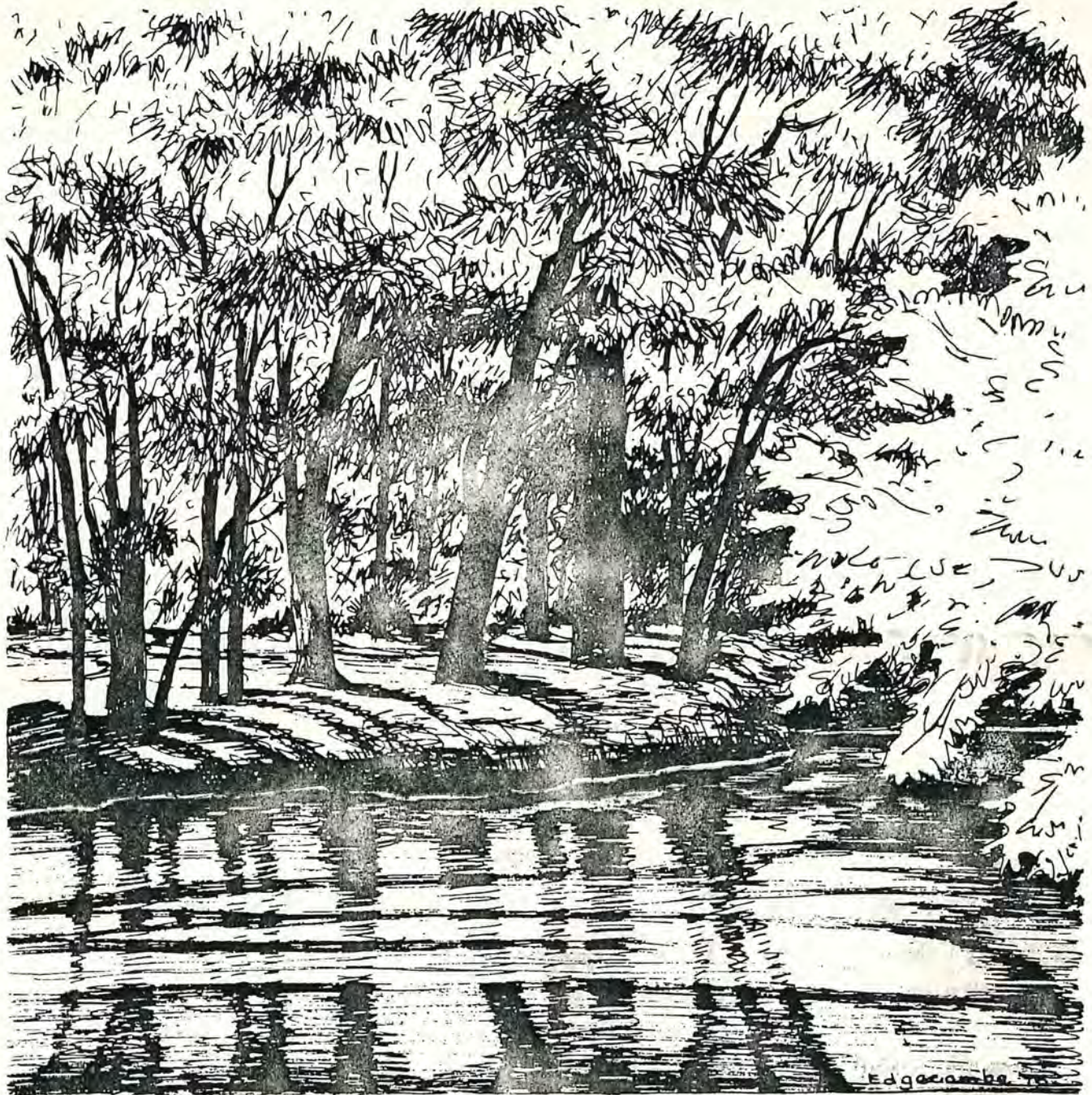


# *Rivers of the Perth Region*



A submission to the Department of Conservation and Environment  
containing recommendations for further reserves in System 6.



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Cover design -- A scene from the proposed Collic Valley  
National Park by Mollie Edgecombe.

