

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

INQUIRY INTO SHACK SITES IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
TUESDAY, 3 AUGUST 2010**

SESSION THREE

Members

**Hon Brian Ellis (Chairman)
Hon Kate Doust (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Phil Edman
Hon Colin Holt
Hon Lynn MacLaren**

Hearing commenced at 12.34 pm

MEYERKORT, MR STEPHEN L.

Project Manager, Department of Environment and Conservation, sworn and examined:

SHARP, MR JAMES

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

SHARP, MR PETER

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

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you for coming in.

Mr James Sharp: It is a pleasure.

The CHAIRMAN: We would like to apologise for holding you up and thank you for waiting patiently. It has been a bit of a trying morning, and we started late. Thanks once again for being so patient. I would like to welcome you along and ask you to take either the oath or the affirmation.

[Witnesses took the oath.]

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you. You will have signed a document entitled “Information for Witnesses”. Have you read and understood that document?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: These proceedings are being recorded by Hansard. A transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. To assist the committee and Hansard, please quote the full title of any document you refer to during the course of this hearing for the record, and please be aware of the microphones and try to speaking into them. Ensure that you do not cover them with papers or make noises into them. As we have more than one witness, would you speak in turn so it is easier for Hansard. I remind you that your transcript will become a matter for public record. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today’s proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session. If the committee grants your request, any public and media in attendance will be excluded from the hearing. Please note that until such time as the transcript of your public evidence is finalised, it should not be made public. I advise you that the publication or disclosure of your uncorrected transcript of evidence may constitute a contempt of Parliament and may mean that the material published or disclosed is not subject to parliamentary privilege.

Perhaps if you could make an opening statement, if you wish, to the hearing of your department’s position on these shacks.

Mr James Sharp: Thanks for the opportunity of appearing before your committee. We are here to represent the submission that we made to you. Essentially, we have outlined the responsibilities that the Department of Environment and Conservation has in relation to shacks, and that we apply existing policy in that management responsibility. In essence, the responsibilities we have are at

Donnelly River in D'Entrecasteaux National Park, at the Dampier islands and at the Dampier Archipelago—there are some shacks there—and Wedge and Grey, which are not incorporated in conservation lands managed under the Conservation and Land Management Act, but we were given the responsibility to manage those. As we have indicated in our submission, we have just tried to outline some of the issues that face us in meeting that responsibility.

The CHAIRMAN: I suppose, for starters, what is your definition of a shack?

Mr James Sharp: We actually have used the definition under the Land Administration Act, if I can quote that: if it is a structure that has been erected on public land without lawful authority; if it is a structure, the erection of which is not at the time of erection authorised by the Land Administration Act. So that has generally been—I guess we fall back to a statutory definition as being the basis under which we work.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay. For the benefit of the committee, can you outline the current policy that applies to these shacks in WA now?

Mr James Sharp: Primarily, I will speak to the shacks for which we have responsibility. The shack policy applies statewide. We have applied it, and there is, if you like, a relationship with the Conservation and Land Management Act. Two of the sites I mentioned are covered by the Conservation and Land Management Act. There is a requirement that we have a management plan for those acts, and under that management plan we determine, through a public consultation process and with ministerial approval, how those areas will be managed. Dampier Archipelago, the Dampier islands and Donnelly River fall under that arrangement, and the state government squatter policy deals with that by saying that on crown lands, that is how the policy deals with it; it is dealt with under crown arrangements. As far as Wedge and Grey are concerned, we have applied the policy of putting leases in place with a six-year arrangement for the termination, as is under the policy. However, there have been a series of circumstances by which those leases have been extended, I think on roughly three occasions.

Mr Meyerkort: There have been two extensions.

Mr James Sharp: Two extensions; I stand corrected.

The CHAIRMAN: Two extensions from when?

Mr James Sharp: When the leases were initially allocated.

Mr Meyerkort: The initial lease went from 1995 to 2001, and then there were two subsequent extensions of five years.

The CHAIRMAN: So the latest extension finishes next year?

Mr Meyerkort: On 30 June, 2011.

The CHAIRMAN: You partially answered this question. The original objective of the squatter policy was to facilitate the removal of existing dwellings over a six-year period, but the shacks are still in existence. Were those extensions departmental extensions or government extensions?

Mr James Sharp: It was the decision of the government of the day to extend them under the circumstances of the time.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have a review in place at the moment in your department to review your policy towards how you manage these shacks, or are you waiting for government direction on this, or are you waiting for this committee to make a decision?

