

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

INQUIRY INTO SHACK SITES

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
ON FRIDAY, 28 JANUARY 2011**

SESSION ONE

Members

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

Hearing commenced at 9.24 am**SERAFINI, MR TONY****Deputy Chairman, Lower Donnelly River Conservation Association,
sworn and examined:****LUSH, MR ALAN****Local Resident and User of the Donnelly River, sworn and examined:****RYAN, MR ANTONY****Chairman, Lower Donnelly River Conservation Association, sworn and examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: First we would like to welcome you along to this hearing. Before we do start, I have a procedure I have to go through, but I would like to introduce our committee to you. On my left we have Hon Phil Edman; Hon Lynn MacLaren; myself, the Chair, Brian Ellis; the Deputy Chair, Hon Kate Doust; and Hon Col Holt as members of the committee. As you know, I have a formal procedure I have to go through and I ask you to take either the oath or affirmation.

[Witnesses took the oath.]

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, and please be aware of the microphones and try to speak into them. Ensure that you do not cover them with papers or make noises near them. As we have more than one witness, can you speak in turn? It is easier for Hansard to pick up, rather than someone speaking over the top of each other.

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 you 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 bearing with me through that. I understand you have a presentation for us and, as we invited you along, I would welcome that presentation now if you would like to give it to us.

Mr Ryan: I would just like to thank you, Mr Chairman, for allowing us to add to our previous submission on shack sites in WA, and I would like to call on Alan to start on the submission.

Mr Lush: Mr Chairman and committee, the document that I am referring to is titled “A Presentation to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs Regarding Inquiry into Shack Sites in Western Australia”. It is dated today, 28 January. I will simply start out with a summary of what we will be covering and then go into the detail of each of them so that we all have a bigger picture to start with.

The CHAIRMAN: Can I just say—I have spoken to Alan about it—that while the presentation is going, as long as you do not mind, we may ask some questions and may interrupt at times. I think that will be better for the whole inquiry anyway if we have a question to ask at that moment.

Mr Lush: Thank you, Mr Chairman. The Lower Donnelly River Conservation Association—I will just talk about “the association” after this—represents 43 hut owners who occupy land under lease arrangement within the D’Entrecasteaux National Park in the Shires of Manjimup and Nannup. It recognised the need for a state government squatter policy to control the proliferation of random and ragged coastal shacks, mostly along the central west coast, north of Perth. It believes that the policy has achieved its purpose and now needs to mature to take account of other significant community values and their ongoing management.

The association submits that the hut precinct on the lower Donnelly River is absolutely unique. It requires both protection of its heritage and other values and careful management. The precinct has been a low-cost family holiday destination continuously for almost 100 years, covering up to four generations. It can only be accessed by boat, it has a strong connection with our earliest pastoral activities and it demonstrates the benefit of an effective, sustained and environmentally sensitive hut community.

The association has worked in partnership with the Department of Environment and Conservation—formerly CALM—for over 20 years and has been considered for its heritage values by the Heritage Council of Western Australia. The proposal to protect and manage the hut precinct is supported by both the Manjimup and the Nannup shire councils—the Donnelly River is actually the boundary between those two shires and that part of the world—and the association proposes changes to the squatter policy and proposes sensitive developments to the lower Donnelly River hut precinct to protect significant values whilst enabling wider public use.

If we look at the location—just a reminder that 43 hut owners occupy land there—the map that is displayed shows where we are talking about on the south coast, which is probably 350 kilometres south of Perth to this point, and the nearest road access is that little spot there. So, it is a 12-kilometre journey by boat from here to the estuary of the Donnelly River.

The huts are under lease arrangement—individual leases—within the D’Entrecasteaux National Park on the estuary in those two shires. The huts are on the other side of the estuary. This is the estuary. It would almost be over the top of the beach here on the Southern Ocean, but you can see some of the huts here. There are more huts along the edge here, and there are some huts around in there. They are reasonably inconspicuous and they each have some sort of a jetty. So, that is pretty well the impact that you have got on the landscape. From the river they are a little bit more obvious, but we will see a couple of pictures of that shortly. It is certainly one of the best spots in the world, but we all live in those places and we think it is pretty good.

The situation, as I said, is unique. Access is by boat. This would be a pretty typical commute these days, and so getting backwards and forwards is by boat and getting materials to the coast to build a shack is by boat. In one of the earlier pictures somebody has just barged up a couple of boats, put the materials on board and then poled their way down. Some of the evidence that we collected during the preparation of a submission to the Heritage Council cited an example of two days for the journey—it must have been a low river—so it accesses by boat only. The other thing which is shown here is just the community. It has been a low-cost holiday destination for a long time and there is a very strong community there. The emphasis is family holiday. The community is self-governing more or less and has been for many years. It is a registered organisation with a constitution and by-laws.

[9.33 am]

The CHAIRMAN: Alan, you are saying you access only by boat; where do you get on your boat?

Mr Lush: At the boat landing.

Hon COL HOLT: 12 kilometres up the river.

The CHAIRMAN: It is 12 kilometres up?

Mr Lush: Yes, at this point. I have got a couple of photos of that spot later on.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay, I was just wondering where you started from.