First printed July, 1976

Second print October, 1976

## PREFACE

The Amateur Canoe Association of Western Australia represents the rapidly growing number of members of W.A. canoe clubs. As well, we are speaking on behalf of the much larger number of non-affiliated canoeists, including those from schools, universities, youth groups and church clubs. Data on the number of canoeists are hard to obtain, but the most prominent manufacturer has estimated a production of several thousand canoes. As there are several commercial manufacturers and many canoes are made by schools and individual club members, it seems that there are already 5,000 W.A. people who go canoeing.

Canoeing while offering the individual a mixture of relaxation, exercise and adventure, also takes him to the few rivers which flow in the South West of W.A. The canoeist, more readily than most, can appreciate the value of rivers to the environment, for recreation and for purely aesthetic reasons. Unfortunately this appreciation has until recently not been shared by the planners of our society, and the canoeist is constantly reminded of the disdain with which society has treated our fragile rivers.

It has been observed overseas<sup>1</sup> that appreciation of wilderness and its recreational value increases with increasing urbanisation and with higher levels of education. Australian society is becoming increasingly urbanised and more highly educated and it is obvious that preferences for recreation are following the American trend. The popularity of high environmental contact recreation (wilderness recreation) is increasing rapidly and the river valleys of south western Australia (if protected by reserves) will offer future generations the opportunity to escape briefly the tensions of city life.

We hope that the foresight which led to the purchase of Walyunga National Park will lead to the establishment of many more National Parks along our river valleys.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. LARGE NATIONAL PARKS SHOULD BE CREATED ON THE MURRAY AND COLLIE RIVERS, AND FURTHER LARGE SECTIONS OF THE AVON VALLEY SHOULD BE ADDED TO THE EXISTING NATIONAL PARKS.
- B. Wild and Scenic Rivers Legislation analogous to the United States Act<sup>2</sup> should be implemented to evaluate and protect those parts of our rivers not included in National Parks.

Scenic easements<sup>3</sup> should be purchased to enable the preservation of the essential character of undeveloped private land along rivers. Such contracts would respect the rights of private landowners and avoid the high costs of outright purchase of private land.

- C. The E.P.A. should conduct an enquiry into urban water supply policies with the aim of reducing future water consumption and thus minimizing the enormous environmental damage foreshadowed by current trends.
- D. The E.P.A. should be consulted before any further "river training", flood mitigation or desnagging work is carried out.

## MURRAY VALLEY NATIONAL PARK

*The sheer magnificence of an untamed wild river cascading over the rapids and falls of its rocky valley has stirred the American people to preserve many of their wild rivers by act of Congress. The Murray is the river most worthy of such protection in south western Australia and should be given the highest priority for reservation.*

RECOMMENDATION: A LARGE NATIONAL PARK SHOULD BE ESTABLISHED ALONG THE MURRAY RIVER FROM THE DARLING SCARP UPSTREAM TO NANGA BROOK.

The Murray Valley presents an opportunity to reserve a large National Park close to Perth with the recreational and aesthetic attraction of a magnificent wild flowing river in a deep forested valley. The quality of scenery in the Murray Valley far exceeds that of the very popular Walyunga National Park. The valley is already commonly used for recreation and is well provided with picnic areas and access roads, although there are some sections where the hiker or canoeist can escape the cars and cans of the casual sightseer. Indeed, the Murray is the only deep valley in System 6 which contains any significant unspoilt section of natural river at all.

The most valuable section of the valley which should have highest priority for reservation is that section from Nanga Brook to the edge of the Darling Scarp. The upper section (from Nanga Brook to the Nanga Road Bridge) has well developed (indeed overdeveloped) vehicle access. The river consists largely of long pools and small rapids, but includes the spectacular Baden Powell waterspout (a small cascade over a granite bar). This section is ideal for simple canoeing for those wanting a quiet paddle down a peaceful valley with the reassurance of roads visible, or audible, at all times. This section is already widely used in the winter and spring by youth and community groups. The lower section, from Nanga Road Bridge to the Darling Scarp has less vehicular access and offers the hiker or canoeist the challenge of more difficult terrain, and the rewards of spectacular rapids and pristine valley scenery away from motor vehicles. The existing pockets of private land could be purchased if available, or more practically, protected by the purchase of scenic easements restricting development.

