;
- the clubs and other bushwalking groups;
- commercial guided walk operators;
- the wider community;
- corporate sponsors and partners.

Planners need to ensure they don't overlook a significant, long-established recreation activity such as bushwalking simply because it has a comparatively low public profile compared to much more heavily promoted, currently popular activities such as mountain biking.

Some courage is especially needed on the part of government and agencies to recognize and embrace the potential of new trails developments to generate growth of the activity to the benefit of the state; rather than erecting insurmountable 'barriers' such as requests for trails proponents in the community to demonstrate upfront proof of user demand (the classic 'chicken' and 'egg' of trails usage versus trails development). It's unlikely the now iconic Bibbulmun Track would ever have been developed if proof of future demand had been required when it was initially proposed.

Achieving new trails will require a willingness on the part of regulators and land managers to consider access and other issues in the context of the greater community benefit, rather than from a narrower perspective of striving to reduce the managers' risk toward an unachievable zero probability.

As the peak body [Bushwalking WA](#) has the mission of fostering and promoting hiking / bushwalking in Western Australia. Our [Strategic Plan 2018-2021](#) captures eight key strategies which are also directly relevant to this Strategy. BWA has in the past had very limited resources and funding to pursue its broad objectives effectively; Recent opportunities for business sponsorship/partnership support and other positive changes are expected to greatly strengthen the organization during 2018.

4. Who bushwalks?

Participation levels - Bushwalking appears to be a popular and growing recreational activity in WA. In some other states (Victoria and NSW) the tourism sector has in recent years experienced an astonishing growth in visitors going hiking.

Walking is by far the most popular form of recreation or exercise in WA. But 'bushwalking' in WA has historically ranked only fourteenth in popularity out of about fifty available recreational/sports activities, whereas Australia-wide it has ranked eighth. That relatively poor WA ranking may have improved, especially with the recent rapid growth in this State of large online Meetup bushwalking groups (see 4.2 below). Also the statistics likely greatly underestimate bushwalking participation; Terminology is changing and many who may have described themselves as bushwalkers in the past now refer to themselves more simply as 'walkers'. e.g. "Walkers" on the Bibbulmun Track. Their numbers may be missed in the 'bushwalking' statistics.

Gender - Bushwalking attracts equal numbers of men and women.

Health and environment - Bushwalking appeals to the health conscious and conservation-minded.

No age barriers - Hiking / Bushwalking is generally seen as a life-long activity available to anyone with appropriate fitness levels, so bushwalking opportunities must reflect the needs of the young, aged and people with disabilities, as well as those seeking more demanding walking challenges.

No cost barriers - Relatively low cost opportunities to participate.

4.1 Organised bushwalking

i) Clubs

History -The bushwalking clubs had the key role in the initial growth of organized hiking / bushwalking in the state beginning in 1937 when the first club, Western Walking Club, was founded. Today there are at least 13 incorporated clubs/groups. Eleven are members of BWA, the peak body.

The clubs' contribution :

- a. **Trails initiatives** -Without the Clubs' past contributions, it is unlikely that hiking / bushwalking would have a significant place today in recreation in WA. And without the initiatives of Perth Bushwalkers Club champions in 1972 and 1991 two of the state's most popular trails, the Bibbulmun Track and the Eagle's View Trail in John Forrest NP, would not have been developed.
- b. **Responsible bushwalking** – The clubs have long had an important role of introducing walkers to bushwalking and conducting safe activities. The typical WA bushwalking club environment offers the following benefits:
 - Introducing members of the community to a healthy recreational activity;
 - Introducing members to new walk opportunities;
 - Fostering of good risk management and safety through policies and practices;
 - Mentoring, training and development of members in leadership, first aid and bushwalking skills, courtesy of experienced members and external courses;
 - Protection of members through liability and personal accident insurances facilitated through their membership of BWA (applies to 11 clubs);
 - Sustainable activities through Minimum Impact / Tread Lightly practices;
 - Sharing transport to often-remote areas (reducing costs and access challenges);
 - A sound organizational structure which helps ensure the continuity of the activity.

ii) Commercial groups / Other organisations

Several companies and individuals organize guided 'walks'/bushwalks:
e.g. (list incomplete):

- [Adventurous Women](#)
- [Auswalk](#)
- [Bibbulmun Track Foundation](#) - a leader in introducing families and kids to 'walking'.
- [Cape to Cape Tours](#)
- [Down Under Discoveries](#)
- [Edgewalkers](#)
- [First Hike](#) (welcoming young refugees)
- [Inspiration Outdoors](#)
- [Jarrahdale Heritage Society](#)
- [Off-the-Beaten Track](#)
- [Willis Walkabouts](#)
- other.....