Mr Lush: So, this is just a community meeting at the time. There is a hut at the back. That is one of the more recent huts, but that is the kind of hut we are talking about on the Donnelly. The association has a code of conduct, it has a building code, it has regular busy bees for site and environmental maintenance to deal with public access et cetera. There is general caretaking done by the association that includes informal monitoring and policing of, kind of, other users, if you get jobs down there, miscreants, if you get people misbehaving. The local members, just by their presence, have an influence on that and so the code of conduct tends to be followed by everybody that is down there. The huts are reasonably scattered and discrete, just a couple to illustrate that. You can see in those ones that this particular hut here is that building and the photo came from another hut up there. So, these are what we are talking about. Less obvious, tucked in the bush there; a little bit more obvious a bit further down the river. The Donnelly River beach itself is pristine and the surrounds—if you could get a vehicle down there you could drive along this beach for a long way. The next beach to the east is the Yeagarup Beach. That has public access. It is 17 kilometres from the Warren River to the Donnelly River along the beach and it is hard sand; it is a 60 to 70 kilometre per hour sort of driving with four-wheel drives. If people could get to this beach by vehicle—that is the kind of beach it is, you can travel along it for a fair distance, but is not accessible by vehicles and so you have got a very pristine beach. The surrounds are natural for the settlement.

On the point of the community being environmentally sensitive, the river conditions: these are typical. Essentially, the river conditions show no impact by users other than what has been developed at the boat landing up river and what has been developed in the immediate hut precinct. There are just a couple of pictures: these are normal sort of views. This is just up a little side water and that is the side water, but you cannot see any impact of access and there have been people going down there—the earliest record we found was 1913, the earliest campers. So, there has been a lot of usage, if you like, and the river is fantastic. That is the ocean; the mouth is just around the corner there, so this is right at that bottom end of the estuary. So, the river has not shown any impact by users over all that time. The coast itself: there has been rehabilitation done, by the association, of degraded areas, especially mobile dunes. In the old photo, taken around about 1970, the river is here, it just scoops around that bit of a cliff and it goes out there sometimes, it goes out there sometimes, it is not going anywhere just in this photo, but all of this is mobile sand dune. Moving in that direction, you can see evidence of past sand dunes moving, but that was mobile in 1970. This is the same area now. One way or another, the area has been stabilised, a lot of the association people over the years have picked up a bit of marram grass somewhere else along the coast and put in here to help sort of stabilise things. The river bar builds and breaks naturally; artificial breaking is actively discouraged. Some people like to dig a trench if it looks like it might go, but the local people there, they try to stop that. Periodic surveys of noxious weeds and the removal of introduced species have been carried out in conjunction with CALM and, these days, DEC since the 1980s. The huts are spread out and discreet sillage is disposed off hygienically. But the building code has, for years back, started dealing with toileting waste and so on, so there is good disposal of sillage these days.

The CHAIRMAN: When you say the building code, so the local government asked you to come up —

Mr Lush: No, the local associations, their own initiative.

Hon KATE DOUST: Would you be able to provide a copy of that to the committee?

Mr Lush: We have not got one with us, but we can provide it.

The CHAIRMAN: If you could.

Mr Ryan: That is a copy of the building codes, the association's building codes.

The CHAIRMAN: It is your own building code.

Mr Ryan: We have got a code of conduct as well, if you would like both.

Hon KATE DOUST: Yes, both would be very helpful, thank you.

Mr Lush: Rubbish is removed from the site on a carry in, carry out basis and the association has annual clean-ups of the areas where visitors tend to go, and so that is sort of kept clean as well. Very recently, the fires in December of last year—they had a fair bit of press—exposed a whole lot more rubbish that had been covered by scrub. There has been a cleanup of that and that removed two semitrailer truck loads of the rubbish that was just sighted, so there was a busy bee to get rid of that. So, that has all been happening.

Mr Ryan: That was what has been carted in the bush for years and years. Since the fire, between Christmas and New Year—we never knew the rubbish was there. It exposed it all, and it is open because it burnt pretty heavy, so then we had to clean up this mess on Monday, where we gave people a week or two notice and we brought stuff up to the landing and we took bucket loads out. The place now, as far as the eye can see, within a kilometre, is as clean as a whistle.

The CHAIRMAN: When you say that rubbish was brought in over a number of years: brought in by who? The settlement or other people?

Mr Serafini: In the early period of people using the Donnelly, there were practices that, you know, were like today it does not exist. These are going back over 20 years ago; we are looking at people that were either dumping stuff and then not realising in those—our mental thinking today is totally different than what was practised in the past.

Mr Lush: In terms of cooperation with DEC: that recent clean-up in the last couple of weeks, DEC provided a boat and some of their workers to assist. That was just part of ongoing cooperation with DEC, but there are a number of other things. The hut owners have met regularly with CALM and DEC on numerous matters for over 20 years. Fire management is formal; the association has its own formal management plan and documented fire plan. They have done that with some liaison with DEC, but it is a proposal to DEC to say, "This is what we think needs to be done." The association engaged a private consultant to prepare that fire management plan, especially to identify and specify preventative measures. The hut owners actively assisted CALM to control wildfires in 1988 and again in 2010—very recently. DEC firefighters were hosted overnight during the 2010 fires. There were a number of members of the public trapped down at the mouth and when the river was closed for three days they were then housed and looked after by the hut people, I think for a number of days, until access became safe.

There has been a survey of noxious weeds and the removal of introduced species carried out in conjunction with CALM and DEC, again, for a number of years. The public facilities, that is parking and toilets and boat handling facilities at the upstream landing site, were planned and developed in conjunction with CALM and DEC and some involvement with the Manjimup Shire.

Hon PHIL EDMAN: Can I ask a question on that? Just in relation to the boat jetty that was built by the hut owners, why didn't you use a floating jetty, rather than having it built where it is on three different levels?

