

**ECONOMICS AND INDUSTRY
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**HOUSE REFERRAL OF PERMANENT
PARK HOME RESIDENTS MATTER**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 31 AUGUST 2011**

SESSION TWO

Members

**Dr M.D. Nahan (Chairman)
Mr W.J. Johnston (Deputy Chairman)
Mr I.C. Blayney
Ms A.R. Mitchell
Mr M.P. Murray**

Hearing commenced at 10.35 am

McNAMARA, MR KEIRAN

Director General, Department of Environment and Conservation, examined:

SHARP, MR PETER

Director, Parks and Visitor Services Division, Department of Environment and Conservation, examined:

SHARP, MR JAMES ROSS

Deputy Director General, Parks and Conservation, Department of Environment and Conservation, examined:

The CHAIRMAN: Thanks for your appearance before the committee today. This committee hearing is a proceeding of Parliament and warrants the same respect that proceedings in the house itself demand. Even though you are not required to give evidence on oath, any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. Before we commence, there are a number of procedural questions I need you to answer. Have you completed the “Details of Witness” form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you receive and read an information for witnesses briefing sheet regarding giving evidence before a parliamentary committee?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have any questions about giving evidence before the committee today?

The Witnesses: No.

The CHAIRMAN: Today’s hearing has been called mainly to obtain information to respond to a request from the house that the committee consider the appropriateness on undertaking an investigation into all park homes that have been closed or have collectively evicted long-stay tenants since 2006 to ensure compliance with all aspects of appropriate legislation. More importantly I think, for the Department of Environment and Conservation, the committee is also using this opportunity to obtain relevant follow-up information from its earlier inquiry into caravan parks and camping grounds. The committee has received copies of your response in advance, thank you very much. Before we go into questions, would you wish to make an opening statement?

Mr McNamara: The only statement I will make is that we are pleased to have the opportunity to appear before the committee today. We have provided answers to the written questions, as you have said. In respect of closures and evictions, we have not enacted any such actions. The only possible way that that ever happens is when there is a refurbishment or an expansion or whatever of a particular site and there can be a temporary effect, of course, but we are in the business of expanding the opportunities for camping and caravan access to the lands that we manage.

The CHAIRMAN: I understand, though, that you are not on the park owner side of the business so much. By the way, on the ones that you manage are there any long-stays in the parks?

Mr P. Sharp: Yes, at Woodman Point, which is managed by Aspens. They have some long-stay and short-stay accommodation.

The CHAIRMAN: I thought it was the Water Corporation that owned that land; no, it is DEC.

Mr P. Sharp: There are 102 permanent sites in Woodman Point and 151 short-term. Aspens are currently considering an expansion there with the possible addition of another 112 sites.

Mr McNamara: If I can just elaborate—it is in the written information we did provide—obviously we provide a wide array of bush-based camping and caravanning opportunity around the state. But there are eight privately operated caravan parks that operate as leases on CALM act land. So there is the Woodman Point one that Peter Sharp has mentioned, some of the others are at places like, I think, Coalmine Beach at Walpole, at Dwellingup, and at Hamelin Bay in the Leeuwin–Naturaliste National Park.

The CHAIRMAN: Is the Hamelin one managed by DEC or subcontracted?

Mr P. Sharp: It is leased.

Mr McNamara: So a lease under the CALM act. Those leases are exercised by me as the director general after consideration by the Conservation Commission, then tabled in the Parliament, but then the lease obviously imposes the obligations on the lessee to manage the place accordingly.

The CHAIRMAN: One of the major recommendations of the inquiry in respect of DEC was to see if DEC could explore expanding the access to its land for caravanning and camping. We know you had extensive facilities already and you obviously use it quite regularly, but one of the side aspects for it was to target this growing trend for RVs and ecotourism and like facilities for the grey nomads and others. What has been your response since we last met on this issue?

Mr McNamara: The response takes a number of forms. I might just begin by saying that in respect of the national parks, nature reserves, conservation parks and state forests that the department manages, under the CALM act we are required to manage those in accordance with the approved management plan, where one exists, and where one does not exist, we are required to manage those areas in accordance with the necessary and compatible operations provisions of the CALM act. So, the intent of that is that we do not have the unfettered discretion to just go and develop the parks and areas that we manage, but rather we have to go through an appropriate management planning process, which is a public process that results ultimately in ministerial approval of those management plans. We certainly actively pursue in the management plan process those sorts of opportunities. A good example of those is the Cape Range National Park on the Ningaloo coast where the latest management plan—the 2010 management plan—provides for expansion beyond the, I think, current 13 different campgrounds in that national park, so that is an example. We have a range of individual developments, such as expansions of those opportunities at the Cape Range National Park on the Ningaloo coast. We have got some royalties for regions funding, in addition to our normal parks capital funding, which is rolling out expansions of those sorts of opportunities in a range of locations around the south west of the state in particular. We have the Naturebank initiative jointly with Tourism WA, which is looking at sites in some very high-profile locations across the state from Purnululu to Shark Bay down to the south coast.

