



Nathan Rees MP

Minister for Emergency Services

Minister for Water

NEWS RELEASE

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SYDNEY'S CATCHMENT AREAS UNDER REVIEW

State Plan Priority E8: More people using parks, sporting and recreational facilities, and participating in the arts and cultural activity

The Lemna Government is considering a proposal to open up parts of Sydney's restricted catchment area to recreational mountain bikers, NSW Minister for Water, Nathan Rees announced today.

Minister Rees asked the Sydney Catchment Authority (SCA) to consider recent requests for access to Sydney Catchment land for recreational purposes and well as announcing an increase in fines for those caught engaging in illegal activity in the catchment.

"During the public exhibition of the Sydney Water Catchment Management Regulation 2008, a number of requests were made for access to restricted Sydney Catchment land for recreational purposes," Mr Rees said.

"It is important to recognise that by encouraging people to visit our national parks, we are using one of the best tools we have to teach people about the importance of conservation."

The Special Areas comprise more than 370,000 hectares of land surrounding water storages much of which is National Park.

"The Special Areas play an important role in protecting our water supply by acting as a buffer zone to development and help stop nutrients and other substances that could affect the quality of water entering the storages," Mr Rees said.

"I have requested SCA review the mountain bike riders' proposed routes and explore options that allow appropriate access for recreational riders, without impacting on our water quality.

"Our number one priority is the protection of Sydney's drinking water, so any review would need to ensure appropriate controls and regulations to protect water quality are always the first and foremost consideration."

Alex Unwin, Chief Executive of Bicycle NSW, welcomed the review.

"This is a great step towards developing appropriately regulated bicycle access to certain areas of the catchment, balancing community demand for recreational use of the lands with the need to safeguard the water supply for all users," said Mr Unwin.

The move towards more sensible access to Sydney Catchment land follows the formal gazettal of the new Sydney Water Catchment Regulation 2008.

“We are dedicated to ensuring those who use our Special Areas do so without impacting on the security and sustainability of the water supply and have introduced higher fines for people caught engaged in illegal activity in the catchment,” Mr Rees said.

“Fines can be issued for dumping waste, or for trespassing in Special Areas where all access is currently prohibited.

“While a large majority of people who access Sydney Catchment land respect the rules, those who ignore the law can face tough penalties.

“By increasing the maximum fines for illegal activity we are sending a strong message - interfering with the health of our water supply will not be tolerated.”

The maximum on the spot penalties for illegal activity in Special and Controlled Areas will increase to \$750 for individuals and to \$1,500 for corporations. The maximum court fines will also increase to \$22,000 for individuals and \$44,000 for corporations.

In 2007/8 there were 48 fines or pollution notices issued for illegal activity in the Special Areas, in addition to 31 warning letters.

The review of access options will involve extensive consultation with the Department of Environment and Climate Change, the Department of Health, a range of special interest groups and bodies, and the general public.

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