4.2 Informal bushwalking groups / Meetup and other social groups

In recent years there has been rapid growth in WA of large online Meetup and Facebook bushwalking groups such as:

- [Redtail Bushwalkers](#) (nominally 890 members)
- [South of the Border Hiking Club](#) (nominally 1300 members)
- [Young Perth Hikers](#) (incorporated; nominally 2900 members)

Such groups suggest a massive shift from the traditional club environment. In general, Meetup and Facebook groups have the following characteristics:

- Contemporary operating model using social media, with a much less formal structure than the traditional clubs, though at least two groups are incorporated.
- A mainly a younger membership than the clubs.
- Sustainability of the group may depend on just one or two 'champions' as organisers.
- Most do not offer the 'traditional' benefits available in the formal club environment (e.g. fostering of volunteering; risk management; insurances; skills mentoring), but the more informal operating model clearly appeals to many.
- Able to access and share much information on bushwalk opportunities online which was once only accessible via membership of a club.

4.3 Independent walkers

Many walkers choose to walk independently, usually in very small groups or solo. This is generally not a recommended practice for most walkers, and especially not for the inexperienced, and not in remote, isolated areas; but the responsibility and risk issues very much depend on the situation, experience and preparedness of the walkers. e.g. Provided that solo walkers on the Eagle's View Trail in John Forrest NP or on the Bibbulmun Track are fit and well prepared (with ample water, map, etc) and carry a personal locator beacon or other reliable means of emergency communication, they do not expose themselves or others to unacceptable level of risk and/or inconvenience..

5. Attractiveness / suitability of WA for hiking / bushwalking

The Strategy should identify the particular natural attributes that can differentiate the broad hiking trails experiences within WA from what is available elsewhere within Australia and globally. These can be used to much more effectively promote WA and its (present & future) bushwalking trails.

Examples of some unique or positive attributes that should be included:

- Diversity of potential walking environments across the one State;
- Diversity of potential walking experiences also within easy 100km distance of Perth city;
- Many areas with National Park status;
- Wildflowers – unique in diversity (autumn through to springtime);
- Unique fauna
- Beautiful open wandoo woodlands – a delightful wonderland for walkers;
- Unique, sustainable, open forest walking opportunities;
- Huge granite outcrops;
- Deep, rugged gorges e.g. Murchison Gorge; Karijini NP;
- Remote, challenging wilderness experiences e.g. southern coast NPs;
- Rugged coastal scenery e.g. Cape to Cape Track
- Rugged mountainous landscape e.g. Stirling Range NP
- Stunning red, near-desert landscapes e.g. Pilbara region
- Waterfalls e.g. along Darling Scarp and in southwest.
-etc

6. Walker values and expectations

Walker expectations will cover a wide spectrum according to personal values, experience, fitness, time, etc.

e.g.

- Attractive, undisturbed natural environments, free from excessive development, noise, or interference from other recreational users (including notably off-road trail bike activity);
- Access to fully appreciate our National Parks and State Forests;
- Wilderness experiences;
- Uncrowded trails;
- Well maintained trails, trailhead parking, good signage, facilities, infrastructure, water;
- Good trail information, including good quality maps;
- Easy of access e.g. travel distances from Perth and regional centres;
- Short, easy walk trails (up to 5-10 km; suitable for families including young children; often wheelchair-friendly);
- Circuit day walk trails (typically around 15km) e.g. Eagle's View Trail;
- Opportunities for 2-3 day walks with overnight stays/camping opportunities;
- Longer - or Long-distance – multi-day through walks e.g. Bibbulmun Track;
- Marked or unmarked routes (see below) e.g. Surveyors Heritage Trail, Walyunga & Avon Valley NP;
- Remote area walking, away from established routes e.g. Pilbara, Kimberley, southern wilderness areas.