Mr Ryan: I think that that is pretty difficult there, because we were not allowed to put it out, because the stream is very narrow. We were not allowed to put it out in the actual stream; we had to build a jetty and that is a drawback for the jetty, the jetty is back on the bank. When the water is really low it cannot be accessed. Because, harbour and lights would not let us put it right out in the

middle. If we did, we would have blocked half the stream off. The three-tier system works very well. Another metre out, obviously would have made a lot of sense, but even for the tour boat, the river cruise, it is very hard to access that. So, he has got a front loader—you will probably see it in another photo—which loads down onto the concrete ramp. There used to be wooden ramp before and because all the wood was built like slats, like a weatherboard house on its side, so your tyres—you would have the grip to pull your boat out of the water. Now we have replaced that. Most of the money for that came from the Shire of Manjimup, from grants. We had done all the work, and we did the same with the jetty and the same with the boat ramps. We did the boat ramp in two pieces, and that is all concrete now.

Mr Serafini: You have got to visualise also that that height of the top tier is actually under water when that river is high.

Hon PHIL EDMAN: That is what I was looking at; it looks a bit—

Mr Serafini: And that varies; that even covers that, you do not even see that on occasions. That was designed to load our boats and bring our stuff to the boat when we had the boat in the water.

Mr Lush: In this picture, you can see that the river is quite narrow, that is the other side of the river and so the point has been made that there would be a problem if you had something out into it. The boat ramp that Tony is talking about, which is now concrete, is back in behind the picture to my right; everybody's right; that is now a concrete structure. What is not in this picture, and I do not have a photo of it, is up above the bank there is an old winch, which was restored some time ago. When you did not have traction you had to hook this winch up and wind yourself out of the water; we have had some interesting experiences, but we will not take up that today!

[9.45 am]

Mr Ryan: Just while we are on that point, the distance between that jetty and the boat ramp is not very much; probably two boat widths, back this way, to the right. A canoeist would find it very difficult, with powerboats and the cruise boat, to get in and out. It is a real problem. We like to encourage canoeists; the river is pretty famous with canoeists, and they need protection. We have talked about it with the powers that be, to no avail. They need a separate launching pad to run off, because the distance is there. With powerboats and the cruise boat alongside it, something is going to happen one day. They need a separate spot, and we have been trying to get that done, but no-one seems to be listening to us. That is a pretty important factor, I think, as far as the canoeists are concerned.

Mr Lush: This work was funded by the Shire of Manjimup. The association was able to secure a grant from that shire, and it was built by the association members.

Hon KATE DOUST: It has been very interesting to talk to the various groups involved with shack sites about their relationship with local governments. Maybe at this point you might like to explain to us the relationship between the Donnelly River association, shack site holders, and the local governments in the area.

Mr Ryan: That has been part of my job—to canvass the shires. We have a very good relationship with the shire president and the CEO of the Shire of Manjimup. We have the full support of all councils; we have done the same with Barbara Dunnet, the shire president of Nannup, and they are very supportive of us. We have written submissions in.

Hon KATE DOUST: Would they support a continuation of the shacks at these locations?

Mr Ryan: Yes, their opinion is that they would like us to go for some sort of management plan, whether it be DEC controlled or shire controlled. What people seem to have in mind is something similar to what has happened at Windy Harbour; that is what people are thinking of, foremost, but we do not know, and we are only hoping that whatever management plan we get into, we will have some input into it. That, to me, is pretty important. But the relationship there is excellent. When we

had the last minister, Donna Faragher, down to the Donnelly—not the June just gone, but the June before—she came down with Barbara Dunnet, the Nannup shire president, the CEO of Nannup, and the shire president and the CEO of Manjimup shire. We have a photo of them all here at the site where we were intending to build a gazebo-type shelter for daytrippers. We just do not seem to be getting any answers; we want to fund it and build it, because the daytrippers and campers are a pretty important part. We want to fund it out of our own funds, but we cannot seem to get anywhere.

The CHAIRMAN: But you are saying that you have a good relationship with those councils.

Mr Ryan: A very good relationship, and the Nannup council was unanimous.

The CHAIRMAN: Are you in agreement with their requirements? We understand that they have talked of long-term lease if all huts meet health requirements and building requirements and that management arrangements exist for promotion of access to short-term rental.

Mr Ryan: If that is what we have to comply with, we will have to comply with it. We have no options, have we?

The CHAIRMAN: No, I was wondering whether you were all in agreement with that.

Mr Ryan: Yes, we are.

Mr Lush: We are talking or liaising and have been cooperating for some time with DEC and the shires. In terms of public access and support, in addition to the upstream landing facilities, the hut owners have renewed the boat ramp several times. They provide shelter, water and fireplaces for public visitors, including overnight stays.

Hon PHIL EDMAN: Can you elaborate a bit on that point? You have 43 huts, so how do you provide the shelter and the fireplaces for the overnight stays? Does that mean you are renting out?

Mr Lush: The verandahs are all available.

Hon PHIL EDMAN: So you are letting out one of the 43?

Mr Lush: Not subleasing, just letting people use the verandahs and providing the barbecue fireplaces that are there. There is a water supply available, and all of those places on the huts are readily available for public use.

Hon PHIL EDMAN: What about sleeping quarters?

Mr Lush: They sleep on the verandah. It saves them sleeping in their tents, sometimes. If they are trapped down there after a boat breakdown—that happens periodically—they have somewhere where they can at least get out of the rain, if it is wet.

Hon PHIL EDMAN: But the actual shacks themselves are not for rent or lease.

Mr Lush: Parts of the shacks are less secure.