The sections of valley above and below the proposed National Park are also worthy of reservation in some form. The upper forested stretches provide the touring canoeist or determined hiker with a challenge of distance away from habitation and an approach to wilderness recreation.

The lower section from the western edge of State Forest to the coastal plain offers the most magnificent river scenery in a partially cleared valley. The reservation of this section would create a very valuable recreational resource but would involve the purchase of private land. A narrow reservation of say 200 metres each side of the river would allow access for recreation without the high costs of large scale land acquisition. A strip reserve coupled with scenic easement protection would be an economical way of preserving this section of the river, which includes the most spectacular rapids in south western Australia.

## COLLIE VALLEY NATIONAL PARK

RECOMMENDATION: THE SECTION OF THE COLLIE VALLEY BETWEEN WELLINGTON DAM AND BUREKUP DAM SHOULD BE RESERVED AS NATIONAL PARK.

The highest priority for reservation along the Collie Valley is the section from Wellington Dam to Burekup Dam. Details of the unique worth of this section have been described at length by Clark and Whitehouse<sup>4</sup> but will be summarized here.

In common with the Avon and Murray, the Collie Valley is already widely used for recreation. In common with the more northern rivers it is a most scenic section of river running through a deep forested valley which attracts many people for picnics, sightseeing and camping. The unique feature of this valley is that it is most attractive and most widely used in summer, rather than in winter and spring.

The Collie river in the section described flows with clean fresh water in mid-summer when other rivers are stagnant or dry. The rapids, pools and waterfalls all have a special attraction for the marron fisherman, the picnicker or the canoeist as they may be enjoyed in the heat of the summer. This is a result of the release of irrigation water from Wellington Dam to flow some 9km down the valley to the Burekup Dam where it is diverted into irrigation channels for farms on the coastal plain. The Collie Valley is a very successful example of multiple land use, as the irrigation, forestry and recreational use of the valley are, at the moment, completely complementary.

The current popularity can be gauged by the estimate that four truck-loads of rubbish are removed from rubbish bins by the Forests Department after a long weekend<sup>4</sup>.

Like the Avon and Murray rivers, recreational use of the Collie Valley is expected to continue to increase both with increase in population and with the trend towards recreation in the valleys of flowing rivers. It is most important that this small area of the Collie Valley be made a National Park, including the purchase or protection by scenic easement of that area to the west of the Gervase forest block.

The proposed National Park is already divided into two sections. The section from River Road to Wellington Dam has a road running along the river with picnic areas provided. It is recommended that no further access be provided and that the forestry track on the northern side of the valley be closed to the general public.

The section downstream of River Road has limited access along the river and by forestry tracks. It is strongly recommended that public access to this section be restricted to non-motorised methods. This will retain a small section for those who wish to walk or paddle into the tranquility of a valley, without the cars, trail bikes and cans which follow unrestricted access.



## NATIONAL PARKS IN THE AVON VALLEY

RECOMMENDATION: FURTHER LARGE AREAS OF THE AVON VALLEY, BOTH UPSTREAM, DOWNSTREAM AND BETWEEN THE EXISTING RESERVES SHOULD BE PROCLAIMED AS NATIONAL PARK.

The Avon Valley is the closest deep river valley to Perth and is already widely used for recreation. Walyunga National Park is a shining example of the value to the community of purchasing private land along rivers for National Parks.

Since 1966 when it was purchased by the government, Walyunga has become increasingly popular with picnickers and sightseers, due to its proximity to Perth and the attractions of the Avon river which flows through the park. Attendance figures, available since 1971, reflect the steadily rising popularity of Walyunga. Some 15,000 vehicles, perhaps 45,000 people, visited Walyunga in 1971, rising to over 20,000 vehicles in 1974 or say 60,000 people. If this trend continues, by the year 2,000 some 60,000 vehicles or almost 200,000 people will visit Walyunga per year. It is evident from declining attendance figures from John Forrest National Park and Yanchep, that people's habits are changing and there is a marked change towards the type of recreation that Walyunga offers in the winter and spring. The attractions of a sparkling flowing river in a natural bush valley have obvious appeal to vast numbers of Perth people. A few come for high environmental contact recreation such as bushwalking or canoeing, but most come for picnics and sightseeing. There is probably a trend towards a higher proportion of Walyunga users enjoying the adventure sports of canoeing, bushwalking or floating down the river in rafts and so on, but there are no statistics apart from personal observations on which to base this view.