7. Sources of information on trails and bushwalking areas

- [Bibbulmun Track Foundation](#)
- [Bushwalking clubs](#) – Experienced Club walk leaders generally have knowledge of many ‘traditional’ walk areas and informal walk routes that are not documented
- **Commercial guiding groups**
- [DBCA – Parks & Wildlife Service –Park finder](#) (search under Activities > Bushwalking)
- [Friends of Cape-to-Cape Track](#)
- **LGAs /Shires** eg [Albany](#) ; [Gosnells](#); [Kalamunda](#); [Mundaring](#) ; [Swan](#); [Wandering](#)
- [The Life of Py](#)
- [Total Trails \(Warren-Blackwood Alliance of Councils\)](#)
- [Trails WA](#)
- [WalkGPS](#)

8. Existing bushwalking trails in WA

WA generally has less developed hiking trail experiences than other States and countries. Aside from the two notable exceptions of the long distance Bibbulmun and Cape-to-Cape Tracks, other developed trails are limited in diversity, mostly comprising short family-friendly walk trails.

8.1 Long distance ‘walks’

- **The Bibbulmun Track** – To the general public, ‘bushwalking’ in WA probably means walking the Bibbulmun Track even if the experience is promoted on the official website as a ‘walk’ rather than a ‘bushwalk’. The Bibbulmun Track is a world class walking track and appears to be gaining a profile globally. Quality support materials, facilities and infrastructure, and effective promotion by the Track Foundation, in combination make the Bibbulmun Track (in part or whole) an attractive walk experience to many local and tourist/visiting walkers. For that reason, and the very limited range of other trail choices, over-use is an increasing risk.
- **The Cape to Cape Track** is also gaining in popularity but is less promoted walk than the Bibbulmun Track.
- **Other multi-day ‘walks’**: e.g. **Coast to Nannup Track**; [Coastal Plain Track](#) ; **Kep Track** (multi-use); etc.

8.2 Shorter walks (family friendly or day walks)

Of the 289 WA ‘bush walks’ listed on the [Trails WA](#) site, 90% (29) are less than 15km in length and 70% (202) are less than 5km. Many of the latter are very short walks of 0.5-2km in length. The popular Eagle’s View Trail in John Forrest NP is the only listed circuit bush walk of day walk length (15km or more) in the Perth Hills region within 100km of Perth.

8.3 Marked routes – e.g.

- [Walyunga Survey Heritage Trail](#): Marked by occasional red-orange trail markers and also small information boards at two points. Original guide available at State Library: Battye Library Collection listing ref. PR12454/116.)
- [Avon Valley Survey Heritage Trails network](#): Undated former Department of Land Administration, Mapping & Survey Division publication. Original guide available in W.A. State Library map collection at Battye Library; Call # 9022.H65E635.) Marked by red-orange trail markers and also information boards at a few key points.

8.4 Unmarked and/or undeveloped “trails” (informal routes)

Undeveloped, unmarked trails are an easily overlooked, valid category of hiking/bushwalking trails in mainly remote areas that need to be recognized. Despite the popularity of designated, developed trails such as the Bibbulmun Track, a smaller group of walkers find that their best

walking experience is on informal routes. These informal routes are described in Australian Standard, AS 2156.1 as Class 6 Routes. Class 6 routes have no engineering at all, have no facilities, no marking, and follow substantially unmodified terrain.

Some of WA's best locally known walk areas such as the Stirling Ridge, the Murchison Gorge, and much of Karijini National Park, are undeveloped but attract walkers, largely for that very reason; Parts of the Darling Range close to Perth are also uniquely ideal for such bushwalking.

A cross-country walk route that is unmarked and has no worn foot-track for a walker to follow, can enhance the connection to undisturbed nature. For experienced walkers it also heightens the sense of freedom, exploration, adventure, risk and challenge of the wilderness experience. Many such areas in WA offer unique and memorable walk experiences that rival many trail opportunities available interstate and overseas.

