

**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 ONE

Members

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

Hearing commenced at 10.45 am**KNOWLES, MR MURRAY****Executive Committee Member, Wedge Island Protection Association,
sworn and examined:****MARR, MR PETER****President, Wedge Island Protection Association,
sworn and examined:****TEUNE, MR ROBERT****Vice President, Grey Conservation and Community Association,
sworn and examined:****SHEPPARD, MR PETER****President, Grey Conservation and Community Association,
sworn and examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: Firstly, I would like to apologise. We have had a few technical mishaps this morning and we have held you up. Thank you for coming. I welcome you. Before we start, I have to ask whether you wish to take either the oath or affirmation.

[Witnesses took the oath or affirmation.]

The CHAIRMAN: 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. Please be aware of the microphones and try to talk into them. Ensure that you do not cover them with papers or make noises near them. As there is more than one witness, can you speak in turn so it is simpler for Hansard? I remind you that your transcript will become a matter for the 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 that publication or disclosure of the 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. Thank you for that.

I understand that you will make presentations to us. We will listen. There may be moments during the presentations that we may have questions that develop from your presentation, and there may be questions at the end. Perhaps you —

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Mr Chairman, perhaps you could —

The CHAIRMAN: Forgive me; I have not introduced ourselves. I am Brian Ellis, the chairman of the committee. Hon Kate Doust in the deputy chair of this committee, Hon Lynn MacLaren is another member and Hon Liz Behjat is sitting in on the committee today.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: I am a blow-in.

The CHAIRMAN: We have apologies from Hon Phil Edman and Hon Col Holt, who cannot make it to today's hearing. If you would like to lead off with your submission, please.

Mr Sheppard: We clearly have a scripted text, but we fully expect that you will ask questions appropriately throughout that; that is how we believe it will proceed. As an opening remark, on behalf of both the Wedge and Grey associations, we have been negotiating with various government authorities for some decades now to get long-term tenure. It is the charter of both organisations to do that on behalf of our members. This is the first opportunity to formally present our case through a formal government process, and we thank the committee for that privilege. We will proceed from there. Each of us has different roles during this hour. We will tag-team as appropriate.

Mr Marr: Thanks, Peter. I speak on behalf of the Wedge Island Protection Association as its president. Obviously we welcome questions as we go. The Wedge Island Protection Association has been in existence since 1968. As Peter said, our charter is to act in the best interests of the Wedge environment, the community and to maintain our members' access to recreational facilities. Over the many years we have worked diligently with both government agencies and our state universities in the areas of environmental protection, heritage and architectural and community planning, site studies and site plans. We have campaigned for formal site management and long-term tenure since the 1970s and we now lead the campaign to bring about a review of policy to enable a balanced management regime to be implemented in the interests of all stakeholders and the general public. Our objective from this presentation today, and from our submission, which we have presented, is that we want to achieve long-term tenure. We do believe that long-term tenure will enable the resolution of issues. We expect this standing committee to recommend a change of policy to create a pathway to enable each shack community to produce a site-specific management plan.

Today in our presentation we will outline why policy change should be affected and we will outline what we want this committee to do. We also intend to respond to some issues that have been raised in other submissions that we have been able to view, and we will outline the need for site-specific plans. With that, I will hand over to Murray to explain the whys behind our process.

Mr Knowles: Thanks, Peter. I guess the opportunity we have here is to present to this committee why the government should in fact take up our case and listen to why we think the shack communities—specifically Wedge and Grey, but it is equally applicable to other shack communities that do not have long-term tenure—as to why the government and this committee should actually take up the cause and have a will to actually do something to resolve it over and above how it has been dealt with in the past. Effectively, for the last 20 years there has been a government policy that says that the shack communities should disappear. That policy has been implemented to varying degrees essentially through the central coast, but other areas have in fact been able to resolve appropriate regulation and management of shack sites around the state, and certainly in other states of Australia.

We are attempting to present here our case, which essentially fits into three categories. Wedge and Grey are used by a large number of people. There are 350 leases at Wedge and about 130 at Grey, but the number of people who use that site for recreational purposes for family-based, low-impact activities is something in the order of 14 000 or 15 000 individuals. You will not see any of that data, because it has never been measured. No data is collected because, theoretically, it is legal occupation so there is no incentive for anyone to measure the need that is being met and the volume of people who use these places.

The CHAIRMAN: How then did you arrive at the figure of 14 000?

Mr Knowles: We have done survey work of people who come to the shacks. We have essentially come up with a model that indicates a multiple of 35 per shack lease. That is an average. We do survey work. In fact, recently the Grey association physically did a survey.

Mr Sheppard: A masters student at Murdoch University, who is also a shack owner, has presented as part of her course a document on this. It gives a number of around 5 000 for Grey.