Certainly Walyunga has been a success in its short history, and just as certainly there is a great need for provision of further areas of National Park along the Avon Valley.

### 1. DOWNSTREAM FROM WALYUNGA.

It is already evident that the large numbers of visitors are affecting Walyunga, and that more intensive management will be needed to control the pressures of future visitors. There is, however, an alternative which would reduce the growth in numbers at Walyunga without the obvious disadvantages of further expansion of car parks, toilet blocks and so on into our valuable bush areas.

The section of the Avon Valley, from Walyunga downstream to the Upper Swan Bridge is already widely used for recreation, although access is currently restricted to canoeists or bushwalkers. Like Walyunga, it has the attraction of the flowing river, with spectacular rapids, water smoothed rock outcrops and tree-lined pools. The vegetation ranges from natural bush to cleared farmland, but the valley still has considerable appeal, even in the farmland sections.

The purchase (when available) and development of the valley from Walyunga to the Great Northern Highway would channel much of the demand for picnic areas, car parks and so on into a landscape already altered by man, leaving the more pristine upper section of the valley for those prepared to walk or paddle to see it.

2. FROM WALYUNGA TO THE AVON VALLEY NATIONAL PARK. and
3. UPSTREAM FROM THE AVON VALLEY NATIONAL PARK.

Largescale expansion of the existing National Parks is important to cater for the growing recreational needs of urban people. The trend towards high environment contact recreation is likely to accelerate and coupled with the future decrease in other areas available for recreation due to inevitable development, it is highly probable that pressures on the existing Avon National Parks will lead to conflict between competing uses (such as recreation and conservation). It is thus important that steps be taken now to provide further large areas both joining Walyunga to Avon Valley National Park and upstream from the Avon Valley Park towards Toodyay.

Should funds not be available to purchase all the privately owned land as it becomes available, it is strongly recommended that scenic easements be purchased to prevent further deterioration of the Avon Valley landscape.

The Avon Valley is an extremely high priority area for reservation (including largescale purchases) on a number of grounds:

- (a) It is already widely used, and usage will greatly increase on current trends.
- (b) It may soon be the only remaining flowing river of any size within 200km of Perth.
- (c) Should petroleum shortages drastically change our transport patterns as has been seriously forecast, it will be extremely valuable due to its proximity to Perth. It is possible to cycle to Walyunga for the day, and the valley has a railway line which could prove immensely popular should the Sunday drive become beyond the reach of ordinary people. It is not hard to visualize large numbers of people catching a train to Toodyay, then walking or canoeing back to Perth along the valley, (through a continuous National Park).