Walkers on such informal routes are typically few in number and are expected to have suitable skills in navigation, map reading and bushcraft. Though carrying emergency devices such as Personal Locator Beacons, they accept they need to be substantially self-reliant.

See under 11 below for sustainability issues.

9. The trails gap: The need for more trails

Aside from the two long distance trails, and the many very short family-friendly walk trails (mainly less than 5-10km) listed on Trails WA, the state has a dearth of easily accessible, developed, day circuit trails of good length to satisfy the many bushwalkers who are seeking neither a longer through-walk nor a very short walk.

9.1 Walks within easy distance of Perth

There are few quality hiking / bushwalking circuit trails in the Darling Range near Perth; The opportunities and growth potential for bushwalking in the Perth region, especially for good new circuit day walks beyond the Bibbulmun Track are under-recognised.

A majority of the existing designated walk trails in the Hills area are short walks at the least challenging end of the spectrum. The most notable exceptions are the long-distance Bibbulmun Track, the 15km Eagle's View Walk Trail in John Forrest NP and the shorter (~11.5km) Numbat Trail in the privately-owned Paruna Sanctuary in the Avon Valley. Walkers seeking another satisfying day's bushwalk on an established circuit trail of good length and in convenient distance of Perth will be quickly frustrated. Despite the continuing popularity of Eagle's View Trail as a day walk circuit, no other public circuit trails offering a comparable quality of bushwalking experience have been developed in the Perth Hills in the 20 years since that trail's 1997 opening. Perth's population has grown by more than 40% over that 20-year period. Great potential exists for attractive new trails

Much more needs to be achieved. The long distance Bibbulmun Track, with some more local 'looping' in its northern section, could help meet some of the demand for local, circuit walks. Development of day walk trails in Avon NP and Wandoo NP should also be priorities among the 20-or-so parks and reserves within 100km of Perth that lack good walking trails.

Existing non-designated tracks in some popular walk areas would be ideal for upgrading to high quality 'designated' trails and could have a substantial positive impact for relatively small effort and cost. e.g. A longer circuit trail in the Victoria Reservoir – Bickley Brook area (Banyowla Regional Park and Korung National Park), only 20km from Perth, would have much wider appeal than the existing 7km Victoria Reservoir Trail, of which more than one third (2.5km), requires walking on bitumen and gravelled road.

9.2 Additional 'iconic' long-distance trails

New 'iconic' trails would take some pressure off the Bibbulmun Track in particular, and provide other attractive distance walking (with camping) opportunities in other parts of the state. Trails linking regional towns such as the recently proposed ["Walk to York"](#) trail from Mundaring to York would be attractive if land management restrictions could be overcome.

9.3 Recognition of unmarked routes

Most would prefer walking on formed trails if they were available and offered quality walk experiences. For others however, bushwalking involving cross-country walking along unmarked routes using traditional map and compass or GPS navigation skills is an important aspect of their bushwalking. It has long been a core activity of several of the bushwalking clubs.

However, land management policies and other pressures in recent years are increasingly restricting club walkers and other experienced walkers to the small choice of existing developed trails, without any focused research being initiated to test the need for such restrictions under WA's particular conditions (see also 11.6). Continuing loss of access to unmarked routes would mean very heavy usage pressures on the much fewer current walking opportunities for club walkers and other experienced walkers. The outcomes for both the environment, for trails, and for recreational bushwalking would be strongly negative.

Recognising such trail opportunities is consistent with the principle of **"A diversity of trails opportunities for different users"**. **Some users deliberately seek out risk and adventure as a life experience and some also seek solitude and a wilderness experience.** Unmarked/Undeveloped Trails are most likely to meet those users' expectations. In such cases over-development of trails (much beyond providing access to the trail-heads) can destroy the users' experience rather than enhancing it.

9.4 Trails networks

'Networks' of trails should be an eventual objective, especially in urban and urban-fringe areas and within forested areas within easy reach of Perth. However, the concept of trails linkages will likely not be practicable in the case of many of WA's widely-spaced remote walking areas. Trails opportunities should not be ignored simply because they do not fit into a broader 'network'.