Hon KATE DOUST: I have not had an opportunity to see one of these shacks. Can you describe for me how rustic they are and what state they are in? If all these other people are coming in, how is that organised? Is it up to the person who has the shack? Do they have friends come in or is there a more organised method for people to use the shacks if they are not the owners?

Mr Teune: We had occasion in November last year to take a gentleman from the National Trust to Grey for a visit. He had the same questions as you. The immediate response is that to really gain an understanding, it is worthwhile paying a visit and seeing the shacks. The observation he made when talking to me about my shack usage was that I obviously paid money to lease the shacks. I said yes, and that we also maintain them. He asked if I rented my shack out to people. I said that we do not rent them out. We bring new people to these communities—this is typical of most, if not all, shack owners—and once they have been there they get access. There is no rental arrangement, but once people have been there and know how to move around and how to operate in the environment —

Hon KATE DOUST: So it more of a word-of-mouth type process?

Mr Teune: It is very much word-of-mouth. But there is also an element that involves a proactive desire on the part of shack owners to introduce people into the area and to share the experience with them. In my example alone we worked out that over the course of the past 12 months up until November in excess of 100 people had used my shack. In fact, I had been there only four times. Many other people had not only used it, but had used it on a regular basis as if it was their own. In many ways every shack is a mini community in and of itself. The thing that the gentleman from the National Trust found quite interesting was the fact that no rent is paid and that there are no formal arrangements. He said that it is almost like a little self-evolved bubble of the community attitude towards the way that shack access is managed. That would be a typical example, I would think, based on the studies we have done on Grey. Some shacks have in excess of 100 people a year use them and in most cases there is no rental pay; it is an access thing.

Mr Knowles: At Wedge some people leave keys. Generally one or two people are there fairly regularly, partly for security reasons, especially when it is the off-season for fishing. There are full-time professional fishermen at Wedge for nine months of the year. Quite often the shacks are made available on the basis that if someone needs to use them, the key is there and there is someone to supervise. The shacks are completely self-contained. They have their own power system with solar power generators and water and gas supplies. There is a range of things you need to do in the right order to fully utilise the shacks. Someone needs to be available to provide that advice. A group of students from the architectural and urban design area at Curtin University of Technology are going to Wedge—this is a regular thing that happens—for a four-day study tour as part of their curriculum. Those 40 students will be billeted out. They will use our community centre as their workshop area while they are there during the day. That is an example of how we can accommodate simple requests, and you will find that people provide them.

Mr Marr: Your other question related to what the shacks look and feel like. It is a bit hard to quantify. I have a wife who refuses to go camping, but she goes to Wedge. I would have to pitch that by saying that the basic shacks would be more or less a farm shed with self-contained toilet facilities and solar power up while some are houses that would almost qualify as residential in the metropolitan area. There is a range that hovers between that.

Mr Teune: We have photographs if you would like to view them later.

Mr Knowles: That explains the first point I was going to make about the social value of these places. There is a cultural significance to these places. They are communities and there are communities within communities, but it is an open site. We have a tradition at Wedge, for example, where the central meeting place is down at the point, which is the part of the mainland that

occasionally joins up with the island. This is the check-in point, if you like. People come up on Friday night. They will come to the point first to meet up with people—see who is around. It is a tradition every night: watch the sunset, have a couple of drinks, have a chat, and then they go off to their shacks or whatever else is organised. It does not exist in reality, but it is a social thing that happens, and that is a well-frequented tradition.

[11.00 am]

The nature of life in Wedge is all about families. There are up to, in some cases, four generations now that have been using the same shacks. So you have got parents now who were toddlers. In my own case, I have got two grandkids now who probably know more about Wedge and sustainable power and water conservation et cetera than a lot of high school students. So they get to appreciate what isolated community life is about. They are given some freedoms that go hand in hand with responsibilities. They get to do things. They actually get to feel and touch and taste things as opposed to just learning about them in school. They tend not to be playing video games and watching DVDs and all that sort of thing, and they get to participate with their parents and their siblings and friends in general community life. There is no division; everyone joins together. Basically, all of that is about social value stuff, and it has been recognised by a whole heap of independent studies. This is something that the bureaucracy has a great deal of difficulty acknowledging, because it is intangible stuff; you cannot measure it, or it is difficult to measure. Mind you, we have proposed to do an economic and social impact study that we would fund to prove what we are talking about, which will be done. We have had some discussions with consultants about doing that, but \$20 000 is a fair sort of whack out of our community fund. But we have been prepared to do it; we have offered that to the Minister for Environment.

Hon KATE DOUST: Maybe you need to find a PhD student to do that for you.

Mr Knowles: Yes.

Mr Sheppard: Cheap hands.