Mr James Sharp: Obviously the government and my minister has indicated that she is awaiting the advice or outcomes of this committee. In the meantime, the minister has asked us to consider the propositions in relation to the potential for shacks to be retained and the prospect of public facilities and amenities to occur at the same time. We are working through the application of the policy, if you like, within the context of looking at how that might be achieved.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you work with councils or do you just manage separately without taking into account councils' views and considerations when formulating your management policy?

Mr James Sharp: In terms of management plans, those other situations were required, from a statutory point of view, to have management plans considered by the local authority in which area the park or reserve is located. In the case of Wedge and Grey, the proposition was that those two areas were to become part of Nambung National Park, and so it was in the planning process for Nambung National Park that consideration was given to the future of those areas, and we were given a management order under the then Land Administration Act to manage the squatter shack situation in that setting, but very much taking on board what the local authority's views were in that process. In terms of ongoing negotiations, we keep ongoing contact with local authorities, and that is Steve's responsibility.

The CHAIRMAN: I note in your submission that you mention environmental management and that rehabilitation to repair environmental damage has been necessary in some instances. Are you satisfied with environmental management at this stage? Are these areas complying with your requests?

Mr James Sharp: They are complying; I guess we have been in, as Stephen has indicated, two periods of extensions, so we are actually in a holding position until we end up at a final point, I guess, and that is what we are exploring now—what that final point would be. They are, if you like, very much temporary arrangements; they are not final arrangements. The extensions have meant that the level of investment, certainly by shack leaseholders, has been minimal, as has investment in other infrastructure, because there has been an uncertain future.

The CHAIRMAN: So what you are saying is that it is not being managed now, while you are in this limbo period? Is it being managed sufficiently, or is there evidence of environmental damage at the moment?

Mr James Sharp: There are a range of issues that have occurred in terms of tracks. There is erosion; there is the issue of water in the watertable. All of those issues are there and there is not, if you like, a major scheme in place to deal with them at the moment.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: I was basically going to ask a question along the same lines. We have heard evidence about the various methods that the residents or the users of the shacks are undertaking to deal with human waste. Who actually monitors that? If there was an issue to do with either public health or environmental contamination, whose responsibility would it be to monitor whether that is occurring and to deal with the issues that come up?

Mr James Sharp: Our understanding is that all of the various statutes, if you like, apply, in terms of health and environment. They apply to those situations.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Would you go in to inspect?

Mr Meyerkort: I think the answer to that is that the shack communities, historically, have looked after their own refuse site. The department contributes towards its maintenance, and we liaise with them. We do not direct what they do; it is just something that is traditionally done. We have had people from our contaminated sites branch having a look at it, and we are about to undertake some water sampling and things like that, but that is mainly associated with what might happen with the next phase of whether shacks stay or go.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Is there any program of regularly monitoring the environmental impacts of residents in those areas that you have mentioned—Donnelly River, Dampier, Wedge and Grey?

Mr James Sharp: The answer would be no in terms of specific monitoring programs. Dampier and Donnelly River are part of an ongoing management regime, so our staff would be there as part of the management arrangements; not daily, but as part of the park management program, they will be

inside the park as such. In terms of specific water sampling and monitoring, I cannot answer that question; I do not think there is.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Is this kind of thing dealt with in the management plan? Do you basically set the guidelines for what should be achieved in the management plan, and then hope that the users in that area are following those guidelines?

Mr James Sharp: The guidelines of the management plan?

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Is there no requirement to check to see whether they are or not?

Mr James Sharp: No.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Are you aware of any contamination issues, particularly at Wedge?

Mr James Sharp: No.

[12.50 pm]

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: I am particularly interested in Wedge. You have said that no decision has been made as to what is going to happen long-term at Wedge. I am interested to know whose decision it was and why so much money has been spent to put a bitumen flat top spur road to Wedge off the new Indian Ocean Drive; especially if there are no plans on the table about what is going to happen in the long term.