9.5 Timing of new trails

New trails (including networks) could be proposed under Regional Masterplans ('RM'). However the Strategy also needs to address the urgency for developing additional trails. A trails development approval process should therefore include mechanisms for fast-tracking of individual trails that may have obvious merit for early development, but may not be covered by an existing RM.

10. Overcoming barriers to trails development and participation

10.1 Factors that must be considered include:

- User preferences (diversity in trails experiences);
- Trails facilities and infrastructure (e.g. vehicle parking, paths, gates and styles, foot bridges, trail-head signage, trail markers, picnic areas, etc);
- Funding;
- Finding trails champions (government & community), committed volunteer/other support;
- Quality experiences (meeting user expectations);
- Risks of over-usage / congestion on popular existing developed trails
- Remoteness;
- Vandalism (at trailheads, including vehicle damage)
- Water availability;
- Opportunities for overnight stays/camping;
- General accessibility e.g. lack of public transport to trail-heads; road quality, wilderness areas);
- Climate and seasonal issues;

- Land management access and land use issues (including water catchments; bauxite mining);
- Under-recognition by authorities of traditional bushwalk areas and routes (including wrong assumptions of no use due to no evidence of use, so no access need);
- Insufficiently detailed prescribed-burn alerts (especially burn area maps linked to alerts);
- Rights-of-access;
- Environmental impacts / sustainability / need for local research;
- Sustainability advantages and misconceptions about 'traditional' bushwalking routes;
- Die-back disease;
- Ongoing, committed trail maintenance support (volunteers, commercial operator users);
- Possible decline in volunteering support in traditional clubs;
- Ongoing promotion (but not over-promotion) of individual trails or networks;
- Competing users (e.g. mountain bikes; trail bikes);
- Lack of draft Park Management Plans for most parks in Perth region;
- Risk management & safety
- Public liability issues (including liability insurance costs);
- Public education (awareness of skills needs, safety, etc);
- Quality walk brochures and map guides;
- Pressures to regulate the voluntary efforts of clubs (e.g. leader recognition processes).

10.2 Trails must meet users' reasonable expectations. Trails must not simply be trails for trails' sake. This may ultimately mean fewer formed trails overall but a diverse range of high quality, accessible, fit-for-purpose trails – in the right places for the right reasons. A reactive approach with poor planning may lead to poor quality trails that do not meet user needs and the missing of better opportunities. Generally walkers are seeking natural experiences. Bush trails need to meet that need and not for example just follow existing firebreaks and forestry tracks placed for entirely different objectives and having limited suitability to meet walkers' expectations.

10.3 A clear and unambiguous trails classification (and signage) scheme should be adopted (or adapted) to help ensure intending users are unambiguously informed, and stay within their competency level and enjoy the trail experience, rather than becoming the cause of an ambulance call-out or search-and-rescue operation. 'Over-promoting' of trail experiences (such as undeveloped, unmarked trails) which may be unsuitable for many walkers (though preferred by others) should be avoided.

10.4 Remoteness and accessibility - The Strategy will need to recognize the relative remoteness from urban areas of some of our best longer distance bushwalking opportunities compared to most of the other states (and other countries). That poses special accessibility challenges and emphasizes a need to optimize whatever opportunities we do have to improve access to trails that are within practical distance of urban centres. On the other hand, the very remoteness of our more distant trails is undoubtedly one of the attractions for many walkers seeking a different experience that they can't obtain in more densely populated states and countries. Availability of public transport (or tour operator buses) to trail-heads on reasonable timetables may be a key factor.

10.5 Lack of suitable access and off-road parking facilities at the 'trail-heads' for many popular bushwalk routes - A well known example is the difficult access for the Stirling Ridge Walk route where walkers are forced to add about 5km of uninteresting walking to reach the primary start point for the walk. (Legislation for legal rights-of-way could help address problems of access across private property.

10.6 Park management planning – Most of the parks in the Perth region currently lack approved, published park management plans. Approved plans exist for only 5 out of 22 parks and reserves relevant to 'traditional' bushwalking areas within 100km of Perth.