Mr Knowles: The other dimension to this social value—I have an example here in Wedge. In the past three or four years, a family has bought a shack. It cost them something like \$35 000. The husband works off site; he is two weeks on and two weeks off. They have three kids, ranging from about eight down to two. The second child was born severely disabled and basically needs constant 24-hour care, and the younger one has also had some difficulties, being born immature, so he has respiratory problems. That family cannot take a family holiday, because one parent or the other has to constantly be looking after those kids. They cannot get away as a group. Either dad stays home or mum stays home. When they came to Wedge, they did not just simply lob at Wedge and buy a shack; they came up with friends. They felt what the community was like. They could see how their family unit could exist and have the benefit of it being fairly easily accessible, time-wise, into the site, and they ended up buying a shack. That means that they can have family recreation as a unit. With their disabled son, they can drive their vehicle down to the beach and be at the point when everyone is around. The kids can play; mum and dad can supervise them, and the community can also join in that responsibility, and they feel completely at home about that. So that is another dimension. They could not do that anywhere else if this sort of site did not exist and that sort of community did not exist.

The other significant value that these sites represent is in terms of tourism assets. There is a view held by Tourism WA, by probably DEC and certainly by the Shire of Dandaragan, which is our local shire, that tourism development needs to be formalised. It does not recognise the shack community and those 15 000 users as part of that market. But why a lot of visitors come to these sites is the shack community itself, which is the focus of their visit. It is not necessarily the physical aspects of the sites. There are some in both locations, but it is more the fact of what the community represents. It in itself is the icon. It is in itself the attraction; it is the uniqueness; it is the point of differentiation. There have certainly been some developments along the coast which were ex-shack

sites. The communities have been demolished and there has been a replacement facility put in there, but they are only very small and very restricted, and they do not service the need that those areas were being used for previously. So, yes, they serve a purpose, but they certainly do not address the need that was previously being acknowledged.

I guess what it means is that these communities, these shack areas, are actually rough diamonds that nobody sort of looks at and they are prepared to discard, but in fact they are significant tourism jewels if you look at it from a different way and see how that could actually enhance the general visitor range of services that could be provided. In our submission, which hopefully we will get to a bit later, we talk about a shack-stay concept. You have got farm stays. So it is something different. It is not the standard “build another one up the road, have another car park, a couple of camping bays and whatever and then move on to the next site”. These represent something different, which we believe is a significant tourism asset if it was used the right way. And you could have an integrated activity on the site that does not exclude any user group. It is not one over the other; it can be a complete, integrated service to actually enhance and expand the range of services that the other market that is not coming into Wedge now—you cannot replace what is at Wedge and Grey in a commercial sense; it would be impossible. Retaining that resource, that critical mass, means that that forms the base around which other extended tourist facilities could in fact be provided. So by using the shack community as the critical mass, you then enable an increased servicing facility for other tourists, who now certainly are able to access the place because of the new road. Of course, at the end of the day, if there is formalised long-term tenure, then all of those assets that are there now are going to be enhanced, as has been the example in other states—in Tasmania et cetera. If you provide long-term tenure, you then enable people to invest in their site, upgrade the facilities, ensure that they meet relevant codes, and provide a formal process of community access.

The third thing is that, in effect, the shack owners and their visitors become the environmental custodians of the site. We do not have an on-site ranger. One is based in Lancelin, and he has got to cover all the area from—two nature reserves all the way up to the Nambung National Park, which means that physically you can only be in one place at once.

The site is an open site, so we are having a lot more people using the site than just the shack owners. The shack owners take pride in their own facility, but also in the site itself. It is in both of our organisations’ charter. So we are out there doing clean-ups; we are out there doing environmental projects, rehabilitation work, and Peter will cover one of those as an example shortly. Uncontrolled camping comes into the site. Wedge has had a problem for quite some time of big groups of off-road bike users coming in because there is no control. We have no authority to move those people on, but we certainly go and clean up after they have been, which otherwise would not be done by any of the authorities. So that is the other benefit. We actually provide that function, and you are getting, in effect—there can be two and a half thousand people in the busy times over Christmas or at Easter, so you have got that range of people on site who are using shacks, but you have also got probably a significant number of day visitors and campers et cetera who do not have any other responsibility on site because they are not paying fees and there is no-one checking on them. So we perform that custodial role. Perhaps if Peter can just give an example of environmental projects that we have been involved in.

