

ECONOMICS AND INDUSTRY STANDING COMMITTEE

Second Report — “Provision, Use and Regulation of Caravan Parks (and Camping Grounds) in Western Australia” — Tabling

DR M.D. NAHAN (Riverton) [10.14 am]: I present for tabling the second report of the Economics and Industry Standing Committee, entitled “Provision, Use and Regulation of Caravan Parks (and Camping Grounds) in Western Australia”. As members can see, we have been active! No wonder I had a hernia!

[See papers 1548 to 1550.]

Dr M.D. NAHAN: Caravanning and camping have long been a central part of the Western Australian way of life, whether it be family vacations by the sea during school holidays, exploring the great Western Australian outback or undertaking the grand tour of the north and beyond. The network of caravan and camping facilities around the state is a vital part of the state’s tourism industry and constitutes a sizeable business in its own right. This way of life and the industry that supplies it are under threat. Caravan parks are disappearing and not being replaced, and many of the remaining parks are filling with permanent residents, which is reducing space for tourists. That is a central finding of this report. The loss of caravan and camping infrastructure is not new to members of this place, past and present; many members have, over the past decade, raised their concerns about the loss of such facilities. Governments have commissioned numerous advisory groups and investigations, some of which are ongoing, aimed at addressing the loss of this essential infrastructure.

The loss of these facilities and the associated problems are of longstanding concern to many local governments, park owners, caravan groups, regional governments and park residents. As is apparent from this pile of documents, many of these people have expressed their concerns in the form of submissions to the committee. Despite this interest in the investigations, the committee finds that very little of an effective nature has been achieved to address the decline in caravan and camping infrastructure. This needs to be addressed as a priority.

The loss of caravan and camping infrastructure is significant. For example, Mandurah—historically a mainstay of the traditional family caravan holiday—has witnessed the closure of many caravan parks over the past decade, and only six parks remain. Of these remaining parks, 87 per cent of the available space is currently occupied by long-stay residents, which leaves only 80 sites available to tourists. Moreover, it has been assessed that four of the six remaining parks are likely to be closed in the near future. No replacement parks have been identified for or planned in Mandurah or the greater Peel region.

The Shire of Busselton—another traditional centre of family caravan holidays—has lost 15 parks over the past few decades, with seven closures over the past few years. Two of the remaining 11 parks have limited or no short-stay sites for tourists, and some parks are under threat. Again, there are no plans to redevelop or find new parks in this shire.

In the Pilbara region, although parks are not being closed, they are filled with workers to the virtual exclusion of tourists, so that caravanners making the 1 500-kilometre trek from Exmouth to Broome have no place to stay along the way. Despite caravan parks being the foundation of the Broome economy, providing accommodation for most tourists and a place of residence for workers in the wider tourism industry, caravan parks are either full or disappearing. The pressures for redevelopment or closure of parks are numerous, powerful and ongoing. Characteristically, caravan parks in the past were located on the outskirts of towns on isolated, pristine beaches, or near attractive tourist sites. That is what happened when these places were low cost. In recent years, urban encroachment, rising land values—particularly along the coast—and rising demand for holiday homes have driven large increases in the underlying value of the land on which caravan parks are located.

Caravanning and camping is fundamentally a low-priced business; that is one of its attributes, but it also means that there is limited ability to pass on costs. This has meant that many parks have struggled to cope with recent rises in water and electricity prices, land taxes and rates, wages and other costs, which is putting pressure on them to redevelop into alternative, higher value uses. The vast majority of caravan parks are privately owned and have zoning that allows for redevelopment. Caravan parks have come under pressure from people in need of housing, affordable or otherwise. Nearly 15 000 people live permanently in caravan parks around the state, resulting in many parks being filled with long-stay tenants. Although the growth in long-stay tenants is a response to a real and growing need, and although many caravan parks need a proportion of long-stay tenants to remain viable, long-stay tenants are crowding out tourists.

What should be done? The response needs to be a fundamental one. The central task is to stem the loss of existing parks and to ensure the creation of new parks. The report has made a number of recommendations, including that the government identify, procure and zone parcels of land for new caravan parks. The government

should purchase the redevelopment rights of privately owned parks on strategic sites, and encourage and assist pastoral lessees to develop and manage nature-based parks on their leaseholds. The government should ensure that the Department of Environment and Conservation sets aside a much greater proportion of its estate for low-cost—I emphasise low-cost—nature-based caravan parks and camping grounds. It should also ensure that LandCorp, the Department of Planning and other planning and development agencies include caravan parks in their structural and regional plans. These actions will come at a cost but are necessary to sustain the industry.