10.7 Land management issues:

- **Water catchment access** – Access restrictions affect the recreational amenity of outer drinking water catchments far beyond the 2km-wide Reservoir Protection Zones. These include a current ban on backpacking with overnight stays away from the Bibbulmun Track's designated campsites.
- **Bauxite mining expansions** – The greatly accelerating expansion and planned future extent of bauxite strip-mining across much of the Darling Range near Perth has far-reaching implications for the future of bushwalking in reasonably undisturbed areas.

11. Trails sustainability

11.1 Existing and future trails must be sustainable in terms of resourcing, environmental and social impacts. A consistent process should guide the planning, implementation and ongoing maintenance of bushwalking trails and ensure their sustainability.

11.2 Formed trail development is not always a prerequisite for fit-for-purpose, sustainable trails
Not all bushwalking trails require intensive development and ongoing maintenance to remain sustainable. e.g. Undeveloped, unmarked (AS Class 6) trails can be sustainable despite minimal resourcing. Key requirements for such trails may simply be

- i) accessibility (e.g. the provision of suitable vehicle access and parking at the trail-head);
- ii) water availability;
- iii) walker information/education on trail etiquette and safety;
- iv) ongoing low cost monitoring to assess any (unlikely) impacts (e.g. [Fluker posts](#)).

In many cases intrusive 'over-development' of the more primitive trails may destroy the very essence of the experience they previously offered to walkers.

Sections 11.3 - 11.7 below address the characteristics of typical undeveloped routes in the W.A. environment, and the need for research to support informed discussion on their sustainability:

11.3 Intensity of cross-country/off-track bushwalking activity

Usage of existing unmarked routes is rarely intensive and is inherently self-limiting and will remain so, regardless of a growth in bushwalking generally. Consider:

- The walkers typically have a preference for small groups and quiet walk areas. Most off-track walkers would simply opt not to walk in an area they see becoming 'busy' with other walkers as the area will have lost one of the key qualities that attracted them there in the first instance;
- Walkers need navigation skills and greater self-reliance;
- More pre-walk preparation is needed;
- 'Trail-heads' are typically in less familiar, more-difficult-to-access locations;
- Much wider choice of walking opportunities, with the benefit that no one area gets over-used as: i) walkers are few in number in any one area, and ii) each area is only occasionally visited.

As a result unmarked routes are typically exposed to very low levels of activity. Most known routes in walk areas in the Darling Range have been walked by Perth's bushwalking clubs and others over many years yet show no evidence that walkers have passed through i.e. no informal tracks developing and no evidence of trampling of vegetation along the off-track sections. Where animal tracks have been used there is no evidence of damage due to over-use.

11.4 Environmental impacts of traditional (unmarked route) bushwalking

Impacts will be influenced not only by the levels of activity and trail-user behaviours but also by the specific local conditions. WA's particular conditions help minimise any potential impacts of walking along unmarked routes:

e.g. in the Perth region:

- The ground surface in walk areas of the Darling Range is most often a hard, pebbly lateritic surface, which is not vulnerable to compaction effects and lacks any dense ground cover of vegetation;
- Elsewhere the surface is typically (between prescribed burns) blanketed by a cushion of leaf litter rather than ground cover vegetation;
- The jarrah forest and wandoo woodlands are typically mostly very open, with very sparse to patchy understorey;
- Walkers seldom choose identical paths along a general route, so typically no worn track develops;
- Where denser heathlands occur, animal tracks invariably provide an easy way through;
- The vegetation itself is typically harsh and prickly, so bushwalkers are not tempted to 'bush bash' a way through denser patches;

- All walk areas are periodically controlled burned which temporarily removes most groundcover and other understorey in any event. Walkers avoid the sooty, freshly burned areas at a time when fresh vegetation is re-emerging.

Ironically the low impact of walkers along such trails can be mistakenly taken to suggest they are seldom visited and have no special recreational amenity value to the community. The impacts of bushwalking must not be confused or conflated with the impacts of off-track trail biking and mountain biking which in many areas in the Darling Range have become widespread and severe.

11.5 Sustainability advantages of bushwalking routes (marked or unmarked):

Undeveloped walking routes have sustainability advantages over developed trails that are often overlooked.