[11.10 am]

Mr Sheppard: If we just take the Grey document, which is the one with the modest cover, and go to pages 29 and 30. I will give the committee a small break from words and we will have a look at some pictures. Essentially, both of these organisations, as Murray said, have the words “conservation” and “protection” in their titles, and we take that fairly seriously. We do feel that we are custodians of this section of coastline. The example I give there is that over the last couple of years—this is at Grey now, and there are similar examples at Wedge—we have taken the opportunity to address a rogue sand dune to the south of the Grey community, and the first picture

on page 29 is pretty clear evidence that there once was a shack. In June 2007, when this project commenced, yet another shack had been eaten by this rogue dune. Essentially, uncontrolled sand dunes migrate in a semi-northerly direction at between five and 20 metres per year, independent of whether there are shack owners there or not. Once there is an unvegetated sand dune, it is on the move. There are four pictures there showing that over the last three years, we have managed to get busy bees together and we have replanted this sand dune. You can see an acknowledgment plaque in the bottom right-hand corner, because we did get some modest funding from the commonwealth government, most of which went to pay for that plaque, by the way! Which is how it is. We have done this project in conjunction with the shack owners. Whenever I call for a busy bee, I get 20 bodies out there to help. We have also accidentally linked up with the Duncraig Senior High School Bush Ranger Cadets. They actually come out for an annual two-day visit, for which we open up a couple of shacks for them to live in, and we supply “before” and “after” pictures, and that is part of their project. This year they are actually growing some seedlings to bring out next year as well. We are linking into the community as well as doing revegetation in that project. Those are the examples in the pictures.

On page 30, just moving on a little bit, this was a formal project where we actually applied for permission and we had all the seed licences and a proper process. The top two pictures on page 30 are of what was simply a spontaneous act by one of the local shack owners, who managed—I am not sure how—to acquire the mooring rope from a very large ship, which was pre-loved, and decided he would do exactly what I had done to the south of Grey along the foreshore. The committee can see that we have barricaded off the foreshore and made a designated access. It can be seen that what was once a bit of a goat track with access all over the dune, is now completely revegetated and there is obvious access to the beach. We even supply rubbish bins, which we maintain and look after ourselves. One can be seen in the top left-hand picture; it is not the prettiest bin, but it is pretty obvious that it is a bin. One of the locals takes it upon himself to empty them regularly. The four pictures at the bottom represent how we maintain our local tip. We have specific sections where we, on a regular basis, stack steel and sort it out. We have aluminium can recycling, and from time to time, with DEC permission, we do what I am calling green waste consolidation with what is left. That is a very organised tip, and last year when the minister, Donna Faragher, came up to look at the shacks, we hijacked her, as we should. We did not take her to the beachfront and show her the coast; we took her to the tip to show her what we do behind the scenes. That is just an example of what we do, so we feel that we are custodians of this area.

The CHAIRMAN: Those are admirable initiatives that you have taken there, but if you could answer questions on other environmental issues, such as the human impact from things such as sanitation and off-road vehicles on the dunes. Are there any other impacts? Have you had any communication with the Nyoongah people in relation to the human impact on that particular area?

Mr Sheppard: Okay, I will try to address those questions. At Grey there is not an Aboriginal heritage issue; we have done a search on that. There is at Wedge, and perhaps they will talk about that. We have certainly looked at sewerage issues and grey and black water issues. I think current reports from the government say that both these sites are still pristine, so we feel that we do not have a red flag there, but we certainly have some people on our committee that are professional architects and have done some research on sewerage systems. One of the issues that is talked about is that until we get some significant long-term tenure, it is very hard to put in the investment to do some these things, like bio-toilets and things like that. It is a bit of a catch-22, but we certainly know the issues; we do not believe that we are outside the parameters for country septic systems. Most of us have sealed systems with a leach drain, which is what the entire metropolitan area had until the 1960s and 70s; they are not long-drops or anything like that. We do acknowledge that. The impact on the area is certainly an issue with some quad bike activities. A lot of these are day trippers or weekend trippers who are outside our control; they simply stack up with bikes, fuel and booze, head north from Perth and leave their rubbish behind at the end of the weekend. If the

committee turns to the next page, which is page 31, just briefly, I sort of did a Google search recently to give the committee some idea of our footprint. This is Grey-specific. From Google Maps, I estimate that Grey occupies 25 hectares of land. The nearest sand mining operation occupies more than 6 000 hectares, and in fact its tailings dam is actually bigger than the whole of the Grey footprint. In terms of a footprint on the landscape, we are quite modest. I talked earlier about rogue dunes and how they are independent of human activity; they just burst into life and have a life of their own until they finally succumb to the vegetation. The nearest rogue dune to us, in Nambung National Park, is 750 hectares. I have made a quick calculation, and in about 150 years, the Pinnacles will actually disappear, if the dune is not controlled. That is nothing to do with human activity; that is simply because dunes grow and die.