That is the broad answer, but we have got 330 designated campgrounds on DEC-managed lands and 76 of those have caravan access and that is in addition to the eight privately operated caravan park leases and four leased safari camps that exist on the lands we manage. Those figures of 330 and 76 are slightly different to what was presented to your committee a couple of years ago in your inquiry. The difference is largely in the form of improved data and record keeping of what all our sites are across the state but they are also actually on-ground improvements.

If I could just give one—before I ask my colleagues to add if they wish—sort of anecdotal type of example, in Stokes National Park on the south coast near Esperance, the campground there was burnt down in a serious bushfire a couple of years ago. I was back down there with Minister

Marmion for the reopening of that site several months ago. It is relatively small; it is a fairly small national park. It is a terrific location, but there is I think only about 13 or so bays there. But they have certainly been redeveloped in a way where each individual bay is larger than it was before and that is specifically in recognition of the types of vehicles that people are increasingly using these days. That facility includes a camp kitchen and some of the other facilities that go with that sort of operation.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Just before you were saying about the rollout of areas in the south west. I am not asking about particular places, but how many into the future? Like, your projections of how many are needed because of the pressure that is on. I will use Honeymoon Pool for an example, those sorts of ones have huge pressures and then the camping goes on in the bush and then you get the streamers off every tree around there after Easter, you know, the toilet paper that is in nearly every tree around every bit of water or camp area. So is there a plan to pick up some of that along the way? I will probably chuck Kepwari in there just for the sake of saying it again.

Mr McNamara: Certainly, Wellington National Park, which is the area you are referring to, within our normal capital budget we are doing site planning work for expansion of camping access at Potters Gorge in that national park. We would then roll that out in the years ahead.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: But really what I am after is the rollout down the south west because of recent times that type of camping has become favourable again. It used to be, then it dropped off and, you know, then units became too dear, so they have gone back to that cheaper type. So is there a planned rollout or just saying we might do this in the future?

[10.45 am]

Mr McNamara: We do not have a gross master plan for the number of sites that we are heading towards. It is perhaps a bit more regionalised and localised than that. But I will ask my colleagues to elaborate.

Mr J. Sharp: In relation to the question about responding to increased pressures on those sites, as the director general indicated, management plans, as they are developed across areas, take into account the need for extra visitor facilities. They propose over the 10-year period what should be made available over that 10 years. The management plan is for 10 years, so it is not aggregated; as indicated, it is park by park. The way we are doing management planning now is to do several parks at the same time, so we take a regional perspective of that.

My other comment would be that the response to pressures—and you are right; there are extreme pressures—at certain times of the year is also a management response in terms of quality of experience, I guess. I do not know whether that is a primary interest of the committee, but it has been for us. People want to feel both hygienically safe, but they also want to feel safe. There are issues around these remote areas for some of the people who use them.

In Lane Poole, for instance, there is a very strong cooperation with the police service over Easter, which is a very peak time. There are thousands of people entering into the reserve. There are special arrangements with the police service and with our own staff being rostered into that area. We actually do checks of people going in in terms of liquor and firearms. It is not just issues of capacity, of finding a site; it is about the quality of the experience, and families, in particular, feeling safe in those places. So we respond at both those levels. In terms of the planning, it is the management plan that usually has got a ten-year horizon. The management plan Cape Range, for instance, indicates what sites should be made available at that time.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have, on a site or park basis, on each one of them, a plan that, say, in five or 10 years' time, you expect the demand for increase and you hope to expand our facilities by X amount?

Mr J. Sharp: It is usually done by saying we will increase the capacity of that campground or we will add additional campgrounds during the life of that. So there are those indications.

The CHAIRMAN: So you have a forecast of your expansion or indeed perhaps contraction of the facilities?

Mr J. Sharp: That is right. You are correct, and also replacement, where sites are found not to be working well, we will put another site in.

Mr McNamara: We are running at about a million or so increase per annum in visitation. That fluctuates from year to year. Once again, data collection is an important part of that. There are those sorts of projections, and then they are overlain by very specific considerations like of course Indian Ocean Drive, changing the nature of access to the Mid West coast markedly.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Do you identify areas and then put them out for public tender at all?

Mr McNamara: There are different scales and types of facilities.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I am talking about the bigger ones. I am not talking about the 15 bay.

Mr McNamara: The small campground, the 10 or 15 bays or whatever, that is essentially just a bush camping area, maybe with a camp kitchen and toilet, we just manage it as normal park managers and we have an outstanding campground host system that operates in that, which I am happy to elaborate on.