Hon COL HOLT: Do you have any idea how many general public visitors, who do not sleep in the shacks, come down?

Mr Lush: Day visitors?

Hon COL HOLT: Day visitors or overnighers who camp on the beach at the river mouth. Any idea how many? How many go on the tour?

Mr Ryan: On the tour, there are about 30 every second day.

Hon COL HOLT: Thirty every second day?

Mr Ryan: Pretty well.

Hon COL HOLT: What about other people?

Mr Ryan: Just to give you an example, during the recent fire we chartered a helicopter. A friend of mine, a hut owner, and three others went down, because we wanted to get things organised and straightened out. We landed a helicopter there, and there were 30 people at the meeting, and I reckon 15 of them were visitors. They were stuck there; they did not get out for three days. I got to my place; obviously I did not have a boat. We had to rely on other people there to move them out, and there were people on my verandah, camped there, and that was all right. They were using the barbecue and sleeping on the verandah. A lot of people use the Donnelly, and I was so surprised. If we had not come in by helicopter, and they were trapped there, I was so surprised there were so many people there. But we put them to good use; they made good firebreaks and worked their little butts off, and they were very helpful.

Hon COL HOLT: So they all jump in their boats from the ramp and tootle off down there for a few days.

Mr Lush: Yes, and DEC closed access because of the fire.

Mr Ryan: We just had a Legacy group down there over the past few weeks, and they had 60 children and 15 adults there; that was just last week. They wrote a letter to thank us for the use of the huts and things like that, and we have had other things; we have had Apex clubs. I have a list that I can go through later.

Hon COL HOLT: To go bit further, the association wants to build some amenity for daytrippers in terms of a gazebo and a barbecue area—is that right?

Mr Ryan: That is right.

Hon COL HOLT: But so far it has not been done because DEC —

Mr Ryan: We have an architectural drawing already in our possession; we have already paid for that. It was done by a lass in Bridgetown who is an architect. We presented that to the Faraghers, the Jim Sharps and the whoevers, and we have got nowhere. We want to fund that and do it ourselves.

Hon COL HOLT: That is a spot near the huts?

Mr Ryan: Right where the photo was taken of Donna Faragher and the shire presidents.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Is that something that could be addressed in a management plan, if you had a management plan?

Mr Ryan: It could well be. We wanted to show that we do not just use it ourselves; we want other people to use it, the same as the canoeists. We want canoeists to have the best possible place where they can launch off.

Mr Lush: Our submission has a number of proposals and I will get to those in a moment. It includes making provision for that sort of amenity. Very quickly on the subject of public access, there is a shelter and rubbish collection in public places. Caretaking duties, moderation of vandalism and unsocial behaviour just by frequent visitations is done, especially in popular holiday times. Obviously the association puts visitors to work, too, if there is an emergency happening, providing emergency help as and when required, such as aiding stranded boats or injured people. Boats do break down and people do hurt themselves in accidents, so the people down there, the hut owners, tend to be the first port of call for first aid and assistance. They are proactive towards DEC regarding improving amenity and the like. Obviously there is a reluctance for any formal endorsement of that until such time as policy is aligned with what DEC does. The hut owners promote and maintain a positive attitude towards high standards and sustainable use of that part of the D'Entrecasteaux National Park. As was mentioned just a minute ago, the tour boat operates daily all year round, carrying passengers to and from the river mouth. The site has heritage values. The precinct has been a holiday destination, as I mentioned earlier, continuously for almost 100 years, and there is a very strong connection with the earliest pastoral activities. Leases for cattle

grazing were granted to pioneering families, including the Bussell family of the Vasse area and the Scott family of the Nannup area in 1861. The Bolganup hut, six kilometres south of the boat landing, is one of the last remaining pastoral camps in the area; it has been formally classified as having high heritage significance. It was built in the late 1800s and was almost lost in the recent fire. In fact, DEC had to dump a load of fire retardant on top of the hut from a helicopter to protect it; there was not any maintenance around it, in terms of firebreaks or anything, so it was almost lost in that fire, but it was not. Town communities have funded boats for communal use to access the river estuary for camping. The heritage point is illustrated by a couple of pictures. This particular boat is loaded for a journey; that is a photograph from about 1924. In this other photograph, a family has its boat on board, dog and all! These days, you cannot take a dog into national parks, so I think the dog would have stayed at home if that was yesterday's photo instead of earlier days! Nora Palmer wrote to us in 2005, when we were gathering information on the heritage of the site. She is now 92. According to my notes, she wrote —

“Round about 1922-23 Manjimup had a progress association of which my father, Don McKay, was President. They raised money and bought two boats which were left at the landing ... these boats were for anyone who wished to have a holiday at the Donnelly mouth. Of course they had to row the 10 miles as no one had motors.

“In about 1923-24 (my dad) rowed us down the river for a holiday. (We) camped in a ti tree shelter which was available to all. It was in a gully near to where Chadwick's hut is today. I remember it well as I was 7 years old at that time. I remember eating mouldy bread—that sticks in my memory ...

“I believe that the Dick family had a holiday even before us. They stayed two weeks, ran out of food and shot crows to eat”.

Government policy to remove squatter shacks has seen most of them removed. Many other coastal camping sites from the early twentieth century have been lost to developers; we read about it regularly—the caravan parks are disappearing, and so on and so forth, and grey nomads have to look a bit harder for caravan sites. The Donnelly River precinct represents one of the few remaining low-cost coastal camps in Western Australia. Huts have remained largely immune to modern technological developments; they are refuge from them, and owners demonstrate the innovation that typified early settlers by adapting and making do with whatever materials were available. The committee may have seen these pictures of typical huts. The fireplaces catch my eye, but that is a typical hut. This one is now a storage shed; it looks like one, does it not?

