



15 May 2020

Hon Mark McGowan BA LLB MLA
Premier
5th Floor, Dumas House
2 Havelock Street,
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Dear Premier

On behalf of the Board of the Bibbulmun Track Foundation (BTF) I am writing to request that funds from the Economic Stimulus Package be allocated to construction and upgrade projects on the Bibbulmun Track.

Background about the Track and the Foundation

The Bibbulmun Track is WA's premier long-distance walking trail stretching 1000 km from Kalamunda to Albany, through some of the most beautiful and peaceful coastal, forest and rural areas of Australia's South West. Along the way, 49 campsites each provide a three-sided sleeping shelter with bunks for 8 to 16, tent sites, a pit toilet and tables.

The BTF is an incorporated association whose main object is to support the DBCA's Parks & Wildlife Service in the management, maintenance and marketing of the Bibbulmun Track. The BTF has over 2500 members and 400 volunteers.

This wonderful recreational resource is free – and used by thousands of West Australians and visitors to WA every year. Results from a user survey conducted in 2015 show that over 300,000 visit days are spent on the Track annually.

Economic benefit of the Track

Bibbulmun Track walkers account for over \$13 million in annual direct expenditure. Much of that is in regional towns that are "off the beaten track" such as Collie, Balingup, Northcliffe and Walpole. Additionally, there are numerous small businesses that offer packaged guided walks, tours and events on the Track.

Prior to a walk, walkers buy gear and equipment, maps and food supplies. Many walkers base themselves in a town for day walks using accommodation, restaurants, transport and other services. Through-walkers stay one or two nights in each town to enjoy hot showers and comfortable beds, dine out, do their laundry and buy food and supplies for the next leg of their walk.

Capacity and infrastructure

The majority of the campsites, and associated infrastructure, are now over 20 years old. Many of the shelters only have capacity for 8 people along with 4 or 5 tent sites. BTF have worked with DBCA to develop a works program to upgrade facilities to cope with increased demand and ensure that the quality of the experience is maintained.

Works include the extension of shelters to increase capacity, installation of additional water tanks, building of board walks and steps in environmentally sensitive locations, erosion control projects in dune areas, upgrading of boot cleaning stations and dieback interpretation and relocation of the southern terminus to the new Visitor Centre in Albany's main street.

The total cost of these works is estimated to be \$2,420,000 with \$1,270,000 shovel ready.

Installation of gates and signage to protect these facilities from illegal vehicle access is also required. The number of trail bikes and 4WDs accessing Bibbulmun Track campsites (often in Disease Risk Areas) is unacceptable. The Foundation is strongly in support of more funding to create better trails for trail bike riders to reduce the impact on walking and mountain bike trails.

Economic and other benefits of maintaining and upgrading the Track

- Immediate benefits: Construction jobs in regional locations along the length of the Track.
- Short-term benefits: Improved facilities and an increase in capacity to meet the needs of West Australians and visitors including individuals of all ages, schools and clubs.
- Long-term benefits: The Bibbulmun Track continues to provide a world-class experience, to encourage more West Australians to participate in bushwalking, and to attract hikers from around the World to WA.

Conclusion

The Bibbulmun Track Foundation respectfully requests that:

1. The WA State Government funds the whole or a large part of the DBCA's works programme for the Bibbulmun Track to ensure facilities meet the needs of walkers with minimal impact to the environment, and to maintain the Track's status as a world-class walk trail.
2. The recommendations made in the State Trail Bike Strategy released in 2008 be reviewed and implemented to reduce the negative impact on walking and hiking trails. Alternatively, that DBCA staff resources be increased to patrol our national parks and trails on weekends to deter illegal access.

Kind regards



Kathleen Broderick
Chair, Bibbulmun Track Foundation

CC:

Hon Roger H COOK BA GradDipBus MBA MLA
Minister for Health; Mental Health

Hon Stephen N DAWSON MLC
Minister for Environment

Hon Alannah MacTIERNAN MLC
Minister for Regional Development

Hon Mick P MURRAY MLA
Minister for Seniors and Ageing; Volunteering; Sport and Recreation

Hon Paul PAPALIA CSC MLA
Minister for Tourism

Supporting information:

Benefits of trails

A global body of evidence shows that the provision of trails leads to multiple health, lifestyle, social, environmental and economic benefits for communities. Generally recognised benefits include:

- › Encouraging more frequent outdoor physical activity leads to improved physical and mental wellbeing and a reduction in lifestyle diseases and associated medical costs.
- › Improved lifestyle due to opportunities for outdoor recreation by individuals, groups, and education and community organisations.
- › Provide low cost facilities for recreation that is accessible to many different groups in the community.
- › Improved awareness and appreciation of the natural environment and support for its conservation and protection.
- › Economic benefits from employment and business opportunities in trail development, management, maintenance, events and supporting products and services.
- › Tourism growth to trail destinations with resulting economic stimulus for local economies.
- › Trails add to the value of nearby properties.

Why investment in trails is so important to outdoor recreation

Many outdoor activities involve some form of journey — whether it's walking, paddling, cycling or climbing - to navigate from one place to another. Tracks and trails provide access, direction, pathways for exploration and open opportunities for a variety of outdoor recreation experiences on land and water.

Well-planned and well-designed recreational trails can reduce environmental impact, attract visitors and encourage more people to be more active, more often.

The provision of well-constructed trails is vital to ensure that these activities are undertaken in a way that protects natural and cultural values and is environmentally and socially sustainable over the long term whilst offering excellent experiences for participants.¹

¹*Department of Sport and Recreation (2019) More People More Active Outdoors A Framework for Outdoor Recreation in Western Australia 2019*

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Consumers are increasingly seeking trails that facilitate their enjoyment and appreciation of an area or trail activities through supporting services, visitor products, interpretation and accessible information.

The growth in the range of people seeking support to explore natural areas (including growth in the retiree generation) has resulted in trail development of soft adventure trails and guided or self-guided experience packages that provide information, accommodation, transport and equipment.²

- › ²*Department of Sport and Recreation (2017). Western Australian Strategic Trails Blueprint 2017-2021.*

More people are bushwalking

The Bibbulmun Track user survey conducted in 2015 showed that over 300,000 visit days are spent on the Track annually.

In addition to individuals, families and tourists, the Track is used by schools and youth groups. In 2019 a total of 410 nights were spent on the Track by Groups – representing 6150 individual nights (average 15 in a group).

The AusPlay survey results released on 30 April 2020 show that bushwalking (hiking) continues to rate in the top 8 out of 133 activities nationally and is in the top 7 in WA. (Recreational walking is Number 1.)

In 2019, 6.3% (1.3 million) of Australia's adult population participated in Bushwalking. In WA, Bushwalking participation was a little lower, at 5.3% (~121,000) of adults. However, this was an increase of 1.2% (~ 27,000 individuals) from 2018. Trail running is also rapidly increasing in popularity with the Bibbulmun Track being one of the favoured trails for this activity. The number of small business operators offering guided walks, tours and events has doubled in the past two years.

Health and Wellbeing

It's widely recognised that there has been a global increase in the development, use and demand for trails to service growth and change in participation in outdoor activities in communities and by visitors. The popularity of individual fitness and recreation activities is increasing while that of organised team sports is static or declining.³

³ Hajkowicz, S.A., Cook, H., Wilhelmseder, L., Boughen, N., 2013. *The Future of Australian Sport: Megatrends shaping the sports sector over coming decades*. A Consultancy Report for the Australian Sports Commission. CSIRO, Australia.