Then we have other opportunities that are, if you like, closer to a conventional caravan park or whatever. That is the example that we gave of the eight that are formally done under leases. Some of those have been of long standing. There is usually the ability to roll those over, but if they are ever vacated, there is an expression of interest-type process, and then there are new opportunities. We have called expressions of interest for new opportunities that have been developed in recent years at Purnululu, the Bungle Bungles and in other locations. The Naturebank program in particular is looking at about eight or 10 sites around the state that are new sites which will go to the marketplace via an open expression of interest and a selection process preceding the issue of a formal lease.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have an attachment out for a number of campgrounds and major parks managed by DEC indicating not just the number of campgrounds but the sites available? If so, has this been integrated? The Department of Local Government and the department of tourism are trying to develop a dossier of campground sites. Are yours integrated with a dossier for their database?

Mr P. Sharp: To the best of my knowledge they are not. A number of our campgrounds can vary in terms of the number of sites that might be there. They can be managed in a way that ensures the environment is not actually adversely affected. Sometimes, at a particular campground we might have 10 sites, and we might reduce that down because we have to do some works to protect it, or we might increase it. Certainly, to the best of my knowledge, I do not think they have accessed our database. We can certainly liaise with them and make sure that they get on some sort of central database.

The CHAIRMAN: One of our recommendations, given what you have said, was that you pull them together. You have a lot of sites there or facilities. The increasing evidence is they are increasingly in demand because of the eco aspects of your sites.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Mr McNamara, do you want to elaborate on campground hosts? I know it is in your submission, an attachment regarding that. If you wanted to put that on the record—

Mr McNamara: The campground host program started a number of years ago. That is part of our broader volunteer program. What it really consists of is that we have a lot of these campgrounds—the Cape Range coast is a good example, but it is not the only one—and there will be a series of campgrounds or sites that will have room for eight or 10 or 15 tents or caravans to stay there. There will usually be a couple who will occupy one of the sites for the season. They are generally retired people. They provide basic visitor services in terms of information, in terms of safety via their radio

and phone communications capabilities, in terms of fee collection. A number of them convene, social interaction at the end of the day, and advise on best fishing spots and all those sorts of things. Once again, as I travel around the state, which I would like to do more of, those people are outstanding ambassadors and outstanding enthusiasts and contribute a lot to both the experience that people have visiting and staying at those sites, and indeed through things like safety.

The number of people who are registered with us as campground hosts at the moment is 455. The number of those who were active in the last full financial year is 162. They have contributed in combination over 108 000 hours of service. I frequently meet people who will do three months in the season on the south coast and then three months in the Kimberley. They are a de facto ranger force.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Is it true you are going to give some of them AK-47s: “Don’t park there! Go to your camp site!”?

The CHAIRMAN: Is that on the record?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: It was a throwaway.

Mr J. Sharp: They do actually receive training; they do not just go out and do it. As volunteers they come in for several days each year for training. They get a manual. They get back-up. Some of them become honorary CALM officers, so they have powers under—not enforcement powers but reporting powers. They have some status. The feedback is generally we do not have people who want to exercise authority. They are genuinely involved, caring people.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: As in any group, there is always one or two.

Mr P. Sharp: There have been occasions, and we do tend to move them away from those sites that they get very attached to.

Mr J. Sharp: In fact, just elaborating, there are a number of people who are attracted from the east coast. They have been travelling around Western Australia, experienced campground hosts. There are a number now who at our annual training day, about 10 last year, who actually come from the east coast, elsewhere in Australia, to act as camp ground hosts.

The CHAIRMAN: I have sailed through Bass Strait Islands a few times, and Tasmania has hosted most of those islands.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: How do you recruit people to the program? What sort of rate of volunteer collection do you have?

Mr J. Sharp: It is advertised through our website. We have active advertising of volunteer programs. There is generally an over-abundance because of word-of-mouth and that sort of experience; people know about it. As indicated, we have 400 or so on our books; 186 were active because we could not find enough sites for all of them. So there is actually an oversupply. We try to even that out.

Mr P. Sharp: We go to our regions and we ask them to nominate all the sites they want to have campground hosts residing in, and then we offer them out, because we have got a wide range of volunteers, and we offer those locations and the volunteers put their hands up and select the places they want to go. We match them—mix-and-match—and it works well.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: In relation, DEC has the formal pastoral leases—a different inquiry about that. You did mention in that inquiry the campground host has been an opportunity for management of some of those DEC responsibilities. I am wondering whether there is any opportunity for developing camping and caravan facilities on those sites. Technically, as I understand it, it is still not part of the park estate, but DEC is managing those lands. Is that being looked at?

Mr McNamara: Once again, my colleagues can elaborate, but it is certainly in our thinking, in our plans, that we want to develop that a lot more. I think for those who want to travel the inland rather

than the coast, there are outstanding opportunities and there are plenty of people who do want to do that, and I am sure there will be more in the future. There are significant areas of land that people can access.