The CHAIRMAN: It looks like it was used for something else before!

Mr Lush: Yes, obviously a storage shed! This is another hut. We think these huts have heritage value, especially since there is very little of this sort of thing that reflects camping in the 1920s and 1930s.

We have a number of recommendations on the policy that I would like to quickly go through. The association would prefer the state government to amend its existing policy to recognise the significant differences between circumstances and shacks in different locations. The current policy has achieved its purpose of halting construction of random and ragged shacks and the removal of many of them. The association recommends the policy be amended to recognise that some shacks are associated with our earliest endeavours to settle and develop rural Western Australia; that it recognise that shacks were constructed to accommodate family recreation at a time and place where affordable holiday accommodation did not exist; and that it recognise that many existing shacks and shack locations have significant heritage value, and that settlements of shacks provide valuable community benefit. The association also recommends that the policy recognise that shack communities facilitate responsible management and protection of natural and heritage values, as well as ongoing care and maintenance of the surrounding environment, and that the policy recognise that shack communities facilitate an ongoing caretaking presence in isolated locations.

[10.00 am]

Further, that the policy require site-specific management plans be prepared in consultation with key stakeholders, endorsed by the vested authority and implemented in a cooperative and shared way; that construction and/or upgrade of dwellings—and the gazebo thing would be an example here—meet regulatory requirements, especially health and safety, without compromising the sense of place and original purpose. The usage of shack settlements is inclusive, meaning that access is available in a controlled and sustainable way to the wider public to provide equity, and that heritage and other values specific to shack settlements is communicated to all users through appropriate interpretative and visitor information facilities.

There are seven further proposals in the event that government policy for the management of squatter shacks is amended to recognise and protect the heritage and other community values. The association proposes that the leases be continued indefinitely to maintain and protect the cultural heritage of the settlement and the hut communities, especially the Donnelly River. The hut precinct is subject to a detailed, site-specific management plan prepared by the association in consultation with key stakeholders, and that is consistent with the national park management plan and the vested authorities and policies. We propose that the hut precinct management plan be endorsed by the vested authority and periodically audited by an independent third party; that the Bolganup hut be relocated to a suitable and protectable site in or near the Donnelly hut precinct; that wider public use of the precinct be developed by provision of short-term—that is, overnight—camping facilities consistent in design and amenity with existing structures; that interpretation and visitor information be provided to raise awareness of the unique natural and heritage values of the lower Donnelly River; and, finally, that costs of development and maintenance works be shared between the vested authority and the association, that financial costs of proposed works are kept within the means of hut owners and that hut owner effort in kind be recognised as a fair contribution. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN: Thanks, Alan. You have raised a few questions for the committee. Before I open it up to the committee for questions, you mentioned some letters. I am just wondering whether you can make those letters of support and letters of evidence of other users of your huts available to the committee. I would just like to see that evidence of other use of those huts.

Mr Lush: Would you like them identified for Hansard purpose?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Mr Ryan: There are some other groups. If you want me to —

The CHAIRMAN: That is if they are all available now. If you have to gather the information —

Mr Ryan: Some are available now. Did you want me to go on with the groups that are using the Donnelly River?

The CHAIRMAN: You can just identify the material, and that will be sufficient. We will look at those letters later.

Mr Ryan: I have three or four letters with me that I have brought, but I have a list of a lot of groups that use the Donnelly River.

Mr Lush: They would like copies of the letters, so just the ones you have got letters for.

The CHAIRMAN: We can do it later, but if you just identify them for Hansard at this stage.

Mr Ryan: Do you want me to identify them now?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes, please.

Mr Ryan: There is a letter from the district manager, Donnelly district.

Mr Lush: That is DEC.

Mr Ryan: There is the fire and rescue letter, and the other letter I have got is from Perth Legacy. The other one is from Apex club. The one I was referring to was the newsletter with Donna Faragher at the site we want to build the shelter.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay, thank you for that. My first question—I know members have got others—but you said when you were going through recommendations to government, you stated that you believe that you are different to other shack settlements. Can you explain why you think you are different to, say, Wedge and Grey or any other shacks?

Mr Lush: I have not visited those sites. Access is clearly unique. The huts are family holiday huts. Yes, the Grey and Ledge Point, Green Island—they would be holiday families as well. I think the Donnelly, spread out along the river, is a unique situation. Formal association or the work they do in conjunction with DEC—I think there are a number of unique things that are different.

I think all of them share the holiday place. I am sure all of them were established way back when people on the hinterland would go to the coast, and that was the nearest bit of coast. There were communities, I think, a lot of them along the south coast and certainly the west coast—and the west coast ones are mostly gone. There are a few that you are hearing about or that you have heard from. I am on camp right now at Hamelin Bay with my grandchildren and my wife. Hamelin Bay was a settlement. That is now national park, leased. That is one of the only camping areas. There is a caravan park. The chalets are moving in. There have been six more put in since we were there last year, so there are fewer campsites, which is what we use. There are not too many of those around. Certainly the association, in addition to the huts, is looking at providing campsites in conjunction with DEC. We would not want it to be a huge, expansive camping ground that would take away from the nature of the place. I think there are a number of differences there.

The CHAIRMAN: I just have one other—I cannot help it; it is the farmer in me. Fires scare me, and you mentioned fires. I do not know how close this fire got to you. It is a beautiful setting, but it is covered with bush. What anti-fire measures do have in place?