Mr Knowles: Looking to the future and what sorts of systems we think could be introduced, we have been consulting with the environmental engineering department at Murdoch University, which actually has a function that is specific to the design of isolated area systems—they are site specific. Certainly, Dr Martin Anda has indicated a willingness to become involved and use his student base, again in a consultative role, to do analysis and identify the development of appropriate systems to take care of grey water and black water, that would work on these sites. This has been the experience with other shack sites that have been formalised; these technical problems can be resolved. There is an engineering solution to everything, if it is economically viable. To access the funds to do that, we really need to have long-term tenure; that was the experience in Tasmania. People could not borrow money if they did not have long-term tenure. That is what Peter said right at the beginning; if conditional long-term tenure is provided—providing milestones and conditions are met—then there is an argument to actually access individual capital investment, which then multiplies out to a far greater level than it would otherwise be on a commercial basis. In terms of our involvement with the Yued family group, who has a claim over the area and have been instrumental in identifying two Aboriginal sites at Wedge, they are part of the community; they have been part of the community for decades.

[11.20 am]

They are part of the Wedge community, and they are totally behind the retention of the shack community. Yes, they have concerns regarding the way the whole area is not managed. A lot of the damage is outside the Wedge reserve; it is in the Wanagarren Nature Reserve, which is the area that these camping groups go to. Because the dune is adjacent to that area, there is the issue of degradation of bush areas and rubbish, apart from the amenity and safety issues. There is also, I guess, a direction for people to move out of Lancelin. Even though it is the designated off-road area, there is a strict no-camping rule. Local rangers advise people to head north, and of course if you head north of the bombing range, you are at Wedge. Without defining exactly where they are to go, they are moving them out of the Shire of Gingin into the Shire of Dandaragan—so they end up at Wedge. There are not enough resources in terms of ranger patrols, police or whatever to actually control that. We will come to that later in terms of some of our recommendations.

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Hon LYNN MacLAREN: I am struggling with the detail about the disposal of effluent. I hear that the residents take on quite a lot of responsibility and I wonder whether anyone carts rubbish off the site and how that is managed. If rubbish is carted off the site—because 2 500 people are coming at Christmastime—that is a huge management issue. I am really excited to hear how the community is dealing with many of these issues, but I have not yet heard from either Grey or Wedge about how they dispose of human effluent and the rubbish that accumulates when visitors come in such large numbers.

Mr Knowles: The human effluent is essentially septic systems; that is, we have contained tanks.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Do trucks come into empty those?

Mr Knowles: No.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: I remember when we used to empty them —

Mr Knowles: Yes; like they did in the suburbs.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Yes. What happens with them?

Mr Knowles: Essentially, what has happened over probably 40 years is that when one is full, it is left and you put in another one. There has been no access to the site. There now is a road, so you can get septic disposal units in there. That is an obvious solution to what is happening now. In terms of the removal of rubbish or how we dispose of rubbish, there has been a designated tip, as there is in most country towns. Our landlord, DEC, has directed us to use an area to dispose of our rubbish. The tip is maintained by the community. We have a separate scrap-metal area that again is a DEC-designated area for old rusty water tanks and tin and broken down vehicles or whatever. They are removed from site by scrap-metal contractors. We do not have the same recycling capabilities for taking cans et cetera. Over time, people have made attempts to do that, but it is physically impossible to cart goods an hour and a half down the track to, say, Lancelin where there is a recycling system that you could tap into. We have not got that right, but we are, in effect, doing as much as we can to contain that problem. At the time of the Jurien marine park development some eight years ago, we understand the marine waters in the bays at Wedge and Grey were analysed. It was identified that the offshore waters were pristine. If we were having a problem, it would have shown up in that analysis of the offshore waters—which it did not.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Yes.

Mr Teune: Obviously access to these areas has been difficult. Historically, the damage that would have been done if you could get a truck to these sites to cart stuff away would have been significant. One of the things that will be able to occur in the future, with access to both sites by road, is that lot more of the stuff at the tip—the recycled waste and so on—will be able to be removed. A large number of people take their rubbish out of the community at the weekend, as opposed to putting it at the tip. You will see lots of vehicles loading rubbish to take it out of the community as opposed to taking it to the tip at the end of the weekend. People endeavour to minimise their impact on the environment to the extent that that is possible, and improved access will improve that situation, as will the opportunity to invest capital into more appropriate, more effective effluent disposal systems in the future. That is certainly something that the Grey association has researched quite a lot in previous years. I think we worked out that it costs about \$8 000 a shack to put in a Biomax system, which would occur very, very rapidly if there were some kind of certainty about the long-term future. It is difficult to make an \$8 000 investment when your shack could be gone by Christmas.

The CHAIRMAN: I accept that you are trying to manage your rubbish, but I suspect that you are in conflict with the Dandaragan shire's waste management plan. Have you had any correspondence with Dandaragan shire at all?

Mr Knowles: We are managed by the Department of Environment and Conservation. The shire handed over responsibility for management of the reserves 15 years ago. When the leasehold arrangement was established, it was handed over to DEC, or CALM as it was then. So, our directions have been from DEC, which directs us to do this, this and this, and so that is what we comply with under our lease conditions. **The CHAIRMAN:** Good.