Certainly there is a lot of informal camping and caravanning on those sites now, especially the ones where there are caretakers. I travelled through the Gascoyne and Murchison about three months ago and caught up with several of our caretakers. They have a low number, but a steady stream, if you like, of people making those sorts of inquiries and staying there. They are just pitching a tent or a caravan close to the homestead area or some other area that they have spoken about. That informality exists and will grow.

There are other examples. I know the Subaru four-wheel-drive club, for example, has adopted one of the former stations and regularly visits there and does some maintenance work and do the things that they wish to do.

Once again my colleagues can elaborate, but we are doing some work to do some more planning for improving the availability of those areas and some access. I would not expect that we would be able to do much at the scale of what we do on the coast and in the south west in terms of facilities just through the cost of the maintenance of those areas. I certainly want those areas to contribute in that sort of way.

Mr P. Sharp: Certainly with the ex-pastoral leases, where we have infrastructure there, we are making those places available for people to go camping and caravanning. There is a small charge attached to that. Usually the people we have looking after the place, the managers of that operation—I think, as Mr McNamara indicated, there is potential there on those pastoral leases for us to engage with the more independent caravanners and campers who want to do vehicle-based camping in a very natural setting, which do not require us to provide water and other facilities and amenities. We are currently investigating how we might be able to put in place some sort of system with Leave No Trace, which is a voluntary organisation, to ensure that people, if they want to engage in that sort of activity, apply the principles. They might do an online course and for a small fee then be able to go and camp in those areas. It is something we have to look at in terms of management capacity and how we can ensure that there are not any significant detrimental impacts. I think it is very doable. It is certainly something that I have been talking with our staff that I want to do.

The CHAIRMAN: You highlight that you have a campground website. Staff have looked through it and said they are quite impressed with it. In our inquiry we found, let us say, an inadequate—generally but not so much yours—and a lack of online access and information about camping in Western Australia.

[11.00 am]

Could you explain what you have done over the last couple of years and where you are going with online information?

Mr J. Sharp: One of the innovations that we have put in place since that time is to trial identified sites, so where we have got significant facilities, they can be well managed by having the staff to manage the outcomes. We have actually moved towards trialling online booking at eight different parks, and hopefully that will expand.

The CHAIRMAN: When did you trial that?

Mr J. Sharp: It started about 18 months ago.

Mr P. Sharp: At the beginning of this year.

Mr J. Sharp: Sorry; correct. At the beginning of this year it actually went to trial, and Peter can outline that. But my understanding is that it has been incredibly successful, and we look like we will be able to expand that, where it is appropriate. It will not be across the whole of the state; it will be

where you can clearly identify a site and you have got a management capacity to ask someone to leave who has not booked it. But it does give confidence to people to travel long distances knowing that it is not pot luck at the end. So there will be a significant proportion of our sites that will move into that —

The CHAIRMAN: Will you have the facility to go on smart phones, and also say where there is surplus capacity? Planning your trip, you want to know where there is availability, particularly during peak times.

Mr J. Sharp: That is being explored. Peter can outline what we are doing with the smart phone capacity.

Mr P. Sharp: Yes. With the online booking system, we are trialling it, and we want to roll it out to those sites where we have management capacity where there is a need to have that sort of provision of service. For example, if you go into Cape Range National Park, and you are travelling all the way up to Exmouth and you swing around, there used to be a time when lots of people would be banked up at the gate, and they could not get a spot. This way they can book, and that is one of the places we are trialling at; similarly at Lane Poole.

In terms of the smart phone and the applications, that is a direction that we are heading in as a department. We are looking at establishing a new website—a very current website tied back with smart phone applications, with the view that we will be able to provide notifications to your phone from all sorts of things, not only on tourist sites et cetera, but other warnings that we might have associated with fire warnings and other important pieces of information. We have been working on that for about nine, 12 months, and we have launched a couple of small applications. We have got a trial for our website coming up soon, and I think within two years it will be a very different scenario.

The CHAIRMAN: Is it separate from your main website, which has a lot of stuff in it?

Mr P. Sharp: It will be linked in to the main website, but it is very much going to operate as a stand alone, but hooked back into the main website. People are having a bit of trouble getting into our website and getting that sort of data.

The CHAIRMAN: Yes, because you have a large brief.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: One of the things that you have identified in your written answers today and in the submissions that you made to the full inquiry was this question about accessibility of some of your parks. You made the comment about parks that are suitable for camping and some other sites that are suitable for caravanning. When we had some of the caravanners themselves in, they would tell us about how they actually went, with their caravans, to the parks that you do not identify as suitable for caravanning. They have large four-wheel drives and they have high ground clearance caravans. I am just wondering: is this something that you could respond to by assisting those people? You have a large road system, and you could be wise and spend more on your roads, but recognising the fact that people are prepared to go further and further off the beaten track with their gear, is there some way that the department can respond to that demand?