Mr Ryan: We have got a fire plan that has only just been implemented. At the moment it is with DEC in Pemberton; they are just saying that they want to finetune a few things on it before they can put that plan into place. Where we live is not really as much of a fire danger as it looks. I am a farmer too, and I have had a fair bit of experience with bush fire brigades, probably as you would have had yourself. So it is not really a danger in the fact that we have got good firebreaks. A lot of people mow around their huts with lawnmowers and cutters, and all the bushes are kept back to a bare minimum, so we have a fair bit of room there. We have got fire-based motors on the river, and heaps of hoses. Instead of having a fire truck, we have a boat fire brigade. So we have got the motor in the boat. We have suction in the biggest reservoir, which is bigger than Sydney Harbour.

Mr Lush: When the bar's broken!

The CHAIRMAN: It is a fair bit of water.

Mr Ryan: It is a fair bit of water. And that is what we do—that is how we get it. I was at the last fire of 1988. That time the river was open and the road was open, whereas this time they closed the road, closed the river—different scenario. It is not real good to be down there when all this is on. We just upgraded firebreaks, had the water and we were waiting—that was all our job was. Never in danger since the last fire—even the fire of 1988, we were never in danger. All we had to do was wait for the word where the containment line was sort of—

Mr Lush: Breached.

Mr Ryan: Fired across, where we could burn back, and that was about it; there was no danger at all. It was just a matter of waiting the time. We worked well with DEC. We have a nice letter here from the district manager, Donnelly, stating all that—for putting his people up, feeding them, for looking out for them, transporting them; all those things are in that letter. They are very appreciative of that.

Because they had daytrippers and they had campers there as well, so it is their duty of care to look after those people.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: I have a couple of questions I wanted to ask. It does sound very interesting what you are describing and is probably one of the things that makes Western Australia unique in being able to enjoy the beautiful environment that we have in the way that you do. I guess one of the issues that comes up is equity, because one of the things that we are looking at in relation to shacks sites is: because it is a national park, how does the stewardship of the huts pass hands through the generations? I wanted to know how that was passed on if somebody decided they no longer wanted to be a custodian there.

Mr Serafini: In 1984 when we had an agreement with DEC that we had permission to stay on a lease basis within the national park, there was a criteria that we had to fill in. On our lease agreement we had an option to write those people of six within the family that would continue that lease sign. If something happened to me, for example, I have my brother and his nephew on the lease—a document that entitles them to continue that lease until the new management plan was out—to be 2005, I think it was. That was the agreement within that 20-year lease agreement with DEC—at the time it was CALM. And that is the arrangement at the moment.

Personally, for equity for me, to be responsible for a person who has no idea what it is to have a hut down there is very dangerous, because we are playing around with kerosene fridges, lighting plants. I think it would be a nightmare on equity, opening the huts to people of the public without knowing who we are inviting in there—it is very delicate.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: The other thing that was mentioned is opening up access to campers, for instance—people who are tenting. It reminds me a bit like the huts that are along the Bibbulmun that allow hikers to sleep overnight. Is that the kind of facility that you are talking about having down there?

Mr Serafini: That is right.

Hon PHIL EDMAN: Just to follow on from the Hon Lynn MacLaren, since the shacks have been there for 100 years or roundabout—

Mr Lush: Camping for that length of time.

Hon PHIL EDMAN: That is fine. Have any of the shacks ever in the last 100 years ever been sold or changed hands, or has it just been handed down from generation to generation? If there has been a shack been sold, then what has been that average price?

Mr Serafini: They really are not allowed to sell them. The lease agreement states that we cannot sell them.

Hon PHIL EDMAN: So in the last 100 years there has never been a shack been sold?

Mr Serafini: It would have been, but we are talking about 20 years since the management plan. I was introduced to the Donnelly when I was about nine. My father took me down with a person who was interested to sell his boat and shack down there, and that is how we acquired that. That was in 1971—maybe earlier than that. At nine—I am 57 now, so it is a long time ago.

Hon PHIL EDMAN: So in the last 20 years, though, nothing has been sold or changed hands?

Mr Serafini: We cannot say that for sure, because it is not supposed to happen. But if it does happen, all I can say on that scenario is: you are not buying a lease, you are buying a salvage right to a place. The same situation, if the management plan goes ahead, giving us six years, and we have to demolish our huts—the person who has the right on that salvage right has the same right in getting rid of that hut as the leaseholder would have had at the time.

The CHAIRMAN: Does the salvage right increase in value?

Mr Serafini: Good question; it is not a thing that we really get ourselves involved with as an association, because it is a private business. Today you have a mutual agreement between two people and it is legally binding between two people and is not against the law. It is open for that. We do not profess that to be the right thing, but it does happen.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: The other issue that we have raised is health and if you are meeting the requirements of the health act in relation to effluent and waste management. Would you explain again how that works? Do the huts have drop dunnies? How do you actually manage your waste? Do you just make it the responsibility of the individual hut owners to transport waste off site?

[10.15 am]

Mr Serafini: Well, most of the system that was designed within the management plan in 1984 was that we had to comply to a system where we did not have drop toilets. The system is a degradable system—flush water systems, showers. They were all part of conditions for the agreement to happen before our lease agreements were signed. So, we had to comply within a certain safety and health reason at the time before we signed our lease agreements, so it is practice that everyone has a proper toilet and shower down there at the moment.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: So is it a composting toilet?

Mr Serafini: Decomposing toilets, yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Can you just give us the numbers: how many people are permanent there? Are they all holiday or —

Mr Ryan: None.

