

Supp Info - DEC (A) - 31 Aug 11



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Environment and Conservation**

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Dr Mike Nahan MLA
Chair
Economics and Industry Standing Committee
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Dr Nahan

PARK HOMES CLOSURES

Thank you for your letter dated 24 June 2011 inviting the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) to give evidence at a hearing into the matter of park homes closures to be held on 31 August 2011, and requesting follow-up information regarding the Standing Committee's earlier Inquiry into the Provision, Use and Regulation of Caravan Parks (and Camping Grounds) in Western Australia.

Please find enclosed a submission that addresses the questions in your letter of 24 June.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to your inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Keiran McNamara
DIRECTOR GENERAL

25 August 2011

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DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION RESPONSE TO THE ECONOMICS AND INDUSTRY STANDING COMMITTEE REQUEST FOR FOLLOW-UP INFORMATION REGARDING ITS EARLIER INQUIRY INTO PROVISION USE AND REGULATION OF CARAVAN PARKS (AND CAMPING GROUNDS) IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA – AUGUST 2011

Questions one and two relate to finding 40 from the *Economics and Industry Standing Committee Provision, Use and Regulation of Caravan Parks (and Camping Grounds) in Western Australia* report, namely **“The Ningaloo coast offers considerable potential to expand opportunities for a nature-based tourism experience in Western Australia.”**

Q1. In response to Recommendation 5 from the Committee’s report into the Regulation of Caravan Parks (and Camping Grounds) in Western Australia, has there been any reduction in the amount of accessible area for caravanning and camping in the Ningaloo Coast region?

Recommendation 5: In any future departmental planning for the Ningaloo coast, access for caravanning and camping must be given high priority to ensure no reductions from current levels.

Response:

Cape Range National Park:

There has been no reduction in the amount of accessible area for caravanning and camping in the Cape Range National Park, which adjoins the Ningaloo Coast. There are currently 13 areas set aside for both camping and caravanning.

In addition the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) is currently developing around 20 additional campsites at Kurrajong campground in Cape Range National Park. The design improvements will also allow for caravans as well as camping.

Cape Range National Park Management Plan No.65, 2010 allows for an increase in the number of camping sites overall in the park in line with sustainability considerations.

Pastoral Leases:

The pastoral leases along the Ningaloo Coast are managed under the *Land Administration Act 1997*, administered by the Department of Regional Development and Lands. DEC currently has no management responsibility on these pastoral lands. The coastal strip on Cardabia Station has been surrendered from the pastoral lease as an exclusion (under the *Land Administration Act 1997*), and this land is also currently managed by the Department of Regional Development and Lands.

The State Government is currently considering the pastoral lease exclusion areas along the Ningaloo Coast, including future tenure and management arrangements.

Q2. In response to Recommendation 6, how much coastal land has been identified in the last two years as suitable for camping sites?

Recommendation 6: State planning should ensure that future generations have sustainable access to camping along the coast and the opportunity to experience the marine park first-hand.

Response:

There are currently 13 campgrounds available for both camping and caravanning in the Cape Range National Park. There is a major new campsite identified at Kori Bay, adjacent to Milyering Visitor Centre, along with expansions at Osprey/ Bungarra and Kurrajong, which will increase the number of sites available for both camping and caravanning by up to 50 campsites.

Royalties for Regions funding has also been used to increase the capacity of the Kurrajong campsite in the Cape Range National Park. Planning to increase the number of campsites at other camping areas is underway.

The *Ningaloo coast regional strategy Carnarvon to Exmouth* (Western Australian Planning Commission, 2004) is the main statutory document and continues to provide a planning framework for the management of coastal camping along the Ningaloo coast.

Question three relates to finding 78 which states “**Land availability for the future provision of caravan and camping grounds in Western Australia, particularly in the South West, Peel and Pilbara Regions, can best be met from government owned land, particularly land held under the jurisdiction of the Department of Environment and Conservation and the Western Australian Planning Commission.**”

Q3. *In response to Recommendation 22, can the department update the Committee on the development of caravan and camping sites on land identified for regional parks in the Peel and Greater Bunbury Region Schemes?*

Recommendation 22: Specifically, land identified for regional parks in the Peel Region Scheme and the Greater Bunbury Region Scheme be referred to the Department of Environment and Conservation for its potential for caravan and camping sites.

Response:

DEC is yet to assume a management role for proposed regional parks in areas covered by the Peel and Greater Bunbury Region Schemes. At this stage, neither the proposed Peel Regional Park nor the proposed Preston River to Ocean Regional Park in Bunbury have been established by the Government. Management structures, land tenure arrangements and funding requirements for the parks are yet to be presented to the Government and these issues require consideration prior to the parks being formally established.