Mr James Sharp: Originally, there had been long-term plans and the planning work that was undertaken—I think we attached a copy to our submission—was called the “Masterplan: Wedge and Grey”. That was originally written in anticipation that under the policy that stood those two sites would be redeveloped for public usage. The understanding that those sites would always be available in some way as a public amenity and developed as such has driven that planning. The original proposition, when the first lease extension was signed—because we are in the six-year period—was that the shacks would be removed and there would be commercial development of those sites with some publicly provided and commercially provided amenity. That was being driven by that plan. So there has been a long-term plan. I do not think the plan has ever changed; that is, that there would not be some level of public amenity provided at those sites. One of the reasons given for the last extension was that the road, the highway, is still to be completed. The spur roads were always planned as part of the highway to provide public access and as there was uncertainty about the level and type of development that would be there the government decided, at that time, to extend the lease period. But the master plan has driven the understanding that there will always be some level of development for public access and use.

Hon BRIAN ELLIS: Do you know whether any heritage issues or the National Trust’s views were taken into account when formulating the so-called squatter’s policy?

Mr James Sharp: In the time of the squatter’s policy, I do not know. I might defer to Steve in a moment about that. But in the process of dealing with shacks we obviously deal with the Heritage Council, which has a statutory responsibility under state statute for heritage matters. We have consulted with them about how heritage is best maintained on, I think, all sites. We are aware that the National Trust has also had an interest and its views will be taken into account in terms of how we go forward and how those heritage values are managed.

The CHAIRMAN: What is the department’s view on fishermen occupying the shacks? Does the department think that they should or should not be exempt from the policy?

Mr James Sharp: We follow the government squatter policy that has always provided for commercial fishers to have a right of access to pursue their commercial activities while—I think there was some mention or words to the effect about—meeting a sustainable standard. We have always understood that that would be the case. I think that in the Wedge and Grey master plan there was even an allowance for the continuation of operational fishing sites—shacks that support fishing activities.

The CHAIRMAN: Given the existing extended lease situation, is it your view that public access to these amenities and sites is sufficient at this stage or is there a need for more access so that the public has the same equity of access to that land as the squatters have at the moment?

Mr James Sharp: We have long held the view that there is going to be a dramatic change in the level of public visitation to that part of the coast. That is simply based upon the new road projecting a much greater volume of people into the area—apart from the other factors such as population growth and the nearness to Perth of those sites and the other issues that drive demand. We have anticipated that there will be much greater demand for access to that coast and that there will be demand in those areas. In fact, we invested something like \$7 million on major upgrades in Nambung National Park in anticipation of the road upgrade. We put in a major visitor centre based on that expectation and understanding. We expect that there will be increasing demand for and expectation of access to that area.

The CHAIRMAN: Are there any Indigenous or native title issues around these settlements?

Mr James Sharp: Obviously the native title act applies, but Peter handles all our native title issues so he can best answer that.

Mr Peter Sharp: With regard to Wedge and Grey reserves native title, the provisions of the native title act will apply. Those reserves were created in 1995. The native title act came into being in 1993, so there is a requirement for any future actions, whether they be leases or amalgamation of the reserve into the national park, to comply with the native title act under the future acts provision of the native title act. Currently, some quite complex legal issues are being considered by the state. It is also wrapped up in the broader negotiations between the state and South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council to resolve the broad native title claims in the south west of the state. This particular area is subject to the Yued claim.

The CHAIRMAN: Is it your opinion that these shacks can be brought up to the Building Code of Australia; they obviously do not comply at the moment, but could they comply in the future?

Mr James Sharp: That is a very difficult question to answer in terms of my knowledge of the building codes and my experience in relation to them. We understand that they need to meet the code—we have been advised that that is the statutory or legal position—but that would be something really for how that interacts with the local government authorities who administer those codes. I think there is quite a variability in the shacks themselves.

The CHAIRMAN: Along those lines again, do they have any property rights at all? I mean, can shacks be sold legally?

Mr James Sharp: In terms of rights, there is a right that goes with the lease. I think the lease confers a right in terms of occupation of the shack. I think the specific provisions of the Wedge and Grey leases convey what a lease can convey in terms of ownership; it gives ownership of the shack to the leaseholder.

Mr Meyerkort: The lease states that the shack is the property of the shack owner, but they are not meant to assign or transfer ownership of the lease.

The CHAIRMAN: They cannot “on lease” the property?

Mr Meyerkort: No; not at this point. Not under the state government’s squatter policy.

The CHAIRMAN: Or sell?

Mr Meyerkort: Or sell.

Mr James Sharp: And the lease makes that clear.

Hon KATE DOUST: How do you get around that when they are selling those leases?

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Yes; what happens?

The CHAIRMAN: There seems to be a market there.

Hon KATE DOUST: We heard today that that is actually happening in some cases. How do you deal with it given you are saying that those leases should not be on sold?

