

White water fans chase finance for Perth park

MINH LAM

Perth could soon have a white water park, similar to one built in NSW for the 2000 Olympics, which could bring in up to \$2 million a year to the WA economy.

The Department of Sport and Recreation has called for expressions of interest from the private sector for construction of a white water park.

It could cost up to \$20 million and is likely to be situated next to the new Champions Lake rowing facility in Armadale or on land near the corner of Beeliar Drive and North Lake Road in Jandakot.

The only white water facility in Australia is in Penrith, built for the Sydney Olympics.

Sport and Recreation director-general Ron Alexander said no State Government commitment had been made to the project, including funding.

"The current process is to determine the private sector's interest and capacity to develop such a facility," he said.

Mr Alexander said a facility like a white water park would certainly be more sustainable than the current alternative. In this, water would be released from Stirling Dam for white water enthusiasts. The water

would flow uncontrolled down the Harvey River to create rapids.

In the meantime a lobby group called Friends of White Water Park has been set up by Canoeing WA to promote construction of the facility.

Coordinator Colin Thorpe said a proposed white water park would have 700m of white water rapids.

'This will enable (Avon Descent competitors) to practise and build up their skills all year round.'

Lobby coordinator Colin Thorpe

Two water channels would cater for rafting, canoeing and body boarding, with saline water recycled in the facility.

The facility would also include a moving water safety centre, water conservation education centre and amenities for spectators, a barbecue area and restaurant.

Mr Thorpe said the venue would be world class and attract international events, and teams in training. It would also allow elite

WA athletes to train closer to home. The facility could also be used for training by competitors for the Avon Descent.

"There is not always the guarantee of a white water experience before the race," he said. "This will enable them to practise and build up their white water skills all year round."

Mr Thorpe said analysis done by his group indicated that a white water park would draw up to 20,000 visitors a year and boost the WA economy by \$2 million.

It could be built within two years if approval were given in the next six months.

Tourism Council of WA president Ron Buckey welcomed the push for a new sporting facility but said it was important that it was a world-class venue. International visitors and events would be drawn to it.

"We see that it can be very much an advantage for the State," he said.

"We have ideal weather conditions for it and we should pursue it with a certain amount of vigour."

The period for expressions of interest will close on June 29.

The public can register interest on a petition by visiting the lobby group's website: www.whitewaterperth.org.au.



Rapids run: Events like this, with Australia's Robin Bell competing in an Olympics slalom event, could come to Perth.