The report also recommends a number of measures to take cost pressures off park owners and to provide fiscal incentives for them to continue to operate parks predominantly for short-stay tourists. These measures include that the land tax concession of 50 per cent be increased to 100 per cent for parks operating primarily for short-stay tourists, with the caveat that there be a clawback over the previous 10 years if these parks are redeveloped. The committee also recommends that local government rates be calculated on actual use—say, caravan use—rather than higher value use as applies currently, such as for general tourism.

One of the main findings of the report was that the demands facing parks vary according to region, season, type of service, levels of investment and mix of tenants. One approach certainly does not fit all in the caravan business. As such, the report recommends that the government amend legislation governing caravan parks to give market forces and park owners greater influence over the design, size and mix of services and that it ensures that local government authorities develop tourism strategies that guide planning and mix of service to include the regulation and principles relating to the proportion of long-stay tenants in caravan parks. The committee also recommends that the licensing and compliance function remain under the jurisdiction of local government rather than the proposed “independent state-based agency”. We believe that the principle of subsidiary in terms of regulation, compliance and licensing remains and applies.

Another major finding in the report is that a major shift is underway in the demand for caravanning and camping services towards nature-based facilities and towards urban recreational and vacation parks with limited services and low costs. These trends are being driven by a number of factors, including a rise in the number of grey nomads—winter drifters, who drift towards the sun and back—and freedom seekers, people who like to go out in four-wheel drives on the weekend and seek freedom; as well as the growth in large, self-contained caravans pulled by four-wheel drive vehicles. These are all defined in the report. This shift poses a challenge to park owners as they emphasise low-cost services and a different mix of services. These trends should be given priority when identifying, developing and zoning new facilities.

One of the most surprising findings of the committee was the large, informal camping activity on pastoral leases along the Ningaloo coast. This represents one of the most concentrated areas of caravan activity in the state—and has been, apparently, for decades. It was at least a surprise to me. It is not included in much of the official records, data and information. It is a secret haven. The committee visited the area, and it is a lovely spot. It is the view of the committee that the government must ensure that these areas remain open to caravanning and camping. Indeed, the government must take great care when deciding the setback and management rights of the land along the foreshore of the Ningaloo park to ensure that these areas remain open to low-cost, nature-based camping and caravanning. In fact it is the view of the committee that there is scope to formalise and expand the nature-based facilities along the Ningaloo coast and that pastoral lessees are well placed to provide these services.

Although the report focuses on the need to ensure adequate caravanning and camping facilities for tourism, it also explores in detail the plight and policy options open to government to address the needs of long-stay tenants. While long-stay tenants play a valuable role—indeed, in some parks, an essential role—the primary purpose of caravanning and camping facilities is tourism. They are not meant to be residential developments but tourism facilities. It is the view of the committee that there is a need to reduce the number of long-stay tenants in caravan parks, at least in strategic areas.

People reside in caravan parks for a variety of reasons, including lifestyle and affordability, as well as, particularly in the north, the lack of alternative accommodation. These are valid needs and must be met. The problem is that rises in house prices in recent years has pushed people in larger numbers into caravan parks, crowding out tourists. Moreover, once in parks, long-stay tenants often become trapped, facing loss of asset values if forced to move and often unable to find alternative parks or alternative similarly priced accommodation. Long-stay tenants are also often elderly, with not too many assets and few opportunities. Thus, the redevelopment of parks has created significant dislocation and, in many cases, substantial hardship to long-stay tenants.

The committee found that the decision of many long-stay tenants to buy into caravan parks was often based on unrealistic expectations, misconceptions about ownership rights and perhaps misinformation. It is unfortunate. It

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is imperative therefore that prospective long-stay tenants be fully informed about their rights, and that they understand that they have not purchased the land on which their van may rest and that the value of the caravan will depreciate over time.

The Residential Parks (Long-stay Tenants) Act 2006 was designed to address the information and tenure deficiency of long-stay tenants. Although it has not been well received by long-stay tenants or park owners, it is the view of the committee that the act went as far as appropriate and the committee does not recommend amendments.

To further assist long-stay tenants, the committee recommends the interagency working group, formed recently to address the problems of the residents of the Kingsway Tourist Park, be continued and that it act in a proactive manner to identify parks that are at risk of closing and develop appropriate solutions tailored to the needs of long-stay residents in those parks.

The solution to the excessive demand for long-stay tenants lies in ensuring the supply of affordable and available housing more generally. Notwithstanding this, the committee found that lifestyle villages or park homes, which have developed in Western Australia in recent years, are an essential mechanism to address the needs of many people—not all—in the market for long-stay tenancy, and thus reduce pressure on caravan parks. The committee recommends that the government facilitate and encourage the development of park homes or lifestyle villages. It is important for these to remain affordable, which means they must be allowed access to low-cost land, such as land zoned rural. The committee also recommends that the government continue to regulate the sector under the Caravan Parks and Camping Grounds Act 1995 and that subsidiary legislation under this act be developed for this purpose.