Consider:

- No track development impacts (e.g. terrain modification) required;
- Low intensity usage (as above);
- Leave no trace: Minimum impact and typically no maintenance needs;
- Routes are impermanent and flexible and require little or no development and infrastructure;
- Can be re-routed at any time if unforeseen impacts (such as increased vegetation density after a controlled burn; other competing/intruding land-use activities; symptoms of over-use – unlikely);
- Access to a spread of routes takes pressure off the few over-used developed trails;
- Over-development of a route can destroy the walker's experience rather than enhancing.

11.6 Examples of marked routes:

- **The Survey Heritage Trail route in Walyunga and Avon Valley National Parks** near Perth has minimal signage, is marked only with occasional marker poles and is otherwise undeveloped. The route requires navigation skills to find the marker posts. Most of the route is across a typical hard lateritic surface and there is no sign whatsoever of any worn trail along the route between marker poles despite the 23 years since the marker posts were put in. Usage of this trail is likely very low however as it has not been actively promoted by Parks and Wildlife or others and route maps are not available.
- **The Northern Territory's Jatbula and Waleka Trails** (Nitmiluk NP, Katherine Gorge) are good, successful examples of sustainable, minimally developed, marked routes which pass through terrain similar to WA's Pilbara region.

11.7 Research needed

Informal walk routes in W.A. have been used by bushwalking clubs and others without impact over many years, several being documented as early as 1985 in "Forests on Foot..." (see Appendix 1). There is no evidence to suggest that intrusive formal track development of these routes is warranted to avoid unintended future over-use impacts. But local research is needed; such research would be a giant step forward toward an overdue, informed discussion on:

- the future sustainability of informal, low intensity walking routes in WA; and also,
- land management access issues affecting such bushwalking, especially access to Darling Range drinking water catchments near Perth (refer statewide Policy 13).

Research should include monitoring of actual walker visitation numbers and impacts in sample walk areas, along with monitoring of non-walker disturbances in the same areas (e.g. new fire control and prescribed burn tracks and forestry operations; off-road vehicle activity; feral animal activity). Research findings could also help establish criteria to guide ongoing evaluation and monitoring of perceived and/or actual impacts of off-track walking.

11.8 Low usage trails

The Strategy should not exclude consideration of low usage trails. Some trails (marked and unmarked routes in particular) may have relatively low use but also be more easily sustainable at minimal cost. They should be retained in the trails network for particular values and/or for maintaining diversity of opportunities.

12. Eco-tourism potential

WA's great range of natural attributes (see under 5 above), can be used to positively differentiate the state's walk trails experiences from what is available elsewhere globally. The best way to intimately experience a place is to walk it. WA has great potential to provide tourists with unique walk experiences.

Long-distance tracks such as the Bibbulmun Track and Cape-to-Cape Track are bringing recognition to WA as a place of walking opportunities, but a large proportion of visitors will not be seeking a long-distance walk nor a very short family-friendly walk. A diversity of trails opportunities need to be available for different users.

Opportunities for visitors should also include:

- **Additional bushwalking opportunities In National Parks within easy distance (~100km) of Perth** - A day circuit bushwalk of around 15km can easily be fitted into a visitor's schedule. cf Eagle's View Trail in John Forrest NP;
- **Marked routes** - The current 'undeveloped' state of many of WA's walking opportunities may itself be a valuable attribute rather than a disadvantage; WA could benefit by differentiating itself, and offering relatively raw wilderness experiences, rather than destroying the essence of the experience through over-development. The untouched wilderness nature of much of WA could be an attraction for adventurous overseas (and local) walkers, offering the different experiences and greater adventure they seek. Some walk routes should be left in a more primitive state (AS Class 5 or 6) to maintain the wilderness experience and to remain 'true escapes'.

Risks

- **Insensitive development** – Insensitive commercial development of trails for tourism risks reducing access, affordability and customary use for local bushwalkers.
- **Sustainability** - There are sustainability and safety risks in 'over-promoting' under-developed and/or under-maintained trail experiences (as historically in parts of Tasmania), but provided the experience on offer is realistically described and appropriately monitored, risks can be minimized and user expectations can be met.