The CHAIRMAN: There are no permanents?

Mr Lush: No permanents.

Mr Ryan: There was one, but you see there—that was his wake.

The CHAIRMAN: Oh, right.

Mr Serafini: He is in the river.

Mr Ryan: He is there permanently now.

The CHAIRMAN: On average how many weeks or days of the year would these huts be occupied?

Hon KATE DOUST: Or is there a maximum number of nights that you can stay in the huts?

Mr Ryan: I know someone is staying there now for a month—one family. Another family is staying there for a week. I mean, it varies. I do not think anyone would stay there for two or three months at a time—not this late. But I say a month is a reasonable time for someone to stay.

Hon KATE DOUST: We asked that because in a number of other shack sites where agreements are in place with local governments—for example, Naval Base, I think they can only stay there for 120 nights a year. They can go down every weekend or every day but in terms of staying overnight—I was just wondering if that was the same sort of arrangement for you.

Mr Serafini: No, there is not.

Mr Lush: There is nothing.

Hon KATE DOUST: So there is no restriction at all?

Mr Lush: There is nothing in the lease.

Mr Ryan: A lot of people would like to live there.

The CHAIRMAN: So, most of the year it is not being used.

Mr Lush: Well, there is always somebody there.

Mr Ryan: Yes.

Mr Serafini: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay. I would like you to clarify also: in your recommendations, point 8, you are saying —

Usage of “shack settlements” is inclusive, meaning that access is available in a controlled and sustainable way to the wider public ...

Do you mean in that recommendation the right to rent the property or are you talking about just other people coming in and camping there? Which way do you —

Mr Ryan: I think that is regarded more friends of the family and other descendants of the family and people —

Mr Lush: My understanding is that for general public use there would be some sort of camping facility provided, similar to the Bibbulmun hut sort of shacks, and that people would use those. If there was an overflow from that sort of facility, I expect it to fall back to the verandas again, but I have not heard—and Tony had better clarify this—any mention in my association with different members of people leasing or renting or subleasing their huts to holidaymakers.

Mr Ryan: I am not aware of that.

The CHAIRMAN: So that would be in conflict with what the local government wants?

Mr Serafini: I do not think so.

The CHAIRMAN: No?

Mr Lush: Tony, can you comment on what the local governments, you think, are thinking for wider public use?

Mr Ryan: I do not know. The talks I have had with the shires, really, they would just be happy to see us have a plan, say, have a lease for 20 or 21 years and a management plan that we abided by. I do not think they want—they have not really got into any more specifics than that.

The CHAIRMAN: This is something that I did read from one of the shires. It seemed to want more, I suppose, equity and it mentioned something about that management arrangements exist for the promotion of access for short-term rental.

Mr Ryan: See, that has been more comments from DEC. DEC would like us to have—originally this is what they have been saying—five, six, seven, eight or however many huts available for that use. That is what they are saying.

The CHAIRMAN: This is from the Shire of Manjimup actually.

Mr Ryan: Is it? All right. So they are saying they want —

The CHAIRMAN: There just seems to be a little bit of confusion between you —

Mr Ryan: I have been there quite a few times, Brian, and I have not heard it mentioned they would want that. They have written that submission without our knowledge, I would say.

Mr Lush: I think the association is keen that wider public use happens in a sustainable way; that whatever facilities for camping are available that fits in with the tone of the place. At one stage, different huts if they became available, they could be made available for camping, but then you have got the issue of kerosene fridges and all sorts. So I can imagine if a hut becomes available and there is nobody interested in keeping it going, you would get rid of the hut and you would replace it with a camping shelter, which allows people to have a roof and some warmth, and there is water and a reasonable toilet available. I think that is for the hut owners. People camping on the veranda they need to go toileting: if the toilet is a camp toilet, the people might prefer to go in the bush at the back. Now, that is not a good idea and none of the hut owners want that. Sometimes a lot a hut

owners might use their toilets as their lockable storage. It is awkward and clearly the association wants to talk with DEC and the local authorities and develop a plan that facilitates those sorts of things. But, you know, it is a national park, it is DEC's responsibility and there needs to be some talk with them.

Hon COL HOLT: I think I read also in something from DEC about at the end of the potential lease period of six years or whatever it was to say, "You've got to pack up and go", that they were interested in taking over some of those huts for campers or day users or anything like that.

Mr Ryan: And tourism. "Commercial ventures" it says. I could tell you a little bit there because I think that it is still written in the management plan that the day that the minister signs the agreement off, we have six years and we have got to then sign to say that we will demolish after six years; if you do not sign, they are gone straightaway.

The CHAIRMAN: This is the 2005 management plan you are talking about?

Mr Ryan: Yes.

Mr Lush: This is the national parks management plan.

Mr Ryan: So that is still with us, as far as I know, because the last visit we had with Donna Faragher, we had Jim Sharp pushing his paper over and asking her to sign it, "Please sign it, please sign it", and that was the story then. They are still looking to that today and that is the big deterrent we have had. How can you get someone to do something to the hut? How can you get some improvements done knowing as soon as that is signed you have got six years and out. I mean, people are not silly. We said, "Just change the wording; change 'six' to '20' and 'not be demolished'. Those are the only two things you need to change and we will walk away from there very, very happy."

The CHAIRMAN: Have you had that input into the new management plan that was proposed?

Mr Ryan: We have no input; only through public submission. But that is still with us today and it is just: how do you get people to do things and make an improvement?