One of the key reasons for the lack of effective action to date has been the lack of a champion amongst government agencies. The sector is of concern to many, but no agency has overall responsibility. The committee recommends that the Minister for Tourism and Tourism Western Australia be given the task to oversee and promote the development of the caravanning and camping industry and related infrastructure, and responsibility to implement the recommendations in the report. In the view of the committee, Tourism Western Australia has tended to focus excessively on high-end, high-cost tourism at the expense of the caravanning and camping sector. This should change. Tourism Western Australia does not have a budget item for caravanning and camping and does not include it in a strategic plan. This must change. The committee strongly believes that the caravanning and camping sector has a bright but changing future as long as we act now and ensure the basic infrastructure remains.

In ending, I would like to thank fellow committee members, including the coopted member, the member for Mandurah, for their commitment and effort. The inquiry has been productive; it has been a joint effort throughout. I would like to thank Dr Loraine Abernethie, principal research officer, and Ms Vanessa Beckingham for their professionalism, dedication, quality of work and good cheer. It is my pleasure to present this report to the government. I urge the government to act.

MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington) [10.29 am]: Ten minutes is a short time to deal with a complex report. It stretches to 530 pages and comprises 151 findings, 57 recommendations and 107 submissions. It is probably true that it was a far more complex issue than committee members realised at the outset. However, this is an important issue and probably needed a thorough review.

I will now make some thankyou's right at the outset so that I do not run out of time later on: firstly, the committee staff, Dr Loraine Abernethie and Vanessa Beckingham; the Chair, the member for Riverton; and the other committee members, the member for Collie-Preston, the member for South Perth and the member for Scarborough, Madam Acting Speaker. Also, who can forget the co-opted member, the member for Mandurah!

The report is unlikely to please everyone. However, as a member of the committee, I can say that this unanimous report has tried to carefully review the history, the current situation and, perhaps most importantly of all, the future of caravanning and camping in Western Australia. We hope that the recommendations will set a framework for a lasting future for this important activity. The danger of a detailed report like this is that it will be a good doorstop but not lead to any action. That would be a tragedy for WA. My view about caravanning and camping is that it is an essential opportunity for a very rewarding life experience. This is not primarily about an economic activity; it is about a rich and rewarding life experience, which is more important than the business needs of particular industry players. If we do not get the regulatory framework right, the caravanning experience will be lost to WA—this has been repeatedly stated over the past decade by members of this place—and to lose caravanning would diminish our community.

I turn now for a few moments to comment on two issues before concluding on one of the recommendations we made. The first issue I want to address is long-stay tenants in caravan parks. The chairman spoke on this quite

important issue. To get a feel for how many people make their life in caravan parks, members should look at the photograph on page xxxii of the first part of the report. There is no question that many long-stay tenants have been and are continuing to be taken advantage of by caravan park operators. This is finding 114 of the report.

However, we cannot legislate for honesty, and I imagine it will upset many people that the committee has said that the Residential Parks (Long-stay Tenants) Act is adequate. However, there are grave issues for long-stay tenants. I saw a caravan advertised for sale for \$50 000 in one of the parks that the committee visited. This sounds very cheap when compared with \$300 000 for a house-and-land package in a working-class suburb of Perth. However, if the same caravan had been for sale in someone's back yard, it would not have fetched even \$5 000. The price difference is the access to the land that sits underneath the caravan. This is very dangerous, because land such as that always belongs to a caravan park operator. A caravan park resident's tenure is always limited, whether it be a periodic tenancy or a tenancy of 30 years. This fact generates the conflict that was raised with the committee in many submissions. This is a real dilemma.

Our finding 134 demonstrates our view that long-stay tenants are better off with a fixed-term tenancy. However, there would be many negative consequences if the government mandated this for existing tenants, including the consequence of eviction for many tenants. In fact, when the residential parks act was introduced, which increased the rights of long-stay tenants, it was the catalyst for park operators to get out of the industry, and this contributed to the eviction of many tenants. There is a critical need for people contemplating moving into a caravan park, including a lifestyle village, to clearly understand their tenancy rights. This has led us to our findings 115, 116 and 117 and recommendation 51.