13. Funding issues

- **Funding in support of a healthy community** - Voluntary hiking / bushwalking organisations provide healthy outdoor recreational lifestyle opportunities and should be well supported by various Government agencies, LGAs and organizations involved in promoting or protecting community health and well-being, so helping reduce the costs of health care.
- **Recreation versus Sport** - Bushwalking activities undoubtedly contribute to the health and happiness of the WA community yet as a 'recreational' activity bushwalking is ineligible for some funding through Government agency/s that is available to 'sports' organisations. That inequitable situation needs review.
- **Corporate sponsors /partners** - Local outdoor gear retailers and commercial guided walk operators benefit from the activities of the voluntary bushwalking organisations, so sponsorship / partnering arrangements between businesses and the organisations which strengthen the organisations and bring more customers into the stores or clients to the walks would seem mutually advantageous, yet such arrangements are rare in WA.
- **Alignment of interests** – Voluntary organisations should be encouraged to avoid funding arrangements with any organisation, company or individual whose nature or operations pose actual or potential conflicts of interest or other risks of misalignment that may compromise the broader interests of bushwalking, bushwalkers and/or the natural environment we walk in.
- **Research funding** – Sources of funding are needed to support specific research into the sustainability of typical traditional WA informal walking routes etc, as per 11.6 above.

Appendix 1

Additional Information Sources

1) WA trails and bushwalking areas

- [Bibbulmun Track Foundation](#)
- Commercial guiding groups
- [DBCA – Parks & Wildlife Service –Park finder](#) (search under Activities > Bushwalking)
- [“Forests on Foot – 40 walks in W.A.”](#) - K. Meney & P. Brown, 1985.
- [Friends of Cape-to-Cape Track](#)
- LGAs /Shires eg [Albany](#) ; [Gosnells](#); [Kalamunda](#); [Mundaring](#) ; [Swan](#); [Wandering](#), etc
- [Perth Bushwalkers Club](#) - see [Where we Walk map](#)
- [The Life of Py](#)
- [Total Trails \(Warren-Blackwood Alliance of Councils\)](#)
- [Trails WA](#) - bush walks in WA
- [WalkGPS](#) – bushwalks in the Perth region; and see [Walks & Parks links](#)

2) Access and Issues

- Bushwalking WA - [Issues](#)
- [“The Right to Roam: A Review of Policy and Management of Public Access to Land”](#) - report for the Department of Sport and Recreation; WA. Hughes, M., Tye, M., and Zulfa, M. (Centre for Sport and Recreation Research, Curtin University), October 2010.
- [“Recreation Access to Land in Western Australia: Summary Final Report”](#) - report for the Department of Sport and Recreation; Hughes, M., and M. Tye. (Centre for Sport and Recreation Research, Curtin University), March, 2014.
- [“Recreation Access to Land Phase 2: A Review of Interstate Bushwalking Access and Survey of WA Bushwalkers and DEC Land Managers”](#) - report for the Department of Sport and Recreation; Hughes, M., Tye, M., and D. Costello. (Centre for Sport and Recreation Research, Curtin University), September 2012.
- [“Urban Fringe Bushwalking: Eroding the Experience”](#), Hughes, M., Tye, M., and P. Chandler (Centre for Sport and Recreation Research, Curtin University), 2016. *Journal of Society & Natural Resources* 29 (11): 1311-1324.
- [“Whose Land is it Anyway? Contesting Urban Fringe Nature-Based Tourism and Recreation in Western Australia”](#), Hughes, M., Tye, M., and R. Jones. (Centre for Sport and Recreation Research, Curtin University), 2013. *Tourism Recreation Research* 38 (1): 29-42.
- [Perth Bushwalkers Club](#) – see Environment sub-menu items
- [WalkGPS](#) - see ‘Access & Issues’ sub-menu items

3) What a bushwalking club offers e.g.

- Perth Bushwalkers Club – [What We Offer](#) & [Types of walk activities](#)

4) Bushwalking WA’s role

- [BWA Strategic Plan 2018-2021](#)

5) Risk management, Minimum Impact etc

- Bushwalking WA – [Risk management, minimum impact, dieback](#)
- [Perth Bushwalkers Club](#) – see Training & Safety; and Environment sub-menus
- [WalkGPS](#) - see Access & Issues > Minimum Impact; and Bushwalking > Cross-country walking