Mr Sheppard: Certainly, Sims Metal has been approached to consolidate and remove all our steel—part of the beer economy; sorry! In the next couple of weeks, one of the contractors will be making sure that the track into our tip is appropriate so that Sims Metal can get in there to remove all our steel.

Mr Marr: We talked about the three planks: we talked about tourism and the environment, and we touched on heritage. I might just get Rob to open up heritage a bit more. It is a key plank for us.

Mr Teune: Obviously, there is quite a bit of information in the submission that we have made. I will attempt to summarise the information in that submission. There is no question that both of these communities have significant cultural heritage values. Those values have been acknowledged by a number of independent experts from outside our own communities. Fundamentally, there are a number of reasons those heritage values exist; not the least of which is that these sites are living breathing examples of how many coastal communities in Western Australia commenced. Places like Lancelin, Cervantes, Jurien Bay and Moore River and even places like Quinns Rocks were squatter shack settlements 40 or 50 years ago. They became town sites, in most cases, when the shack owners in those places were offered freehold tenure, and then the areas became towns. In fact, up until several years ago the location at Grey was a designated townsite. Part of the heritage value of these communities is that they are living breathing examples of how many community started. There are parents and grandparents who can say to their children and grandchildren, "Here's how I lived when I was younger." As time goes on, projecting 20, 30 or 50 years into the future, if you can preserve communities like this as living examples of how much of the country's coastal and other areas were settled, there is a tremendous opportunity not just from the heritage perspective, but also tourism and other perspectives. I mentioned earlier that the National Trust has undertaken assessments of both communities; it found they have significant cultural heritage, partly, as I said, because they are excellent examples of coastal settlements that demonstrate what has been a way of life for many generations of Western Australian families and because they demonstrate that make-do philosophy and the resourcefulness that is typically Australian in the construction of the shacks. Many of these shacks were built in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s when most people did not have four-wheel drives. If you think of the difficulty of moving building materials and so on to these locations and constructing these shacks over many years, you can see this innovative approach to the existing architecture of the shacks.

[11.30 am]

This is something that certainly people from the National Trust have identified, in terms of their assessments, has been quite unique. The National Trust view at least of the uniqueness is in fact more so the strong sense of community, the sense of place—the sorts of things that Murray was talking about earlier. The National Trust view is that these communities have high social value through the connection that leaseholders and their families and friends have, and the broader connections that people in these communities have.

The National Trust has recommended that the Heritage Council undertake a formal heritage assessment of both communities. To date this has not occurred, although we have been pursuing that path, as has the National Trust. Probably finally on heritage, the current squatter policy—that is not its actual name—but the current policy in place to deal with the shacks communities, the squatter policy, does not give consideration to the cultural heritage of these areas. Our view, supported by the National Trust and others—and as evidenced in other states around Australia where cultural heritage has been clearly taken into view—is that any future policy for Western Australia should include consideration of cultural heritage significance.

Mr Marr: Can I ask how much more time we have available to us?

The CHAIRMAN: You have got about 10 minutes.

Mr Marr: Thank you. Watch this!

Mr Knowles: Very quickly to summarise "Why?"—on page 4 of the Wedge document there is a series of dot points. I will not read those out but that is basically a summary of the answer to the question "Why?" They basically fit into three categories. I have heard it referred to before as the triple bottom line with government—this balance between social need, economic need and environmental need. What we believe the shack communities demonstrate a sustainable balance between those three, in some cases competing needs. We think that the sites can in fact achieve what is now referred to by DEC as a co-existence model where shack communities can co-exist

with whatever else they would want to be put in there in terms of whether it is commercial tourism opportunity or simple camping or whatever. We are saying that you can have all of that, and one is not necessarily going to be to the exclusion of the other. In terms of why, we think we are a good example of the triple bottom line.

What is it that we want this committee to do? If we look at our summary of recommendations on the first section, which is page 3, there is a list of 12 recommendations there coming out of each of the sections. The front page is before the main body commences. Essentially, they fit into probably three categories. There are several recommendations that talk about policy change, what we would like to see as a recommendation out of this committee—that is, that we are recommending a two-tier policy change which involves an overarching framework that allows shack communities to put their arguments forward to justify why they should be considered for long-term tenure. That then would lead to site-specific plans to be developed for each of those shack site areas. We do not believe you can have a unilateral site-specific plan to apply to all shack sites. There are different logistics, there are different land forms, there are different markets passing or potential and there are different associations with neighbouring town sites. We do not want to be competing with something that already exists. We would rather be complementing something that is already there. What we are saying the two-tier level is about is that that secondary level, which is basically your onsite management plan, needs to take into account those local factors. So long as there are some overarching guidelines so you did not end up with an unworkable system at a local area. We do not want to use the Shire of Dandaragan as an example of why things will not work, whereas the Shire of Manjimup or the Shire of Denmark are where things can happen—they have set up regulatory arrangements and formal management plans. If we are looking seriously at the statewide issue of changing policy, we think there needs to be a statewide pathway open, a gateway through which these various shack communities could put their case and come up with site-specific management plans. There are several recommendations that relate to that area.