I turn to the second issue I want to discuss, which is the rise in the use of recreational vehicles, whether they be self-propelled Winnebago-style vehicles or towed caravans. The committee got a clear understanding that people are spending \$50 000 to \$60 000 on a large four-wheel drive to tow their \$70 000 or \$80 000 caravan. These big vans are specifically built for the classic "grey nomads", accommodating just two people, with a separate bedroom, fully equipped kitchen, internal lounge, flush toilet and hot water shower. This is a long way from the vans I slept in when I was a kid. These vehicles are technological marvels that need to plug in only once a week—some even only once a month—basically to dump their black waste. It is revolutionary technology that needs a suitable place to pitch camp on every piece of roadside and every camping ground in this state—indeed everywhere. It is camping with every conceivable piece of technology. In fact, it allows vanners to leave caravan parks behind. It gives them the same level of flexibility that once was available only to campers in tents. Just look at the photograph on page xxi of the first part of the report. Literally in the middle of nowhere, just north of Karratha, vanners have all the on-board services, including satellite TV, satellite phone and satellite broadband with laptop computers, and often with solar power. This technological revolution changes everything about caravanning and is a central component of the recommendations that we have made for the future development of the industry. The regulatory framework must be revised to take account of this new reality, and it is of course a challenge to the existing caravan parks.

I draw members' attention to page 101 of our report, which states that there are probably enough regulated caravan parks and that the real issue about the future of caravanning in this state is to create more opportunities for caravans to camp along the coast and elsewhere.

This leads me to the committee's favourite topic, which is dump points. The fact that 10 pages of the report are devoted to dump points demonstrates the importance of this issue. I therefore urge every member to turn to page 124 of the second part of the report and to read our considerations of this essential piece of tourism infrastructure!

Finally, I now turn to what I consider to be an essential recommendation. The technological revolution of self-contained RVs has changed the nature of caravanning. Regardless of the age of people using these vehicles, they are very techno-savvy and are familiar with using the internet, including from their indispensable laptops. We heard evidence of grey nomads regularly pulling out their laptops as the second thing they do when they arrive in a new town. Sadly, WA is not at the forefront of addressing this new style of traveller. We recommend that Tourism WA firstly give vanning a priority and, secondly, as part of this priority, that it develop a pathway in its website for vanners. The idea is to allow vanners to select the pathway from the front page of the website. Once in that pathway, all the information that vanners need would be present. For example, if they entered this pathway and then selected a particular town, only the information relevant to a vanner would be present, such as the available dump points, relevant rest areas, legal caravan parks including nature-based campsites and overflow sites, and any business that registered as relevant to vanners. Currently the Tourism WA website does not arrange information in an accessible way for vanners. This means that WA is missing out on visitations that it should get and missing out on the opportunity for more people to visit WA.

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In conclusion, I will make a few final points. My view is that this caravanning experience is principally not about the economic benefit for the state, although that is very important; it is about ensuring that vanners come to WA and that WA vanners experience everything that this state has to offer. Given that a four-wheel drive and a modern van will not leave any change from \$100 000, this is not actually about low-cost holidaying, although, fairly or unfairly, grey nomads are regarded as spending little when they are travelling. As an aside, the old-fashioned cheap family holiday is probably in Bali today, rather than three kids and an 18-foot van behind a Kingswood heading to the caravan park in Mandurah. Notwithstanding that vanners are not spending \$800 a night on accommodation, if we do not provide for vanners in WA our state will miss out on providing an important opportunity that should be available to every Australian.

MRS L.M. HARVEY (Scarborough) [10.39 am]: I am pleased to speak to this report titled "Provision, Use and Regulation of Caravan Parks (and Camping Grounds) in Western Australia". This report highlights some alarming issues regarding the caravanning and camping industry, not the least of which concerns the inadequacy of available data from both government and industry with which to quantify the trends within the industry. Notwithstanding the lack of available verifiable data, there were also complications within the data due to changes to how information was collected by various departments and industry bodies. This has made an analysis of the industry difficult to the point where the data from most sources was all but useless. This needs to be addressed with some urgency.

Also requiring urgent attention is the long-awaited review of the regulations and legislation pertaining to this industry, with particular reference now to the recommendations in this report. It is fair to say that the legislation and regulations are no longer contemporary, are overly prescriptive and could well be an impediment to further development of the industry. Parts of the regulations are anticompetitive, in particular regulation 49 of the Caravan Parks and Camping Grounds Regulations 1997, which states that it is illegal to create a nature-based camping ground within 50 kilometres of an established caravan park. Whilst I could speculate on the intent of this regulation, clearly there is a market demand right across the state for nature-based camping facilities that are affordable to consumers and geared towards consumers who desire, and indeed require, fewer facilities. Often, the best places for these facilities are just outside of town. The regulations go so far as to determine the number of basins, showers, toilets and laundry facilities for each caravan and camping bay. Not only are these regulations dictating excessive levels of servicing, but they also ignore current attitudes to water usage and the changing industry. Many people want to camp in relative self-sufficiency with fewer facilities, lower fees and more intimate access to the nature reserves and natural areas that they have, in many cases, driven a long way to enjoy.