Mr James Sharp: The lease does not transfer. From our perspective, whoever has the lease has the lease. Now if people come to other arrangements, I do not think that they have ownership. Ownership has not changed hands because the ownership stays with the leaseholder—the person whose name is on the lease.

Hon KATE DOUST: How do they go about changing the name on the lease?

Mr Meyerkort: I might answer some of those questions, Jim—if you like.

Mr James Sharp: Yes.

Mr Meyerkort: You are never going to stop people bartering or shacks changing hands; it is often done in the pub. However, when you are buying a shack you are buying the rights to a key. There is no land title or any property ownership or details that go with it in the normal manner. The department can never stop that happening, but as the project manager who deals with shack owners on a day-to-day basis, I advise them that we cannot transfer the lease because that is written into the shack policy and into the lease itself. However, some people have a different name on the list of names and addresses—different families come and go in terms of who might be using or sharing the shack or who is responsible for it. We will send the lease and the rate notice to someone who may not necessarily own the shack, but as far as our end goes, we do not transfer leases.

[1.00 pm]

Hon KATE DOUST: Do you think at some point there might be some possibility that people would have the opportunity to legally have those names changed on the lease document? Would that make your life easier managing those things?

Mr James Sharp: I guess it is quite clear there is a policy that says they are not. The policy has always been that they are not saleable as such. The idea is to retain the lease as the one lease and the person who takes responsibility for it unless we get a change in that situation.

Hon KATE DOUST: Obviously that policy sets out the theory of how it should be but we are hearing the reality is different to that. In terms of those people holding the key, perhaps that is something we will consider.

The CHAIRMAN: I would like to follow along those lines. The only thing the lease owners own is that lease?

Mr James Sharp: They own the shack.

The CHAIRMAN: They own the shack which is on legal ground. A person who buys that lease, which is happening—I know it is not legal to sell the lease—but the people who are paying up to \$40 000 for a lease, what are they getting? I am a bit concerned that they have not really got anything, have they? There is no legal ownership of anything.

Mr James Sharp: No. From my understanding, no, they do not. And there is no certainty around the lease either. The lease was to terminate, so theoretically you only have what is the residual of a lease period, like you have in any other lease. That is the only value. If people attach other values, that is caveat emptor.

The CHAIRMAN: So under this policy it is a case of the buyer beware because the actual buyer is getting nothing.

Mr James Sharp: Absolutely.

The CHAIRMAN: That is, apparently, around the going market price; around \$30 000 to \$40 000?

Hon KATE DOUST: They said anything from \$5 000 to \$40 000, which is quite a range.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: I do not know if we have heard you detail the environmental issues of shack sites, both the positive and the negative.

Mr James Sharp: The issues we have talked about generically, and we are talking about them in the context of not this uncertainty or just a holding-over period but if you have something that is normalised and, if you like, made permanent or whatever, what we would see needing to be addressed would be those issues around defining roadways and pathways. There are a whole lot of safety and movement of people issues which is environmental as well as safety issues. There are the issues of vegetation loss and erosion. The communities have dealt with that with replanting in some areas and recovering vegetation. They are issues. There are issues about waste water and water itself entering into the watertable. Both those areas—but I think Wedge in particular—is very close to the watertable. There is potential for contamination of water. There is the removal of waste and waste products. In some cases, if it is old building material, there is the possibility of asbestos and those sorts of things. There are a whole range of issues. The benefits that come from people being there is that always when you have people in and close to the land, they have the capacity to be there and be part of managing and being associated with the controlling of activities. I guess that is the balance.

The CHAIRMAN: I will go back a little bit. We spoke about native title. You said you were getting a copy of an opinion. If you get that opinion, could you give a copy to the committee when you receive that?

Mr Peter Sharp: That would be a matter for the State Solicitor to provide us with advice on that. My understanding is that previously when they provided advice that is supposed to be privileged. I can certainly provide it.

The CHAIRMAN: If it is possible, the committee would like a copy of that opinion. What happens at the end of June 2011 in the existing state of play? Have you got plans in place?

Mr James Sharp: There are several scenarios. If the current policy is administered as it is administered, the shacks are removed and a redevelopment program is put in place either by commercialised public expression of interest plus some public infrastructure or whatever, or one or the other or both; secondly, as we have been asked, to explore the options of how those two prospects can co-exist—and we are working through that—of shacks that meet standards remaining but still providing for public amenity and access and redevelopment. That is an option. The third option, I guess, is retained and made normalised as a community as such, then that would be a third option. I think there are a range of options in there. We have been asked by the minister to explore that middle option and look at how that might work.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have any set views of what compromise options would satisfy the department, the state and the local government?