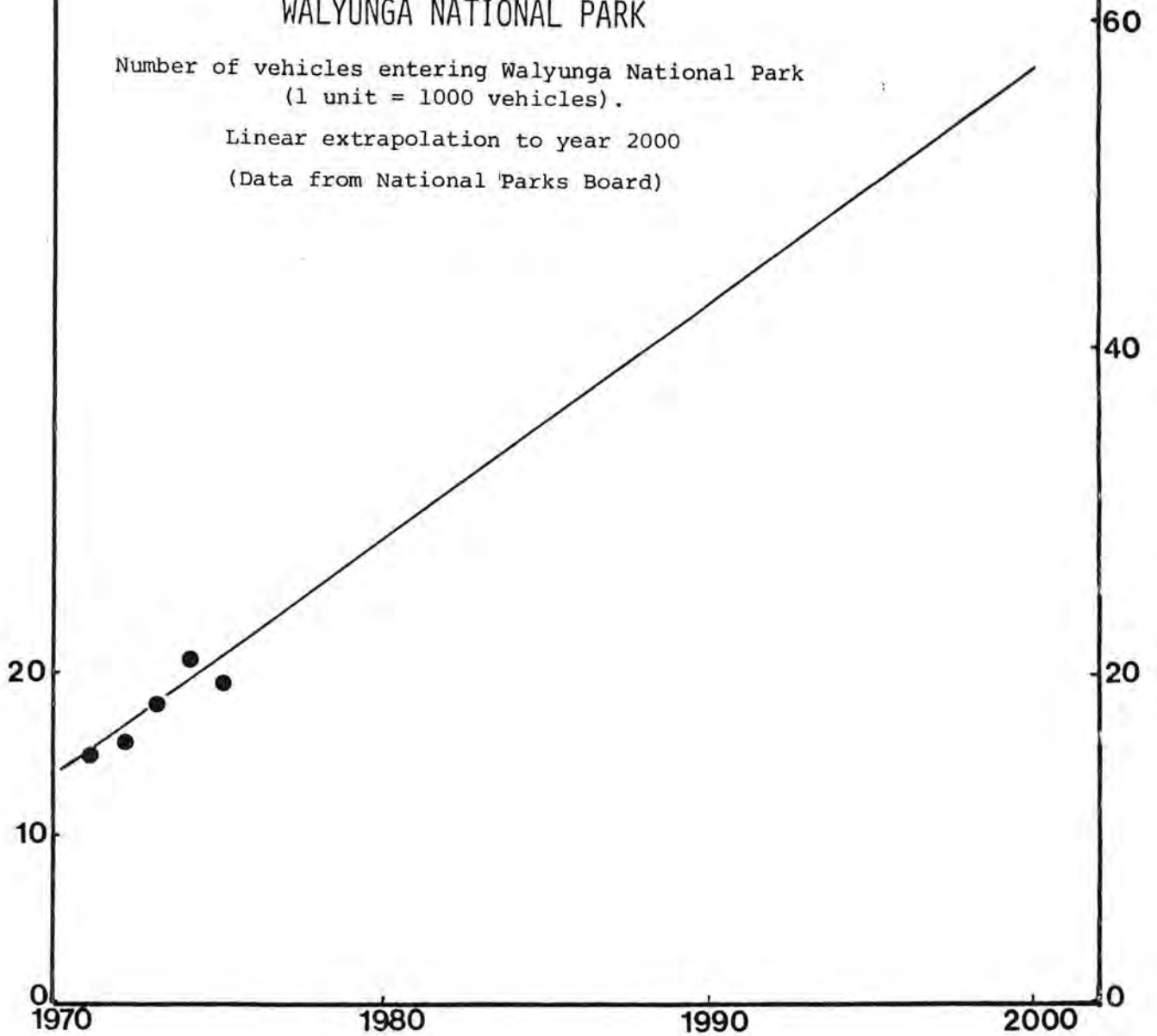
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# ATTENDANCE TREND WALYUNGA NATIONAL PARK

Number of vehicles entering Walyunga National Park  
(1 unit = 1000 vehicles).

Linear extrapolation to year 2000

(Data from National Parks Board)



## NATIONAL PARKS ALONG RIVERS

### SOME GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Where possible National Parks along rivers should include at least all land visible from the river or its banks, to provide a natural vista. However, should shortage of funds or other constraints limit the areas to be reserved, we suggest that the maximum possible length of river be included initially even at the cost of a narrower than desirable National Park. Later expansion can then reserve areas more distant from the river.

We feel the recreational and aesthetic value of the river and its immediate environs is much higher than that of the upper valley and hilltops.

2. Motorised access to river valleys should be limited or often reduced. The Murray valley has roads along both sides of large sections of the river with many fords built across previously attractive rapids. Unless absolutely necessary for management purposes, we feel that roads should not be built along rivers at all and that picnic spots and the like should be accessible only by roads leading down to the river. Construction of road crossings should be minimised. Currently fords are often built across the rock bars which form rapids, diminishing the aesthetic appeal of the section of the river and depriving the hiker, canoeist and sightseer of one of the very features he comes to see.

## URBAN WATER SUPPLIES

Any sincere attempt to preserve for future generations the valuable rivers of Western Australia must start by questioning the whole current philosophy behind metropolitan water supplies.