Similar to many contributors to this inquiry, my family and I have enjoyed camping in various caravan parks, camping areas and roadside rest areas across the state, with, coincidentally, several of these experiences occurring over the duration of this inquiry. Because of that, I felt a great empathy with many contributors to this inquiry, as participants in these activities aspire to enjoy the features of our Western Australian lifestyle, whilst also engendering a sense of ownership of and respect for our natural areas.

Camping holidays are a more affordable option for many families, with the majority of caravanners and campers being interstate or intrastate travellers. As the inquiry unfolded, I formed a view that it is imperative that this form of recreation be protected for future generations. I was alarmed to notice that, whilst these caravan and camping visits constitute 10 per cent of the tourism industry, due to the lower yields and seasonalities of these activities this industry appears to have been under the government radar. It is important that we acknowledge the enormous social benefits to Western Australians who participate in these activities, and that our government acknowledge that a low-yield activity within tourism can also be of benefit to the economy and the community. This social objective must form part of our tourism strategy for the state to ensure that all Western Australians can afford a holiday at home in the best places in the state.

Of great concern is the prospect that sections of the state may not be accessible to future generations. The industry is feeling many pressures at present, including pressures on owners of parks to convert to high-yield uses. These parks are often in the best sites for tourism within the state. Of particular concern are places such as the south west region, where the opportunities for camping experiences are being reduced, with little planning and allocations for the replacement of our disappearing caravan parks and camping grounds.

On a brighter note, though, we also found that there were many new opportunities that could potentially create those nature-based camping experiences that are of such value today in our heavily urbanised and structured suburban lifestyle. There are opportunities in various parts of the state for areas under leasehold, such as the Locke Estate in Busselton and pastoral leases in the Pilbara and Gascoyne, where the government could ensure that land for the provision of affordable nature-based experiences is set aside for the future. The government must look to the many square kilometres of undeveloped crown land, and also land within the Department of

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Environment and Conservation estate, with a view to allowing access to the general public and wider tourism for sustainable, nature-based camping and caravanning sites. Huge potential exists to encourage and further develop sustainable wilderness camping sites, in particular along the coastlines and riverbeds of many pastoral leases.

Many pastoral properties are currently in an ambiguous situation with regard to the permitted uses within their lease conditions, as has been noted in debate in this house over the past few days. Whilst I do not condone or promote a *carte blanche* government takeover of pastoral leases, there are many instances of pastoralists showing that they are willing and able to develop nature-based and wilderness tourism experiences on their leases. It is hoped that government will find a way forward to allow dual use within these leases, many of which are in previously inaccessible areas of the coast and country.

People and children develop a respect for, and a love of, our environmental assets through personal experience of these assets, and generally people do the right thing in natural areas. Regulating our conservation areas by not allowing access is managing for the lowest common denominator in society and depriving the responsible silent majority of valuable experience and the opportunity to develop a sense of ownership of and respect for our natural environment.

I implore the government, when creating future conservation estates within Western Australia, to ensure, legislatively if necessary, that access to nature-based camping activities is ensured, particularly along the pastoral leases of the Ningaloo coast, where there has been a long and protracted battle between pastoralists and government departments regarding land excisions and the like. It is imperative that opportunities for access to this coastline be preserved for future generations at all costs.

I acknowledge the significant sustainability challenges along our coastline areas—indeed all of our wilderness areas—however, there are exemplary examples of unobtrusive and sustainable practices. Warroora station springs to mind, where both owners and visitors pride themselves on their contributions to environmental initiatives. Warroora is a great example of how we can economically and effectively manage our vast landmass whilst allowing access to all. The pastoralists can derive an income from their primary pastoral activities, whilst managing the destructive feral goat activity, and also supplementing their income through wilderness tourism initiatives. This allows the community access to the best parts of our coastline and also has the added benefit of visitors being part of a working pastoral property, which is such an integral part of Western Australia's history and development and a unique value-adding experience. Warroora has proved to be a great example of how well-motivated and researched private enterprise can develop simple but effective ways to manage the impact of human visitors to a sensitive area and ensure that the footprint on the environment is very small.

There are challenges all along the Ningaloo coastline; however, it is my firm belief that prohibiting access and locking people out of the area is not the best management solution. Access to the coastline for camping must be ensured, and it may be prudent to have better education and perhaps more targeted campaigns to ensure that visitors show the level of respect for the sustainability of the main attraction to the area—our unique and delicate reef system. I am concerned that there exists a belief within government agencies that government should be managing this area, and my fear is that, consistent with views about other parts of the state, we may throw the baby out with the bathwater and disallow access to everyone based on a precautionary principle, resourcing issues or a philosophical viewpoint regarding the integrity of the natural systems.