Mr James Sharp: We have worked through, when we met with the two shack communities there, what some of the principles are that would drive that and some of the issues that would need to be resolved in terms of making that work. Part of that is defining areas—how do you define where both access and egress is made by the public as such; what areas are made available for public amenity; how standards are applied? If it was just a development, you would expect a development to look at issues of waste disposal, waste water disposal, water supply, power and those sorts of things. How do you get those to work together in terms of a contribution? There are a whole range of issues and principles that we are working on.

The CHAIRMAN: I am just thinking of the comparison with other states, like Tasmania. What is your understanding of how those states handled these issues? Are there similarities? Are there options there for us to follow in this state?

Mr James Sharp: My greatest—Steve has a greater understanding than I do—is in the other states particularly, they administer shacks on conservation lands, on parks and reserves in a similar way to

what we do using management planning processes and administer that in the context of the park or reserve itself. I think Tasmania is the only state that has gone to a full normalisation, if you like, of shacks across the state. As I understand it, they have done that by way of specific legislation. I think it is the only state that has done that, but with a significant investment of capital. A figure I have got is around the order of \$20 million, but that was based on recouping through the sale of sites and meeting standards. That is a model which I think was a statewide model used in one specific instance. I am not aware of any other models in other states that have looked at the sort of co-development model and retention model.

The CHAIRMAN: On financial issues: is there a financial impact of these shacks on the state and their local government costs? Obviously there is a cost to you to manage these sites.

Mr James Sharp: Yes, there is. In terms of managing them within the national park, that becomes a park responsibility to manage within the park. It is part of the business of managing. There are two different arrangements. At Dampier, licensing is used there rather than the lease. That arrangement is done to an association that manages all of the shacks on behalf of an association in the Pilbara. Then they do subletting of the facilities to members and to the public. In Donnelly, they are individualised. We meet those costs. The costs in relation to the holding arrangements at Wedge and Grey are by way of the lease fees meet what costs there are at the moment plus some money is held in fund for rehabilitation. But in terms of the broader costs, that is an issue I really think for local authorities to look at to see where they would fit in relation to, say, waste and rubbish removal and provision of services if services are expected. There would be costs around that, but there would be significant, I imagine, costs of the infrastructure that is an individual in the community. Those sorts of things are the roadways and other amenities that are expected.

[1.10 pm]

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: I have just been distracted from my original question but I think it was: could you please give us an example of your best-case user-management system in these types of communities? You were talking about if we were to go down that road here, that might be a model to pursue where people who live in that area manage the site. What is an example of the best one in WA, if you could?

Mr James Sharp: I guess there would be two examples in Western Australia where communities have been retained and care for the area. My understanding is that the local authorities in both instances play quite a significant role and that would be Windy Harbour in the Manjimup shire and Peaceful Bay, which would be in the Denmark shire.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: They have good environmental outcomes where the people who live in that area manage the site well?

Mr James Sharp: I could not answer on the basis of an examination of those two sites as such; just through the experience of visiting, they look well cared for and well maintained.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: I noticed in your master plan, which I have just had a quick look through, that in 1999 there was a community consultation process and display that was undergone at Wedge and Grey. Some of the anecdotal evidence there is that the places at Wedge are substandard, there are wiring problems, there are issues with unsafe access to the beach, four-wheel-drive vehicles, children et cetera. Do you have any data that would show that since 1999—we are now in 2010, so there is quite a big time period—as to the number of accidents that have happened at these places in regard to off-road vehicles, fire hazards caused by electrical wiring not being right at the shacks, other sorts of problems that have arisen because these buildings are substandard?

Mr James Sharp: I do not think we have kept statistics on that. At best, it would be anecdotal.

Mr Meyerkort: No, there is no firm data; it is just anecdotal.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: Do you have any anecdotal?

Mr Meyerkort: I can comment briefly, for example, on the off-road vehicle accidents. My reckoning is that there may be four or five serious ones at Wedge per annum. Other issues I am not aware of have been reported.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: So it would seem that, from that 1999 period to 2010, probably these houses are being maintained by the owners so that these problems are not arising. You would have thought that if there was such an issue with substandard wiring et cetera, other problems may have happened there.