Mr J. Sharp: There has been consideration, through that management planning process, of where we get to. One of the key points where I think that raised concerns was Purnululu and the fact that you have a very rough road and very steep creek crossings that are not consistent. We have just had a really wet summer and, therefore, they are all washed out at the moment and trying to be repaired. But the issue has been that even if you have a high-clearance caravan and a great rig, you sometimes then get stuck, and the capacity of staff and others to get people out and fix it for them has been quite difficult. So what we have been doing is that as we review the plans, we will review and improve sites and improve road access. We look at that type of equipment, so we have got to look at that from a policy point of view of where do we make the point of differentiation between an off-road caravan and an on-road caravan, and we are actively doing that.

Mr P. Sharp: If I can expand on that, Purnululu is an example. In the management plan, it specifically says that caravans will not be allowed in the park, and that management plan was prepared 20 years ago. A number of caravans are now designed on the same superstructure as the off-road campers, and that was the issue that arose a few years ago when Minister Templeman was Minister for the Environment. I made a determination, as director, that if the design of the off-road caravan was identical to the off-road camper trailers, which are provided for in the management plan, we would regard that as an off-road camper trailer, and therefore it would be approved. But the concern is where you have other larger caravans that get hooked up et cetera, it causes problems. They are very specific approvals, but we do have that capacity in terms of policy interpretation.

Mr McNamara: Just in terms of some of the questions, there are a few special cases around the state. Much of the demand, especially for the bush style of camping and caravanning can be met by people who are fairly free ranging. The online booking system has not really been a major necessity in this state until relatively recently. The pressure points have been Cape Range National Park, Lane Poole and several others. By and large, across the breadth of the state people have been able to turn up and get what they want. Obviously, that is gradually changing, and therefore we need to move to those sorts of systems, and we have also got to be very mindful of what is available next door to what we actually manage. The towns, the councils and pastoralists also have a significant role to play. Just using that Purnululu example that has just been spoken about, the Mabel Downs pastoral station has been given approval for a 75-site caravan park back at the turnoff from the highway, and then it has got a safari camp approval for that same site, and then another safari camp approval for the border of the national park. We look at what we will do in that space in the totality of what is going on outside as well, and part of the management planning exercise, as Mr Peter Sharp has said, in terms of access for caravans to Purnululu National Park and the explicit provision in the management plan that is still in force that was done some years ago is that there was actually a very pointed debate. Even though I was not central to it at the time, I recall it. It was quite a pointed debate about the nature of Purnululu and whether it was an area that should be kept as four-wheel-drive access and kept as a wilderness experience and so on—the same sort of discussion that takes place in respect of the Gibb River Road, for example. There are some places that a lot of people want to keep as places to which access is reasonably wild.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: What soured the Mt Hart experience, and do you think it has done any damage to people who wish to come into the system?

Mr McNamara: In the medium term, I hope the answer to that latter question is no, but I will ask Jim Sharp, who was intimately involved in dealing with Mr Abbotts in respect of Mt Hart; I will ask him to respond.

Mr J. Sharp: No, I do not. We have put interim management in there, and as has been indicated in our submission, an expression of interest has been put out to private enterprise to take over managing that site, both in terms of the built facilities—the homestead accommodation—and also what was a rudimentary caravan park there, and upgrading it. That has closed. I have not seen the details of it, but it is fully expected that a proponent will emerge out of that process who will invest capital in that site and redevelop that site and improve it markedly. I can say that under Mr Abbotts' management there were issues with caravanners and campers who were being discouraged from going there, or some of them made that claim, because they were a much lower paying option. That will become very much part of the new facility. There has been no concern since we have put an employed manager into the site until the expression of interest is finished. It is performing well and is on the tourism map, so we will see. I think it will be a very positive outcome in the long term.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Okay. We will roll down to the other end of the world, I think. Barn Hill is on a station south of Broome, and we went and had a look at it. It is pretty basic.

The CHAIRMAN: But very popular.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Yes, extremely popular. I am trying to get to the Mt Hart experience. It was said that there were some problems there about management and facilities, but then we go down to Barn Hill, where I think the limit to that caravan park is however many thousand hectares you have left. It just goes out and is very basic, but it is an option because it is very cheap as well.

Mr McNamara: I do not know the site or the station that you are referring to, but that helps encapsulate, if you like, the full range of what needs to be on offer, from very simple, very basic and very cheap. There are a number of providers of that, including roadside rest bays in some areas. Then we are a provider from the bush level through to some reasonably sophisticated levels—some of the safari camps at Purnululu, for example, and the one at Cape Range National Park on Ningaloo Reef, Sal Salis resort. Going back to Mt Hart, we want Mt Hart to cater for people who are self-drive and so on through to people who are coming in by air and on tours. There is actually a very well appointed homestead, restaurant and bar and so on at Mt Hart, so it is a place that we want to cater for the range.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: But does it not come back to the confidence of being able to go in there without the department then coming and saying, “We don’t like your style”? There is natural progression, and their own money is going into smaller development enhancements and those sorts of things. That is what concerns me about how that was handled. I can only go on the coast.

