

WEEKENDER ARTICLES: Warriup Swamp

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Sacred swamp listed

By Chris Thomson | posted on September 6, 2018

LISTING of Lake Mullocullup as the latest of 41 registered Aboriginal sites in Albany will have no impact on whether water skiing, now banned on the pristine waterway near Green Range, will again be permitted.

Following an application by Traditional Custodian Carol Pettersen ('City clears muddy waters', May 10), the lake was on August 14 registered as an Aboriginal site.

A spokesperson for the State Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage said skiing could still occur without approval under the Aboriginal Heritage Act.

"For example, the Swan River is recognised as an Aboriginal site and there are a range of activities, such as boating and water skiing, which do not require approval under the Act," the spokesperson told *The Weekender*.

"If any Aboriginal site is to be altered, destroyed or damaged, the department will review the proposal to ensure there is no breach of the Act and provide advice to the relevant parties.

"Consent from the minister may be required."

For 35 years, until the City of Albany stopped turning a blind eye, skiers skimmed across the lake's surface, a practice city officials now acknowledge was illegal.

Skiing is now banned.

But a report by the City's reserves manager Jacqui Freeman ahead of a council meeting in May said a report on whether to seek Department of Transport gazettal of the lake for skiing would be drafted once the outcome of the lake's heritage registration was known.

An anthropologist's report commissioned by the City after City Councillor Ray Hammond described consultation with Noongar people to that point as "a mess" ('The sacred and the profane', November 30), noted the council's chief engineer Matthew Thomson had conceded staff did not do well in their initial consultation with Noongar people.

This week, Diane Evers, the Greens (WA) MLC for the South West Region, which includes Albany and the lake, said she supported moves from some local landholders and several Minang Noongar people to maintain the ban on motor boats at Mullocullup.

"I am supportive of the people who would like to see that water skiing does not go ahead," said Ms Evers who, like Mrs Pettersen, is a former City of Albany councillor.

"It's got too many things against it."

Ms Evers said she would take the matter up with Minister for Transport, Planning and Lands Rita Saffioti.

In response to a letter from Mrs Pettersen to Ms Saffioti, departmental policy officer David McFerran on December 11 acknowledged comments by the Noongar Elder about the potential impact of skiing on the cultural and conservation values of the area.

"I encourage you to work with the City in seeking appropriate management arrangements which can limit the impact on those values while enabling the ongoing use and enjoyment of the reserve by the community," Mr McFerran wrote.

Mrs Pettersen, whose mother was born at the lake 100 years ago, said she was happy with the heritage listing but was aware it would have no impact on whether skiing would again be allowed.

She and fellow Elder Eugene Eades will launch a documentary by Frank Rijavec on the lake at Albany Public Library at 5.30pm on September 13.

"We're wanting as many people to understand how important this place is," she said.

"It is the only place that we Noongar people can access that has fresh water, and the stories and the abundance of cultural resources there to be able to pass on this knowledge to our children.

“All the other fresh water places we’ve had access to, and fresh water places are so important to Aboriginal people, have been disturbed and gone saline thanks to agriculture and other activities.

“This one is still lovely and there are quokkas nearby – I think my mother used to say ‘kwarkas’, or something like that.”

Bookings to see the documentary ‘Sacred swamps’ can be made at <https://albany.spydus.com/Events>

Image: Carol Pettersen at the lake. Photo: Chris Thomson

City clears muddy waters

By Chris Thomson | posted on May 10, 2018

A REPORT commissioned by the City of Albany on whether local Noongar people support water skiing on Lake Mullocullup east of Albany reveals the “root of discord” between some Noongars and the City over the matter is their lack of a say early in the decision-making process.

In his 27-page report, anthropologist Myles Mitchell advises that “feelings of humiliation and anger” resulted, leading to “a less constructive conversation”.

“Whatever the final decision, some Noongar community members who are passionate about this place feel that they had to agitate for their position to be heard, rather than being engaged in a constructive dialogue from an early stage,” Dr Mitchell reported.

“It should be noted that not all Noongar community members shared these concerns.

“Nonetheless, consideration for improved processes in future is provided here.”

The report notes that at a recent meeting with Noongar people at the lake, chief City engineer Matthew Thomson conceded the City did not do well on its initial consultation.

Asked by The Weekender how his organisation intended to right things, City CEO Andrew Sharpe said Dr Mitchell’s report had “given us valuable feedback”, and would help the council decide whether to recommend that the Department of Transport approve water skiing at the lake.

“We respect the cultural significance of Lake Mullocullup to the local Noongar people and, learning from our experiences, are striving to not only improve our consultation with them regarding the lake, but also to employ better practice into the future,” Mr Sharpe said.

“The independent consultant’s report is part of a more rigorous process council has resolved to undertake to consult the Noongar community about the recreational use of Lake Mullocullup.

“We are now waiting on the outcome of an assessment by the Department of Land and Heritage in relation to the registration of Aboriginal sites at the lake before preparing a further report for council.”

Carol Pettersen, a former Albany city councillor whose Noongar mother was born beside the lake in 1917, told The Weekender she had lodged papers with the State to have the lake listed as an Aboriginal heritage site.

Mrs Pettersen anticipates the listing process will take about three months.