It is ironic that in W.A., perhaps the most arid state of the most arid continent on earth, there is presented to the public an illusion of limitless cheap water. Perth's per capita water consumption is the highest in Australia and if population growth continues, the current "demand" for water cannot be met without enormous environmental consequences.

MUST WE SACRIFICE THE LAKES OF THE COASTAL PLAIN, THE PEEL INLET AND THE FORESTED RIVER VALLEYS FOR THE EXTRAVAGANT URBAN USE OF WATER?

### SOME EXAMPLES

*".... not out of evil intent or incompetence, but from adamantly following a course of action that reveres engineering values and technology and ignores man's soul and sense of wonder".*

*Brower.*

- A. Costing for future water supplies covers the bare engineering costs of dams and pipelines but makes no attempt to include the many social and environmental costs of the destruction of irreplaceable aesthetic and recreational resources. Apparently to some engineers, a forested river valley has no value until it is drowned by a sterile reservoir.
- B. Pricing policies for metropolitan water supplies are based on the archaic rating system, which ensures that those who use only a little of our precious water subsidize those who squander large quantities.
- C. There are delays of months and sometimes years in installing water meters for new houses. This ensures that the new home owner's introduction to gardening is one of unlimited water. These delays encourage the establishment of exotic plant species, thus perpetuating unrealistically high demand for water.
- D. Organisations like the Kings Park Board, which save water by encouraging Perth people to cultivate native plants rather than exotic species, are short of funds while the organisations, like the PWD and MWS, which grow through the expansion of water use, have enormous resources.