Mr J. Sharp: The detail around Mt Hart: it was actually done by way of a management agreement. So it was not a lease or a licence. The issue of coming to, if you like, a culmination of what was of concern was the fact that we wanted to move it into a formalised arrangement that gave certainty and security for someone who wanted to invest and manage it. So it was actually a management arrangement; it was a management agreement. What operates on pastoral leases—they provide an important service. There are two levels at which they provide that. It is actually the experience on site, but often they also provide a place to stay in transit, and they are quite different in terms of the quality of facilities and their locations and what they provide, because with long distances, sometimes people just want to secure a place where they can stay; it is not where they want to actually have the experience. We do not impact upon what people would do on a pastoral lease. The only impact we have, as the director general has indicated, is that if we provide opportunities within a park—a national park or a conservation park—we do have the obligation to meet certain standards, even if they are very basic, in terms of separation of sites and in terms of the toilet facilities we provide, even if they are just basic long drops. There are all of those sorts of things and the separation of groups. Some others do not meet those standards or are not required to do it. We are obliged to do that, and we do try to meet those standards and apply those standards, minimal as they might be.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: The distance is a nightmare. You pull up at a roadside stop, and a lot of it is surrounded by national park. There is a lack of toilet facilities. As you get older, the distance has to shorten. I am just concerned about who does the measurement of how far it will be between toilets. Six hundred kays between toilets is a long way.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: At 70 kays an hour!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: We’ll get the bloke in from Main Roads.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: But you know what I am saying. It is the mess where you pull up. When international tourists get there and pull up at a roadside bay, it is just disgraceful. And I think it is a blight on not only DEC but other departments, Main Roads, the whole lot, who took away the rubbish bins because they only want to—all those sorts of things. But when it is in a national park, that decision is so you do not get the mess into your park.

[11.15 am]

Mr J. Sharp: We do take it into account; we do provide a lot of facilities according to a management plan. We take into account distances people are away from them wherever we provide

even the most basic facilities—we provide toileting facilities. Something needs to be done about long-distance travel, but we have worked with Main Roads cooperatively. We have developed a number of sites that are not on our land, that are on their land; we have done that on the new ocean road, on several sites, where they have given money and we have done the design work and provided basic facilities. We hope to do more of that, but they have been very cooperative in doing that and we like to think we have as well. To me that means —

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: When we did the original inquiry, some bloke, I do not remember his name, from Main Roads came in and his job was this. And I felt he actually had a good handle on it.

The CHAIRMAN: You do have rubbish; you have a lot of people giving you rubbish free so you can take care of it.

Mr J. Sharp: Absolutely.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: There is no question that there needs to be more adequate bays with better services, but this is a huge state, I understand, and it is taking a while to get it organised.

The CHAIRMAN: What do you mean by a safari park? Is that just a name or —

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: You are allowed to go shooting!

Mr J. Sharp: What started it was trying to look at a uniquely, if you like, Western Australian model of accommodation. The word safari actually emerged out of an African—because it was the best to get into the public's mind what it was about. Generally, it is tented accommodation or sometimes it is a little bit harder, but generally recoverable because most of the remote areas, certainly in the Kimberley and even in Karijini in the Pilbara, with cyclone season and be it the very hot dry or whatever season we are in, there is a lot of usage; it is a packed down situation. But the safari camps can attract quite a high-yielding patron; people are willing to pay for good facilities. Some of them in Karijini in the Pilbara and some in Purnululu actually have ensuite facilities. I remember the ones in Cape Range have got good ensuite facilities, yet they are basic at that level, and have a centralised kitchen/restaurant area that serves good food and cold drinks at the right time, and provides basic services to people. It is along that model, and safari, I guess, denotes that it is not a hard-standing motel—bricks and mortar—but it is a high-quality experience.

Mr P. Sharp: It is a direct lift from South Africa.

The CHAIRMAN: I just went to Kenya and did a safari.

Mr J. Sharp: Yes, that was the model.

The CHAIRMAN: In Botswana, they charge sometimes \$3 000 a day.

Mr J. Sharp: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: I did not go to Botswana; I went to talk to bureaucrats not —

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Did you shoot an elephant?

The CHAIRMAN: No, I did not shoot one; I got chased by one!

When does DEC expect to complete its review of campground and caravan opportunities in the Swan region? And is this review looking at tourists as well as residential possibilities?

Mr P. Sharp: It is currently underway. We would be looking at completing that review within the next three months. It will be looking at tourist accommodation rather than residential accommodation, because the main available accommodation is for tourists et cetera, albeit that I did mention that Woodman Point does have some residential accommodation.