In conclusion, I thank all those members of the public, industry organisations and representatives from various agencies who contributed to this inquiry by way of written submissions or contributions during hearings. All contributions provided valuable insight into the various pressures and issues facing the caravan and camping industry. Given the scope of the inquiry and the nature of the submissions, the task of the committee in ensuring the content of this report was relevant to the terms of reference for the inquiry was often difficult. It was an interesting experience, and one which I am grateful to have participated in. My thanks to Dr Mike Nahan, committee chair; the other members of this committee; and our research officers, Dr Loraine Abernethie and Vanessa Beckingham. Both Loraine and Vanessa provided outstanding support for the duration of this inquiry, and I am grateful for their analytical expertise, advice and hard work.

I commend this report to the house and I urge the government to take action to ensure that all Western Australians have access to affordable holiday options into the future in the best parts of this state. I reiterate that we need to open up the very best parts of this state to caravanners and campers. In the past there has been a tendency to allow camping and caravanning only on areas that were already degraded, and I think there is an opportunity to change that. The committee's report highlights action and a way forward for government.

MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie-Preston) [10.48 am]: I, too, rise to speak on the report on the provision, use and regulation of caravan parks and camping grounds in Western Australia.

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I will start at the other end and thank the principal research officer, Dr Loraine Abernethie, PhD, and both the research officer and acting principal research officer at times, Vanessa Beckingham, BA (Hons). The amount of work they did over the period of the inquiry was exceptional. Although the member for South Perth gave them a hard time on many occasions, they did an exceptional job over and above the call of duty, to the extent that the Clerk had to limit the hours they worked because they were working too many.

In saying that, this was a much-needed report for this state. I have fond memories of both caravanning and camping with my family over the years. At times, I had to put up with four girls in a tent who were at various stages of make-up application and various stages of undress, which made me quite uncomfortable at times, but it was part of being a family unit. The inquiry touched on social issues, and we looked at the cheaper, middle-range holidays that enable young families to go on holiday and enjoy themselves without having to rent a unit or a family house. In the Dunsborough area, the rent on those kinds of properties can be between \$2 000 and \$5 000 a week, putting that type of holiday out of the range of the average family.

Caravanning and camping is a major way of life in Western Australia, and something we should take advantage of in the warmer weather, with all the social aspects that go with it. There are also spin-offs for towns like Busselton and Mandurah that have built their economies around the tourist dollar over many years.

As we travelled around the state we saw huge variations in the purposes that caravan parks and camping areas are put to. There are the so-called permanent stays. We must do a lot more work in that area. Often people have bought in for a huge amount of money, only to find later that they had only short-term leases or no leases at all. Their tenure can be terminated and the park turned into residential developments or even short-term holiday accommodation, which is allowed under the planning laws. The definition of short-term stays and tourism allows an owner to build any sort of units on the land and not necessarily keep it as a caravan park. I have seen that happen at Binningup, which is on hold at the moment; Peppermint Grove Beach south of Bunbury; and Preston Beach, which now has up to 50 units and no longer has a caravan park with simpler accommodation.

Successive governments have put this issue on the backburner and not addressed it in its totality because of the variations that exist in the industry. It is very difficult to make rules, regulations and law that will encompass the whole industry, because it is so varied and widespread. We went to a station 200 kilometres south of Broome that had a caravan park with some 200 bays. There were not a great number of amenities—a small bowling green, a bit of a shed and an ablution block. However, people from down south were queuing up to get into the site for a long-term stay during the southern winter. Some of the people we spoke to said that they had to get there a bit earlier to keep the little patch of green that they had planted the previous year, and they intended to stay for three months. For them, the motivation is partly cost and partly the need for variation in their lifestyle at that time of year.

We then visited the industrial and mining areas in the north west, where many of the caravan parks were not what would be called ideal. They had become workers' cottages—it was about how many caravans could fit on the site to provide accommodation to service the mining and construction industries that were in full flight. There is no accommodation on the construction sites, so the workers need to be in those caravan parks. A couple of the caravan parks were substandard, in my view. Regulation is needed to make sure that that is tidied up along the way.

One of the other issues that is very difficult to deal with—I mentioned it briefly earlier—is that of the long-stay arrangements. We went to Augusta, where people are quite upset, and we have received detailed reports from the metropolitan area, where people are now being forced to vacate their caravan parks. In reality, they never owned the land, even though they may have bought an on-site van, thinking that they had security. The security was not there. In our view, and I am sure that no-one will disagree with this, they should be told when they go onto those sites that they do not own the land and that they have the ownership only of the van and its attachments. It is a difficult situation. Many of these people are elderly and have chosen the lifestyle for comfort and security in village-type accommodation. They have friends who have been there beside them for many years, and they go fishing and walking and engage in other recreation together. They think that they are there for the rest of their days, but, unfortunately, as suburbia grows, some of these caravan parks come under pressure for a lot of reasons. Some of this has to do with the local government rates and offers from developers to buy the land and turn it into residential areas. The people who own the parks may be looking towards retirement and considering their options. It is their land, so can we realistically stop them from realising the value of that land? It is a difficult matter, and something that I believe governments of all persuasions should consider. We have seen a number of half measures, and some work has been done on rate relief, but it is certainly not enough.