The second general category is establishing and commencing an assessment process. It is all right having a policy but if no rubber hits the ground, nothing gets resolved. For example, in Wedge's case we have been sitting on an unassessed list with the Heritage Council for 10 years. Nothing has progressed. There are other models in other states. It took them a series of years before things were actually put in place. Systems were created to enable things to happen. We would like the outcome of this process to actually not only look at policy change but look at how the assessment process could be defined to enable that policy to be put in practice. There is a range of models. We are recommending that the committee looks at a range of different models, not necessarily holus-bolus, but each of them have certain elements that are best practice. If you bolt all those together, you will end up with a very good system that can be used by whoever the management authority is going to be in terms of the vesting of that crown site.

Thirdly, apart from that long-term management plan development, the other thing is that there is an immediate need for onsite operational management, certainly in the case of Wedge and Grey. We have got a \$130 million road that will bring people into these sites, over and above the houses being used now, in an uncontrolled way. We would not want to wait for the outcome of all this to go through its whole process before anything is put in place. There has been some advance with our discussions with DEC, on direction from the Minister for Environment. There are some discussions happening about onsite issues and how a co-existence model could be created. That started before this committee decided to have an inquiry. We are running parallel. We would not want all that to stop and wait in advance, or be put aside and wait for the outcome of this whole exercise. There is an urgent need to have that on-site management. Resourcing issue—yes, we accept that but we are offering, as part of the community, to be involved in that.

Mr Marr: As time is against us, we wanted to address some issues that have been brought up in submissions that we have had a look at through the website. Murray will spend two minutes on that and then I might close, with your indulgence.

Mr Knowles: We are aware of the submission from the Shire of Dandaragan which has a lot of reasons “why not”. Some of the issues they raise in here, not surprisingly we have a different view of. I have touched on the Building Code of Australia issues; all the technical issues. We see that there is a way out of that. There is a whole range of different categories within the Building Code of Australia. The code that they are referring to is the sort of standard you apply to a residential suburb or a town site. It is brick and tile homes with things like 100 millimetre slabs—all this sort of stuff. We are talking about basically shed construction. It is a different type of building and therefore a different building code should apply. So long as it satisfies the health and safety issues, it is entirely appropriate to use a code within the standard that is relevant to shed construction. Essentially that is what the shacks are within these sites.

Mr Teune: Just to interject, Murray—there are precedents or examples of how those codes or those standards have been applied and implemented in other locations in similar environments.

[11.40 am]

Mr Knowles: The shire refers to redevelopment of Sandy Cape, which used to have a couple of shack communities. There is nothing wrong with what they have done at Sandy Cape in terms of being a rest stop to cater for passing campers. It is a lovely place, but it is not a replacement for what used to be there. There were hundreds of families that used to spend their Christmas holidays and the kids’ school holidays there. There is only provision there to stay four nights, so how do those families actually do what they used to do it? It is not possible because of the rules that now apply. There is no potable water; there is no facility. As a through traffic for caravanners and daytrippers and whatever, it is fine. But that is not an answer. That is an example of the exclusion of one group simply to replace it by the minimalist, short-term passing sort of trade issue. There is reference in there about the Tasmanian model being completely irrelevant to WA. They make mention of that about the previous commitment from the task force to look at that. There are a couple of things there. They refer to the shacks in Tasmania being, in effect, legal. They were not. They established the same way as the history in WA. It is just that the intervention to formalise them started earlier and ultimately ended up in legislation to formalise the long-term tenure and then overcome all the particular technical and environmental issues. That is a point. They also touch on and refer to essentially equity. In our submission, at pages 13 to 15, we pose the questions about what we understand the issues of equity are. We pose four questions there. Is it fair and reasonable for long-term tenure to be granted to the organisations and the members that we represent over and above the general public not having those opportunities? Is it fair and reasonable that the shacks were demolished in the Shire of Dandaragan 10 years ago? They were gone through the implementation of this policy, but here we are having the same policy being considered to be modified to allow long-term tenure, under a different management organisation but within the same area. On the flip side of that, is it fair and reasonable that the shack owners that are prepared to do all the right things at Wedge and Grey do not get the same opportunity that has happened in Windy Harbour and Peaceful Bay and is about to happen in the blowholes and through the Shire of Carnarvon where long-term tenure has been provided within the same policy, even though the argument is that it is a different location, a different timetable and all the rest of it? You are talking about a statewide policy. It is either applied statewide or it is not. I just refer you to those sections because they are in fact our responses to each of those questions in terms of equity. We also have some detail at the beginning of our document in section 1 under the development of the policy that refers to the specific squatter policy when it was first established and how in fact we assess each of those reasons that they were established in the first place as to what happens now. That was 21 years ago when those guidelines were established, so things have moved on since then.