The CHAIRMAN: That's a different one.

What is the minimum time frame within which DEC can expect to assume a management role for areas within the proposed Peel regional park and the Preston River to Ocean regional park?

Mr McNamara: Can I just introduce it by saying that neither regional park is established at this point and the lead role in the establishment phase rests with the WA Planning Commission. We work closely with them, but that has to happen first before we assume the on-ground management role and so on. As we said in our submission, none of the land in the proposed Bunbury regional park is yet vested with or managed by us, but a number of parcels of land in the proposed Peel regional park are, particularly some of the nature reserves along the eastern side of the inlet and places like the Creery Wetlands for example. My colleagues can best expand on just where we are in timing, but I met with the Mayor of the City of Bunbury, a couple of senior staff members from the city and our own staff, perhaps only four or so weeks ago and I think that has been or is being followed up with a further visit to Bunbury to progress those discussions. But in terms of timing, I will leave it with my colleagues.

Mr P. Sharp: I was down in Bunbury last Friday for a meeting with the council there. I think that the state and the council are finding a way to progress the Preston River to Ocean regional park, but that is going to be subject to WA Planning Commission approvals.

The CHAIRMAN: Are you going to have caravan park facilities or camping facilities within those —

Mr P. Sharp: I think we have got to go through a process of identifying the potential for inclusion of those sorts of things there. It certainly has not come up in the discussion with the city at this point in time, but I would not preclude that from consideration. Our normal management planning process is that we have a look at the land and see what the capabilities are of the land and whether something like that might fit and be placed there.

The CHAIRMAN: Is it a priority for you to see if you can get camping or caravanning facilities into those new parks?

Mr P. Sharp: Into regional parks?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Mr P. Sharp: I have certainly indicated to our staff throughout the south west that I think that it is important that we cater for that and I think this committee identified the potential for those areas to be considered.

The CHAIRMAN: And the need: there is a need, given the loss of other —

Mr P. Sharp: I think we have to give that every consideration to the nature of the planning process.

Mr McNamara: Really, it depends on what lands become part of the regional parks. We cannot be looked to, certainly, as the sole provider, and probably not even as the main provider. There are certain types of opportunities we can and should provide, and that will certainly be an important consideration. But we have to see exactly what the land is that forms the regional park, what tenure it has, because it can be a nature reserve, it can be a conservation park, it can be local government land, it can be private land, so we have to work through that, and there are different obligations according to different tenures. We have to look at natural values and we have to look at the expectations of local communities and day use and picnicking and all that sort of activity as well. So, it is certainly in the mix, but it needs to be looked at in an orderly way in the context of what the land is that becomes the regional park and what the context of that land is in the broader local community in terms of other opportunities for camping and caravanning.

The CHAIRMAN: In the discussion with Department of Planning, who were not just considering these regional parks, but planning the whole sort of area, we tried to gather their priority for caravan whether it is in regional parks or otherwise and they were noncommittal. My reading of it is that it is not their task to demand certain type of activity. It is up to other parties who want to do it, like you or regional parks or tourism or otherwise. In the planning, are there adequate proponents for caravanning? That is, I think, our concern in respect of those two parks and/or those areas. Because

if you do not get the land suitable for caravanning, you might find that you will want to have it elsewhere so that people can come and use your regional parks.

Mr J. Sharp: It is my understanding that as part of the process, the Department of Planning is doing a review of the potential sites across the Peel Region, and we have contributed to that review. I do not know whether you have met with them.

The CHAIRMAN: Monday.

Mr J. Sharp: And they identified a whole range of sites. We have provided comments on those sites on and off our land—what we saw the values as there—and my understanding is that the government is expecting that there will be some sites identified out of that process. That is my understanding.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: This is not by way of a question but rather a comment. I can understand DEC gets a piece of land and it is a valuable wetland, it is a breeding area, you do not want to have a caravan park there; I understand that. But, I suppose, where the line gets drawn, the WAPC explained that they are the ones that draw the line and you get the land inside. In drawing the line you just hope that on one side of the boundary or another there is enough space, particularly with Peel, for some future development of caravan sites, because if the nature of the land is that it is freehold and it is going to get redeveloped over time, we do not want to end up with no caravan parks, because there is the potential to have effectively no tourism sites between —

Mr McNamara: That is the job of land-use planning and regional schemes or greater Bunbury regional schemes or Peel regional schemes to cater for that full range of uses. It has got to be started at that level rather than left to the level of what we plan for those parts of the land within those region schemes that are assigned to our management.