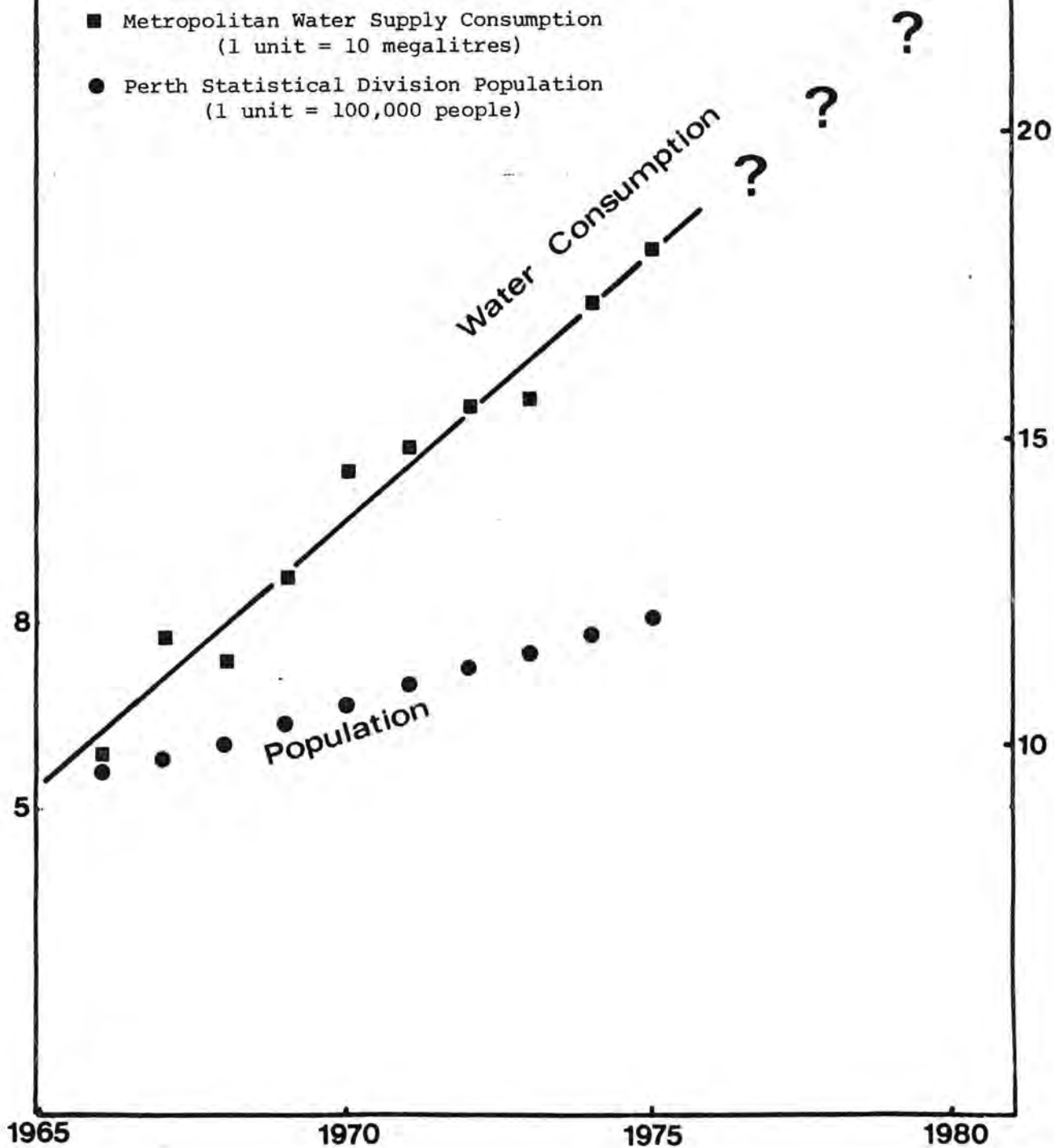


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# PERTH'S ALARMING WATER CONSUMPTION TREND

■ Metropolitan Water Supply Consumption  
(1 unit = 10 megalitres)

● Perth Statistical Division Population  
(1 unit = 100,000 people)



## RIVER "TRAINING" SCHEMES AND DESNAGGING

The Public Works Department, in collaboration with local government bodies has conducted large scale programs of destruction of our rivers in an attempt to reduce periodic unundation of small parts of their flood plains.

Take, for example, the "Avon Training Scheme", whose "doublespeak" title and merciless methods would seem far better suited to a novel by George Orwell than to reality in W.A. In the absence of rational land use planning, sections of Northam town were allowed to develop on the flood plain of the Avon river, in spite of the ready availability of land not at risk from floods. In 1956, after an unseasonal flood had affected part of the town the government instigated the "Avon Training Scheme". Vegetation was cleared and the river bed ripped by bulldozers over a length of about 180km. The shady paper bark thickets which acted as small dams to retain the water in pools were destroyed, releasing sand and draining the pools. The river now rises and falls much more rapidly than it did before, no longer having the reservoir capacity of the big pools. Water speed and erosive force has increased dramatically.

Catastrophic erosion has denuded the river bed, undermining bridge pylons, and has resulted in the silting up of most of the long shady pools which previously had provided water for stock, summer swimming holes for children, and refuges for wildlife.

Vegetation which attempts to re-establish in the denuded river channels is regularly bulldozed or sprayed with defoliants. This operation is termed "maintenance of the Avon Training Scheme".

These unnecessary, brutal measures were employed at great cost to the community in an attempt to stop the perfectly natural, predictable, and beneficial phenomena that the flood plains of rivers are occasionally flooded. As outlined by Kendrick<sup>5</sup> and Casperson<sup>6</sup> the Avon Training Scheme has been of dubious value and is open to the most severe criticism on a number of grounds. Overseas experience in land use planning for flood plains has been ignored<sup>7</sup> and the costly past mistakes made in the United States have been repeated here.

In spite of the widespread realisation of the economic and especially environmental costs of river "training" schemes, during 1974-75 42km of the Moore River was bulldozed and "maintenance" on the Avon further devastated 19km of river<sup>8</sup>.

As well the Nannup Shire Council recently applied for a sizeable government grant to "desnag" sections of the Blackwood river<sup>9</sup>.

CONTINUATION OF THIS ENGINEERING VANDALISM IS TO BE DEPLORED.

It highlights the pressing need for immediate land use planning such as exemplified by the Ohio and U.S. Federal Wild and Scenic Rivers Legislation<sup>10,2</sup>.

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SYSTEM 6

RECOMMENDED NATIONAL PARKS

OTHER IMPORTANT RECREATIONAL RIVERS