Presently, DEC does not manage any land in the proposed Preston River to Ocean Regional Park in Bunbury. The department does manage 17 conservation reserves in the proposed Peel Regional Park. DEC is currently conducting a review of campground opportunities, including areas that are suitable for caravans across the Swan Region that extends from Yanchep to Yalgorup national parks and eastwards into the Perth Hills, including the 17 conservation reserves.

In addition the *Royalties for Regions* program has allocated \$2 million to develop further caravan and camping facilities in national parks in the Peel Region.

DEC is aware that the Department of Planning (DoP) is also assessing potential sites for caravan parks on both government and private land in the Peel Region Scheme area. DEC has been consulted as part of DoP's investigations. Some of these sites are located in the proposed Peel Regional Park. DoP is best placed to provide information regarding these investigations.

Question four relates to Finding 77, namely “**Unless the Department of Environment and Conservation allocates portions of its existing estate and/or future estate to caravanning and camping there will be a continuing shortage of caravan and camping sites.**”

Q4 *In response to Recommendation 19, can the department update the Committee on the Naturebank program ‘aimed at identifying and releasing “investor ready” land for low impact accommodation within the State’s protected areas’? In particular:*

- a) *Has the program achieved its aim of providing an alternative caravanning and camping experience to parks located in urban and town environment?*
- b) *Has this resulted in increased availability of sites in urban and town environments?*

Recommendation 19: The Department of Environment and Conservation take a lead role in identifying and making available land on its estate that could be used for naturebased caravan parks and camping grounds.

Response:

Naturebank is a joint project between Tourism Western Australia and DEC aimed at identifying and preparing sites for development by the private sector of low impact tourist accommodation. Under the *Royalties for Regions* program, the Government has allocated \$5.1 million over four years

(2010/11 to 2013/14) to Naturebank. The current Naturebank site investigations funded through this process are:

- Purnululu National Park (site already allocated for a safari camp at Kurrajong)
- Francois Peron National Park;
- Cape Le Grand National Park;
- Windjana Gorge National Park;
- Wharncliffe Mill in Bramley National Park near Margaret River; and
- Mt Hart Wilderness Lodge in King Leopold Ranges Conservation Park (site released for expressions of interest 15 June 2011).

There are also sites being investigated via the Naturebank project at the Ngamoowalem Conservation Park on land jointly vested in the Miriuwung Gajerrong people and the Conservation Commission, close to Kununurra, and in Millstream Chichester National Park in the Pilbara Region. Specific responses to the questions are provided below.

- a) Yes. Both Mt Hart and Wharncliffe Mill are existing facilities with built accommodation *in situ* but also with caravan and camping capacity. It is envisaged that the commercial proponents selected to take up these opportunities will incorporate and possibly expand caravan and camping capacity at these sites.

An expression of interest for a commercial operator for Mt Hart was advertised in June 2011 and closed on 16 August 2011. Applications will be assessed and a decision is expected in October 2011.

An expression of interest for Wharncliffe Mill is intended to be released in October 2011, following further consultation with traditional owners.

The type of accommodation developed at sites released via Naturebank will generally be driven by commercial factors determined by the private sector proponents. The development of ecolodges/safari camps is generally perceived by the development market to offer higher rates of return and better suit the commercial tour type operations of many developers interested in these properties, particularly in the Kimberley and Pilbara.

The Naturebank program has currently suspended pursuing another site in Purnululu National Park as the existing DEC operated campgrounds and commercial safari camp operations have been supplemented by a development by an adjoining pastoral operator on Mabel Downs station of a 75 site caravan park and the first of two safari camps.

- b) DEC does not manage significant amounts of land within urban or town environments that are suitable for Naturebank style developments and the focus of the project is on more remote regional areas.

Q5. *How many designated camping areas are now on DEC-managed lands?*

- a) *How many of these sites have caravan access?*

There are currently 330 designated campgrounds on DEC managed lands¹ dedicated to low cost in-park camping with 76 having caravan access, though some have size restrictions and are limited to smaller caravans and four wheel drive camper trailers. DEC has refined its data collection and analysis since the Government response in May 2010 to the Economics and Industry Standing Committee report into the Provision, Use and Regulation of Caravan Parks (and Camping Grounds) in Western Australia. New data provide a more accurate figure. In addition there are eight privately operated caravan parks leased on DEC-managed lands which also provide capacity for camping, and four leased safari camps that provide camping but do not cater for caravans.

¹ Department of Environment and Conservation, Parks and Visitor Services RecData, July 2011

The former pastoral leases now managed by DEC and the 2015 pastoral excision process will create opportunities to develop additional low-cost camping and caravan facilities in the Pilbara, Midwest and Goldfields areas. Current indications are that this could add another 13 campgrounds in some of the State's more remote areas.