The CHAIRMAN: I asked the WAPC specifically, “Will there be a caravan facility, a tourist facility, in the Peel area?” And their answer was, “We hope that there will be.” That planning process is quite progressed and that gave us some concern, given the nature of the area and the loss of other camping and caravanning facilities. In other words, we are pretty far down the track and if they say, “hope”, it means they do not have a clearly identified site for it. They did say where they found new sites, and admittedly it was to some extent focused on long stays—the discussion was. In the Peel area they did not identify a caravan park for caravanning for short or long stay and that is a bit of a concern to us, given the nature of the area.

Mr McNamara: It is probably not appropriate for us to comment too much on that—I mean, it is another portfolio—but all I know is that when they do those sorts of plans, we are involved in those processes because there are all sorts of values and all sorts of uses to be weighed up. It is a challenging job for them to correlate urban growth and industry and everything else, but as I have already said in the previous comment, the issue has to start with the broader land-use planning.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: The confusion and frustration in my region is about the proposed Lake Kepwari, which is sort of under DEC control. Then we have Lake Stockton probably four or five kilometres away that is regularly used as an unofficial caravan park. In fact, recently there have been move-on notices to get people to move out of the area, but they are one and the same, although one is very small and probably easier to manage against one that is quite large. The frustration for people who are travelling, the local people who wish to ski and other people who want to use it for commercial purposes, is that there does not seem to be consistency—I understand the legalities—but the consistency about one. And just to say what they are, they are two old mine sites that are filled up with water. One is being used for recreation, the other one is not being used because there are disagreements about liabilities. How come one can be used when it has not been handed back officially—that is my understanding—yet the other one is not moving forward? That could apply to anywhere in the state. How can you have one there and one there under the same management scheme, yet one is not allowed to be utilised?

Mr McNamara: I cannot answer the particulars of the question. It is a situation, I would think, somewhat particular to the Collie area in terms of mine voids being transitioned into recreational use. I know there are liability issues in terms of the water quality and so on post mining and in getting them to the right standard where everyone is satisfied. It is some years since I have been down there; in fact, I have a spot in my diary in early October, you will be pleased to know, to visit Collie and I have got Lake Kepwari on the agenda for that trip, because I want to get my head around where it is at in terms of the progress towards its full openness and availability. I do not know anything about Stockton personally, so I cannot really answer the particulars of the question.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: It is worth a look, because we know how it has just progressed over many years. But the issue is, really how can one be operating and not the other? That is what people are confused about.

[11.30 am]

Mr McNamara: On Kepwari we are certainly heading towards it being able to be open, useable and lawfully used. I do not know the relativity to Stockton, so I cannot —

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Herein lies the problem, as I hear it, and I could ask the question on notice again for you to answer next week. But the fire season is starting and it does not become a priority. Now, I have heard that six years in a row. I do not know which government has been in, I have heard the same thing. So, what I am hearing is that caravan and camping for DEC is certainly not, from what I am seeing, at the top of the list. It does not matter whether it is north, south or east. We are talking about the planning again on the other parts, so really what I am saying is that the focus from our committee is to try to get caravan and camping up a bit in the pecking order, and we do not see that happening.

Mr McNamara: If I can respond to that, leaving aside the particulars of Stockton and Kepwari, which I just do not know the detailed answer to. I think in the submission we have given you all the answers to the questions that the committee put to us. I think we could say that we are being active. The Naturebank sites, the specific sites that we have identified at places like Cape Range, Lane Poole, Wellington and up in the Gooralong area of Serpentine National Park—there is a range of sites that we are actively progressing and I think we are showing that we do have it reasonably high in our priority setting, as we look at the opportunities around the state. We do have a broad range of roles and I am not going to tell our Collie people not to concentrate on fire, but I think we are actively progressing the agenda that is in our charter anyway. The law, the CALM act, says that national parks and conservation parks provide for recreation as well as conservation, and I think we are showing that we are actively pursuing that.

The CHAIRMAN: I just have to call it quits soon. The department of tourism has a planning committee and they are doing an audit. Is DEC involved in that process?

Mr J. Sharp: We are not directly involved in their audit committee but we do have a standing arrangement where we meet regularly with the executive and their senior staff, and alternatively the directors general chair that meeting. So, that is a regular meeting where we discuss —

The CHAIRMAN: And caravan and camping is on —

Mr J. Sharp: Caravan and camping is on the agenda.

Mr McNamara: I can assure you that at the meeting that we had only several weeks ago at our Crawley offices with the CEO of Tourism WA and four or five of her staff and myself and four or five of our staff, the inquiry of this hearing was on the agenda and the issue was discussed.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay; I have a closing statement. Thanks for your evidence today. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Please make these corrections and return the transcript within 10 working days of the date of the covering letter. If the transcript is not returned within this period, it will be deemed to be correct. New material cannot be

introduced by these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information—do we expect any?

Mr McNamara: No.

The CHAIRMAN: — or elaborate on particular points, please provide this when you return your corrected transcripts. Thanks very much again.

The Witnesses: Thank you.

Hearing concluded at 11.33 am