Mr James Sharp: I could not comment. I do not have any knowledge. The off-road vehicle one is regular, but it is a bit confused by the fact that there is a high level of visitation from people from off-site.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: It is more bike users than residents. I understand that.

Mr James Sharp: We run campaigns with the police on vehicles entering that area each Easter to try and constrain and control the number of vehicles that are coming from perhaps not even shack owners, but people wanting to use those areas. That whole coast is getting an increase.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: We have had evidence presented to us of illegal dumping. The amount of rubbish that is out there in those communities looks quite concerning. How do you manage that?

Mr Meyerkort: You are probably referring to the illegal dumping of motor vehicles that are abandoned and things like that.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Just a range of household waste, including old tyres, oil, batteries, general rubbish, asbestos, hydrocarbons and plastics.

Mr Meyerkort: Those sort of things are normal to the shack lifestyle and the ad hoc way in which those communities live and use the place. But in terms of car bodies, for example, which is quite a significant problem, the locals seem to take it to one spot. On a couple of occasions, DEC has arranged for a recycler to come in and remove them.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: That is great that you have done that, and we understand there is another arrangement for a private company to come in and buy waste metal that the community residents have organised. But I am more concerned about this general household rubbish, which is accumulating. Does that pose an environmental issue in your view?

Mr Meyerkort: It would pose an environmental problem. The locals are mindful of their activities, so most of the domestic refuse does go to the domestic tip. But at some stage there will need to be a clean-up.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: The domestic tip out there?

Mr Meyerkort: Out there, yes.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Is that managed by the shire? Who takes responsibility for the tip?

Mr Meyerkort: It is a local responsibility by the shack community.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: So the department of environment does not have any responsibility to manage or monitor the environmental impact of this waste?

Mr Meyerkort: I think the difficulty here is that that we are talking about isolated communities. Up until this road went in there, it was very difficult to get there. I think throughout Western Australia there are probably several sites that are like that, and Wedge and Grey just happen to fall into that gambit of, I suppose, illicit refuse sites.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: I am just trying to ascertain who has got the responsibility for that. We mentioned that in country areas, you dig a hole and tip it, but there is usually a shire that is responsible for that. If there were issues arising, you would go to the shire. Who do you go to if there are issues arising with this rubbish tip?

Mr Meyerkort: It would be DEC.

The CHAIRMAN: I know you have given us an attachment—we are running short of time—of the master plan of Wedge and Grey. Can you just detail what you understand would be proposed by this master plan if those shacks are removed?

Mr James Sharp: The proposition was for a range of public amenities, including camping and caravanning opportunities, beach access—those normal types of facilities—being made available in a coastal setting. Again, you are stretching; I have not looked at the plan for some time. That provided the basis for seeking commercial opportunities as well.

The CHAIRMAN: So —

Mr James Sharp: Caravan park, camping and chalets—those sorts of facilities. The consideration has been given if we move ahead and seek that commercial type of opportunity, the state government has committed to a Naturebank program that we are pursuing in national parks, where we making available sites for commercial developers based upon the state providing some of the base infrastructure—roading, water and power. It would be that sort of model of development where that tries to make the sites investor ready. So you would have public amenity and you would have that commercial amenity as well. The plan itself outlines, I think, at each site what the options are and the range of facilities that could be made available, and where the development nodes are for those sorts of opportunities. That was, as I said, developed in 2000.

The CHAIRMAN: You obviously were involved in this plan.

Mr James Sharp: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Was there any known demand for these tourism options at the time when you formulated this plan?

Mr James Sharp: Yes, there was. There was general interest. A lot of the feedback was, though, that developers would much prefer the timing around when there was a road completed—that it was premature to do a lot of that development until that road was in place or it was known that road was to be put in place. Of course, the development of the road was on a timetable that was significantly delayed. Under the previous government there was a timetable that was put out.

The CHAIRMAN: So, obviously this is the department's preferred option for these sites.

Mr James Sharp: Yes, that is right. It was not just the department; it was the department with the local authorities and a very strong community consultation process. The tourism industry and others were involved in that.

The CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions from members; if not, is there anything you wish to add?

Mr James Sharp: Again, if we can help in any other way and if we have not answered adequately, we would be prepared to assist in whatever way we can.

The CHAIRMAN: That is all right. Thank you once again for coming in and thank you for your patience for waiting.

Hearing concluded at 1.19 pm