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: I actually was just trying to think through some of the issues around people going down there and camping, and it actually would apply at any camping site; the public liability, so if somebody trips over on your veranda or something. I guess I have two worries: one is how do they get out of there quickly and what are the implications for liability? Who has got that liability?

Mr Serafini: We all individually should have a public liability insurance to cover ourselves. We all have. That is one of the conditions that we had to apply within having the agreement with the leases. It was a part of an agreement.

Mr Ryan: It would be a hut owner who would have to run her or him back. That is for sure. We have done that quite a few times.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: And there is always somebody onsite?

Mr Ryan: There is always someone getting hurt.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: And always someone onsite—to help, I mean?

Mr Ryan: Well, not always but —

Mr Serafini: No, that is the thing about public liability. That scares us when you start opening it to the public—where it becomes a nightmare—and something does happen within your hut and public liability then comes into place. But that is a scary thing about opening the hut itself up to the public, for us.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: I suppose DEC would have that as well with the Bibbulmun, you know, if somebody injured themselves at one of the huts—fell over in the middle of the night.

Mr Ryan: Or I could get injured going out and walking out here. I could get injured walking out here going to my car.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Yes, and they would be remote spots as well with no caretaker, so it is probably, you know, for a site which is managed by DEC, it is not an issue.

Mr Lush: I think that is certainly an area that would be worked on—the public safety of each of the areas. One of the things the association is trying to do is to get more work done on the huts. The hindrance is the fact that there is this “get out and demolish your hut in six years’ time”, so some people are saying, “Blow that! I’m going to do what I can anyway and hope the hell that the policy changes”, and others are saying, “Well, I don’t know.” The prevailing actions are positive that we will still do what we can to improve what we have and take our chances on the policy changing. I think as soon as/if the policy does change, you will see the association go up another notch and do a lot more to make the place safer and to help facilitate more public usage. I mean, the proposals put to DEC sit on the shelf because DEC cannot go and say, “All right, build a camping facility” and at the same time say in the management plan “Demolish your huts in six years”, so that is probably the reason they are sitting. If this shack policy that you are looking at facilitates an extension of huts, with whatever conditions you put on them, then we would expect DEC would need to comply with that government policy and then you would be going to get a different attitude towards improving public safety and providing canoe facilities, especially the launching at the congested ramp, helping to do something about huts. If a hut becomes vacant, maybe that gets demolished by the hut owners and that becomes another site for a camping shelter. I do not know, but there are a lot of opportunities once that hindrance is removed.

Hon KATE DOUST: Look, there has obviously been a lot of discussion amongst the people who use the huts in your area about what the future may hold. If the decision was taken in due course that all the huts would be demolished, where does that leave you? What are the other options for people who have been using the huts for so long and who have enjoyed that facility? I mean, where would you go then?

Mr Ryan: That is something we would—but it would be an environmental disaster for us to take materials that are already down there back out. It would be an environmental disaster. I do not think that would ever happen. They just could not afford to do that. Yes, I think that most people would be devastated. All these groups—I have got some more to mention—that have been using it for 30 and 40 years for recreation, for meetings, for training runs and all those things, they would be devastated. I do not want to think that way.

Hon KATE DOUST: No, but I wanted to hear what you thought would happen.

Mr Ryan: Oh, it would just be—and grandchildren. My grandchildren have written stories at school that I did not even know about and their mums brought it up. I did show some to Donna Faragher when she came down; she was a bit touched by some of them. And there are things that, you know, grandfathers and kids do down that stage, in the bush and learning to fish and marron and all those things you do, they stay with kids forever and a day; they remember that for a lifetime. It is pretty important.

Mr Lush: I think one of the bigger impacts will be the older people and the very young probably will not get that experience. If they are just back to tents or camp in a shelter; you will just bring it back to a handful of people who are outdoors-orientated. The older people especially will not go there; you will not get the mixed generations in camp.

Mr Ryan: I mean those 60 Legacy kids would have a fair memory, wouldn’t they? They were there for quite a few days; they would remember that.

The CHAIRMAN: Just along the same issue, I suppose, I have to ask the question about equity. To the public who wish to go there but cannot use your huts and you did not buy the huts, how do you justify that you should keep them?

Mr Lush: I think then the visitor information, the interpretative facility, needs to explain that these are a part of a past heritage; start to tell people that families used to camp on the coast.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: There is certainly precedent, Alan, in the heritage houses like Tranby On Swan and Gallop House et cetera where there are caretakers in them that have never paid for them but they are part of our state heritage, so I do not know if you think about Donnelly in those terms.

[10.30 am]

Bridgetown and Manjimup boy scouts; what better place would there be for boy scouts to be down there training? Bunbury Cathedral College, Albany High School, Outward Bound; Outward Bound are always there. Pemberton Camp School, and that incorporates a lot of schools, but Pemberton has got a very good name for being the camp school there. There is the Pemberton ladies social club canoe group canoe down and Manjimup fire and rescue, Manjimup Bowls Club and local football clubs. There are a lot of people using this place. I call that equity. That is the equity.

Mr Lush: I think having the hut and people that are down there regularly with their boats gives you that bit of first aid, that emergency care. If these visitors have an incident, you have got the local knowledge and there tends to be somebody there most of the time that can help them out.

The CHAIRMAN: Unless there are any pressing questions, I think we will have to wind it up. We have gone overtime anyway. I really do thank you for coming in and putting your case and our deliberations are still continuing. Thank you once again. We will break now.

Mr Lush: Thank you for the opportunity.

Mr Ryan: Thank you very much for having us.

Hearing concluded at 10.30 am