DEC is also exploring a proposal for additional vehicle based camping on those DEC-managed former pastoral leases where this activity is currently not permitted. These are predominantly in the Pilbara, Midwest and Goldfields regions, where remote camping might be permitted in return for a permit of around \$100 per year or \$50 per month. To qualify, applicants would need to commit to best practice camping and complete online training such as that provided by organisations like Leave No Trace Australia which promote minimal impact visitor behaviour.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

In addition to the above responses, the following supplementary information is provided to assist the Standing Committee.

Attachment A: Camp Ground Host Program

Attachment B: Campgrounds Website

Attachment C: New campground developments being progressed by DEC

Attachment D: Proposal for new campgrounds on former pastoral leases managed by DEC

Attachment E: Length of stay under the *Conservation and Land Management Regulations 2002*

Attachment F: Number of campgrounds in major parks managed by DEC

ATTACHMENT A

Camp Ground Host (CGH) Program

CGH volunteers host at camp sites in national parks and other conservation areas during the busy season (summer in the south of the state, winter in the north of the state). Hosts camp at the site to which they are assigned for an agreed period of time and carry out general duties (e.g. providing information to visitors, maintaining facilities, collecting camp fees). Hosts are issued with volunteer uniforms and are provided with a free site while on duty.

Recruitment:

Prospective hosts complete an expression of interest form and then are interviewed by DEC. All hosts must have a national police check (obtained by DEC's Community Involvement Unit) and, if duties involve working with children, a Working with Children Check is required. The final decision to engage a CGH is with the Manager or Ranger in charge of the specific site.

Training:

Training for prospective CGH's has several components:

- A one-day information session held in March
- A two-day information session held in November
- Two-day senior first aid offered in March and November
- Fire Awareness (one day) offered in March and November
- Aboriginal protocol day offered three times each year.

Key facts on the Camp Ground Host Program:

- The number of registered campground hosts: 455
- Number of active campground hosts in 2010-11: 162
- Number of hours contributed in the same period: 108,830

ATTACHMENT B

BACKGROUND SUMMARY: Campgrounds Website

The DEC Campgrounds website lists 120 camp sites and is ideal for retrieving details about DEC campsites throughout the State. Other features on the website include links to purchase parks passes online, links to park brochures and up-to-date weather forecasts.

The website www.dec.wa.gov.au/campgrounds is a valuable tool for visitor centre and front counter staff when dealing with visitor enquiries about campgrounds in districts and regions.

Online Booking:

During the past few years, the demand at a number of campgrounds across the State has exceeded their capacity, particularly in peak holiday periods.

To assist in managing this influx of visitors, an online booking system has been developed and is being trialled on 12 of the busier campgrounds in the State.

Lane Poole Reserve, Beelu National Park, Cape Range National Park and Purnululu National Park all have campgrounds on the booking system.

The online system provides substantial benefits, and will:

- Assist in site protection by ensuring campgrounds are not overfilled and that impacts on sites are kept under control.
- Help meet growing expectations among visitors that they should be able to plan and book their travel itineraries in advance.
- Assist in setting visitor expectations concerning the type of facilities available, activities they can undertake and distance to nearby attractions.
- Reduce the time spent by Campground Hosts and park/district staff in handling cash payments, as booked sites would be paid for in advance through the online system or over the counter.
- Reduce frustration expressed by visitors who drive long distances and find they are unable to secure a campsite for the night.
- Provide accurate details for visitor trends and movements.
- Assist in providing more equity for visitors on the basis of access to sites.
- Enable DEC to communicate acceptable and unacceptable behaviour expectations to visitors before their visit.
- Ensure a consistent and integrated corporate approach to managing bookings as districts develop their own strategies to manage problems.

ATTACHMENT C

New campground developments being progressed by DEC

In 2011-12, DEC is investing \$814,000 capital funds to provide additional camping and improved visitor facilities at the proposed Goongarrie Conservation Park (\$50,000), Francois Peron National Park (\$120,000), proposed Edel Land National Park (\$162,000), Coalseam Conservation Park (\$42,000), Peak Charles National Park (\$60,000), D'Entrecasteaux National Park at Black Point (\$150,000) and Lake Jasper (\$100,000), and Dryandra Woodland (\$130,000). Some of these projects are continuation of works commenced in previous years. DEC will continue to invest capital funds to develop new and improved camping opportunities across WA.

In addition, in 2011-12 capital funds will be invested into site planning for additional camping and improved visitor facilities at Cape Le Grand National Park, Wellington National Park and Logue Brook.