It is important that we consider this issue right across the board, not only from the point of view of caravans, but also tent camping. We need a policy on how to deal with Department of Environment and Conservation land. I know that that topic is quite controversial at the moment, but we need to find ways to utilise some of that land.

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Not everyone wants to go to a caravan park that is 10 or 12 kilometres from the beach. The problem is that beachfront land is prime land. Therefore, I call on all governments to make sure that future planning includes provision for caravan parks and camping areas. There are ample opportunities on coastal land to the north of Perth to put caravan parks in the right places. It must be made quite clear that the area is for caravan parks and camping only, not for just short-term recreational pursuits, because that just broadens the area right out. That is one of the problems that has existed. The loopholes have allowed those caravan parks to be bought out and turned into units.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Should there be both short-stay units and permanents side by side?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: We saw many mix-and-match areas. In one particular park the permanents were at one end, there were units at the other end, and the campers were in the middle. That is the kind of thing that I would see as absolutely positive.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Where was that?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: It was in Albany. It was a newer park. In the older parks we have often seen people putting up lean-tos and building extensions, so it all becomes a bit higgledy-piggledy. This is something that should be included in the planning. Many of the long-term residents do not like the tourists, because they might turn up with half a dozen kids and stay for five or six days. Kids will be kids, and they will enjoy their time and make a bit of noise, when others have been quite used to the peace and quiet in the off-season. There is a lot of work to be done, but this is a way of life in Western Australia. It was a very big part of my life when my children were growing up, and others should be able to enjoy it as well. I commend the report to the house.

MR J.E. McGRATH (South Perth) [10.58 am]: Before I make my contribution, I have a confession to make. I have never actually stayed in a caravan. I am told by my parents that when my father was an apprentice electrician at the South Fremantle power station, we lived as very young children in the Coogee Beach caravan park, which I do not remember, obviously. In those days my parents were waiting to get on the state housing list, and that is where they were living. That has not changed much today, when we see what is happening in many caravan parks in Western Australia.

The genesis of this inquiry is well known to all of us. There has been ongoing concern throughout the state that caravan sites are disappearing as a result of development, especially at coastal resorts. Although the focus on caravanning is changing to some extent, with more nature-based camping and caravanning, the original idea of caravanning was all about going to one of the coastal towns like Bunbury, Busselton or Mandurah with the family during the summer holidays to stay by the beach so the kids could swim all day. It was a great way for families to have low-cost holidays. In the course of its inquiry, the committee was made aware of many more problems facing the caravan industry apart from development, and I will attempt to address some of those.

The Economics and Industry Standing Committee travelled to Broome and also to Busselton. I did not go with the committee when it travelled to Mandurah. There is huge development pressure in Broome. Broome has become the most iconic tourist destination in Western Australia. Some people can afford to stay at the luxury resorts there. Obviously, many international tourists stay in those resorts but many Western Australians, including quite a few people from my electorate, travel north every year and stay in Broome, sometimes for up to three months. They go to the Broome races, which is a massive tourist attraction now. They have a great lifestyle while living in Broome.

As the member for Collie-Preston said, committee members went to a place called Barn Hill, south of Broome. I think we saw half of Collie there, because they all knew their local member! Those travellers have their annual holidays at Barn Hill. The station owners have made a bowling green and they put on dinner every Friday night; there is a real community feeling at Barn Hill. They meet up with the same people at the same time every year and go fishing and enjoy the experience.

As I have said, there is development pressure. We were told by the Shire of Broome that there is development pressure. A couple of the parks in Broome have already been sold to overseas investors who will be looking to convert those parks into high-cost resorts for the international market. There is another caravan park in Broome—the Cable Beach Caravan Park. I visited that park privately on another trip to Broome. It is probably the best example of a caravan park that I have seen. In fact, it has a swimming pool, which the owner, Mr Ron Beacham, has put in at great cost, that would not be out of place at Burswood International Resort Casino. People stay at that caravan park every year with the knowledge that they are in close proximity to other people and all the amenities in Broome. They are the type of people who might not want to experience the wilderness while camping.