The CHAIRMAN: Can I just ask a quick question on that equity? Is there a trade in these shacks? These shacks do sell, do they not?

Mr Knowles: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: What is the average price?

Mr Teune: Between about \$5 000 and \$30 000-odd.

Mr Knowles: From \$5 000 up to \$40 000 at Wedge.

Hon KATE DOUST: And that is all just on word of mouth?

Mr Sheppard: Or the *Quokka*, sometimes.

Mr Knowles: There is a waiting list, if you like. In terms of public access, you can buy the chattels but you cannot transfer the lease. But our landlord accommodates a change of postal address for issuing of notices but not actually a technical transfer of the lease, so it is accommodated.

Mr Teune: It is probably worth mentioning as well, if you look at some of the other states—Tasmania in particular—part of the legislation that was passed there specifically discourages active trade. One of the potential risks you run in providing long-term tenure in an exercise like this is exactly the point that you are making, Mr Ellis, which is: do you actually create a market that drives the prices of shacks? That certainly would not be an objective of ours. In fact, it would be something that we would like to see as a part of this process actively and specifically discouraged. There is, I think, some benefit to allowing a change of ownership because that does address the broader equity issue, but to create a market also takes away from this sense of place and sense of community that we are talking about. And it is that we are looking to protect. We would fight very hard for some kind of cap, some kind of limitation on trading, some kind of control on that component of the exercise.

The CHAIRMAN: But it does sound like you have got a market already.

Mr Teune: If you think back to some of the other examples, according to the survey that our university student was doing, only 12 per cent of occupancy throughout the course of the year in Grey is by actual shack leaseholders. The other whatever per cent are people who do not actually have leases. You do not get that occurring where somebody owns a property and rents it out to the general public; you do not get that same sense of ownership. Half of those remaining 80-odd per cent probably feel that they own the shack as well. On this view about equity and access, I think a lot of people simply focus on the people whose names are on the lease, when in actual fact, as I said, in my own personal case, there are probably 50 or 60 people who feel they own that shack. That is quite unique and something that I think is worth preserving. Creating a situation where a market would occur is something that would potentially damage that.

Mr Knowles: Just quickly, in the model that we have represented as an example in our submission under the site-specific management section, we have actually addressed the issue of equity there. If that is the issue, we have proposed a model where individuals have leases but the control of the shack community is actually under a club arrangement where you become a member of a club. You effectively establish a residential park. The control is that anybody can become a member of that arrangement. There is no direct trading of those because you control by your subleasing under the corporate body. There would be requirements to meet certain obligations under there, so the capacity to in fact gain financially would be controlled. There is a model there that actually addresses that to try to minimise that sort of thing.

Mr Marr: We have slotted that under section 5 of our submission, and Grey have addressed their individual site management as well. We would have liked more time today because we would like to go into the detail around that. We respectfully request another presentation to you if we get that opportunity, but, just as importantly, we would like to invite the standing committee up to each of our settlements so you get an idea of the sense of place and stay overnight. Also, we see it as an opportunity where we might be able to present those individual shack settlement site plans to you. I do not know if you invite yourselves or we invite you, but we would accommodate you if you went up there.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you for your invitation. We will take that into our deliberations whether we do a site visit.

Mr Marr: I am sure you will.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: I can thoroughly recommend a visit.

Mr Marr: Thank you, Liz. Can I close now?

The CHAIRMAN: If you would like to sum up now.

Mr Marr: Thank you for your opportunity for us to present today. Again, in outlining our objectives from our presentation, we do want to achieve long-term tenure and we do believe that long-term tenure will resolve a lot of the issues that we talked about today and that some of the opponents to this have presented to you in their submissions. We do expect this standing committee to recommend a change of policy to create a pathway to enable shack communities to produce site-specific management plans. In closing, as has been shown in other states, Western Australia should not be embarrassed to protect its shack heritage. I thank you for today.

Hon KATE DOUST: Can I just say, having been through those submissions, I think they are exceptionally good submissions, so you should be very pleased with the way you have presented them to us.

The CHAIRMAN: Yes, I would like to endorse those comments also. Thank you for coming in in a very professional manner. We will take on board all that you have presented to the committee today. As I say, we may even take you up on your invitation.

Mr Marr: Thank you. You are more than welcome.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you for coming.

Hearing concluded at 11.49 am