Royalties for Regions is providing \$4.8 million over four years (2010/11 to 2013/14) to establish low cost in-park nature-based camping opportunities across WA (in addition to \$5.1 million allocated to the Naturebank program). In 2010-11 this has resulted in development of a new camping area at Baden Powell in Lane Poole Reserve to replace the existing campground which has a capacity of 18 sites. The new campground, which is expected to be opened in December 2011 will have 40 individual sites plus two new group camping areas which will have capacity for 20 and 40 campers respectively. In 2011-12 development of an expanded camping area in Cape Range National Park at the Kurrajong campground will result in around another 20 sites. Similar increases in the number of campsites are planned for three other camping areas in the South West and Swan regions.

ATTACHMENT D

PROPOSAL FOR NEW CAMPGROUNDS ON FORMER PASTORAL LEASES MANAGED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION

1. Introduction

The Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) manages a number of former pastoral leases across the State that have the potential to offer recreational camping opportunities. The current tenure of this land is unallocated Crown land (UCL) and therefore the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* (CALM Act) and its regulations do not apply to these areas. This means DEC does not have the capacity to use the CALM Regulations 2002 to manage and charge fees set out in the regulations.

There are currently a number of these areas where DEC does allow camping and there are limited facilities at the sites, usually associated with the previous pastoral lease infrastructure. These are mainly located in the Midwest and Goldfields regions. At many of these sites, fees are charged to recover facility maintenance and management costs.

There are also other areas on former pastoral lease sites where currently no camping is allowed or promoted that could offer excellent recreational camping opportunities. These areas are generally not open to the public, for management reasons. The management reasons generally relate to:

1. Lack of capacity within the district/region to manage and monitor these remote sites.
2. Inability to collect revenue to contribute to the cost of management activities (such as rubbish removal and visitor risk management).
3. Concerns that camping would encourage access to other areas of UCL, so adding to the management issues.

2. Addressing management concerns

DEC actively supports the *Leave No Trace* (LNT) program and has included the LNT messages about minimal impact visitor behaviour within its policies and signage to encourage visitors to adopt and use the principles promoted in the program.

LNT has indicated its willingness to develop and offer an online training program tailored to DEC's needs and, at minimal cost, to allow for potential 'remote' campers on former pastoral leases managed by DEC to gain skills as part of a 'permit' system for camping access to these areas.

3. Proposal

It is proposed to identify a suite of former pastoral leases managed by DEC throughout the Pilbara, Midwest and Goldfields regions, where remote vehicle based camping with no facilities can be permitted, in return for a management fee of around \$100/year or \$50/month.

To qualify, applicants would need to complete online LNT training and meet other conditions as appropriate. These conditions may include having appropriate vehicles (four-wheel drives), satellite phones, EPIRBs, and not staying longer than 28 days in any one area. It is proposed that applicants who meet the conditions and complete the training would be issued with a permit to camp, and may be permitted to take dogs. This proposal is currently being developed by DEC, and is subject to further planning and approvals.

ATTACHMENT E

Permanent and Semi-Permanent Residents

The *Conservation and Land Management Regulations 2002*, specifically Regulation 67 (1), stipulate that:

An authorised officer may direct a person who –

...

- (b) has occupied a site in a camping area for more than 28 consecutive days; or
- (c) is occupying a site in a camping area during the school holidays and has occupied that site for more than 14 consecutive days (whether or not all of those days occur during the school holidays);

to vacate that site.

ATTACHMENT F

Number of campgrounds in major parks managed by DEC

Region/ Park in Western Australia	Number of campgrounds
South West (including DEC's Swan, Warren, Wheatbelt, South West and South Coast Regions)	
Cape Arid National Park	4
Cape Le Grand National Park	2
Fitzgerald River National Park	8
Dryandra Woodland	1
Bibbulmun Track huts	48
Munda Biddi Trail huts	8
Lane Poole Reserve	8
Avon Valley National Park	4
Wellington National Park	2
Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park	3
Shannon National Park	1
D'Entrecasteaux National Park	12
Stirling Range National Park	1
TOTAL campgrounds for major parks in the South West	102
Gascoyne and Pilbara (including DEC's Pilbara and Midwest Regions)	
Francois Peron National Park (in the Shark Bay World Heritage area)	5
Kennedy Range National Park	1
Coalseam Conservation Park	2
Karijini National Park	2
Millstream Chichester National Park	2
Cape Range National Park (in the Ningaloo Coast World Heritage area)	13
TOTAL campgrounds for major parks in the Gascoyne and Pilbara	25
Kimberley	
Geikie Gorge National Park	1
King Leopold Range Conservation Park	2
Purnululu National Park (World Heritage area)	2
Mitchell River National Park	1
TOTAL campgrounds for major parks in the Kimberley	6