The government must look at the issue of the supply of caravan parks. The committee has the view that the government should identify and set aside land and have it zoned for caravan and camping use, so that the land

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will never be able to be sold for redevelopment. The land could be vested in local government, which could then give long-term leases to operators. I think this would solve a lot of problems, because if governments have the will, they can achieve almost anything. I know there is a scarcity of land in some of the more populated coastal areas, but I think that land can be identified and set aside. I have a personal view that the government could even set up a fund that could be used to procure some of these sites. The government could say to the people of Western Australia, "We understand that caravanning and camping is something that you have enjoyed for such a long period that we are going to make sure that that low-cost holiday facility remains there for the future."

The committee also went to Busselton. The member for Scarborough mentioned the area known as the "Holy Mile". That land has been used by church and other community groups for holidays. The committee has the view that, even though the Shire of Busselton has deferred making any decision about putting a caravan park on the "Holy Mile", that is one area that could be zoned as a caravan park site, so that it would be a caravan park for all time.

The changing face of caravanning is another issue that the committee looked at. This issue poses a great challenge for caravan park owners. Other members have mentioned the recreational vehicles, which are so self-contained that many RV owners bypass caravan parks. Consequently, the traditional caravan park is really struggling and long-stay tenants are used to keep such caravan parks viable. People who own fully self-contained RVs—there are many thousands of these vehicles travelling around Australia all the time—believe that Western Australia is falling behind in some of the services it offers and are calling for more roadside stopping places and dump points. The committee feels that the Department of Transport and Tourism Western Australia could get together and provide a better source of information for those people to inform them of the services they can look forward to, especially those who travel from other states to Western Australia.

I will briefly mention the plight of the Park Home Owners Association. I attended the annual general meeting of the association that was held in Manning, in my electorate. Members of the committee really feel for those people who have been dislocated because villages such as Kingsway and Springvale have been sold for private development. However, the fact of the matter is that those people never had a lengthy tenure on those properties. They might have had a lease, but they never had a lifetime tenure. I think a lot of those people either were ill-informed or had an unrealistic belief of what they might have been entitled to. The committee believes that the government should continue to try to help those people who have been dislocated, and there will be others who will be dislocated because this is a transition period for the caravan and camping industry. I think the problem will be solved if more caravan parks can be zoned forever as caravan parks. More people will be able to move into those parks on long-term leases. I am sure that we can look at that matter. The industry is changing so much that the Economics and Industry Standing Committee will not be the last committee to look at it and it will not be the last committee to come up with recommendations. But it is certainly something that the government needs to look at.

In conclusion, I congratulate the chair of the committee, the member for Riverton, for the way he encapsulated in such a short time in the chamber the findings of the committee. It was an enjoyable experience to see so many different caravan facilities throughout Western Australia. Like other members of the committee, I congratulate the principal research officer, Dr Loraine Abernethie—I really did not give her such a hard time; I like working with academics—and the research officer, Vanessa Beckingham, for putting up with us. The work they did was outstanding when members consider the size of the report. It is a very comprehensive report. I urge the various ministers and the government to give it full consideration.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [11.07 am]: As the coopted member to the Economics and Industry Standing Committee, I would like to make a contribution to this debate. I thank publicly the committee for allowing me to serve as a coopted member of the committee; I appreciate that. I also acknowledge the tremendous work of the principal research officer, Dr Loraine Abernethie, and the research officer, Ms Vanessa Beckingham, for the wonderful work they did.

I listened to the member for Collie-Preston talk about his early days caravanning. I thought his comments were very interesting. Like many members in this place, I also have fond memories of early caravanning activities. As a child, I visited the now named Lucky Caravan Park in Mandurah, but prior to that it was owned by the government through the State Energy Commission of WA, where my father worked. Employees of the SEC could put in for their annuals and, if they were successful, they would get their one-week slot at the Lucky Caravan Park. Interestingly, that is probably only one of a couple of examples of the government owning, through utilities or government agencies, such important infrastructure.

The Economics and Industry Standing Committee report is actually very, very important because it is a milestone report. First of all, it frames the question: do we value the importance of caravanning and camping to Western Australia from not only the aspect of lifestyle and tourism but also as an opportunity for people to enjoy

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the beautiful natural attractions of Western Australia? I think at one particular hearing I posed the question to officers from Tourism Western Australia: are we actually just trying to save a dinosaur? I seriously put that question to them because if we do not value caravanning and camping, we will allow it to die a natural death. That is a fact; if we do not value it, we will let it die a natural death. If we do value it, some urgent things need to be done now and other things will need to be done in the coming years to ensure that it is a viable and effective option for families from this state and other states to enjoy the natural attractions of Western Australia. I asked that question and then I think I left the meeting, but anyway, it was a very important question.

However, in all seriousness, the committee looked through its terms of reference very extensively. The committee examined the current circumstances and situation of caravan parking and camping ground provision around Western Australia, particularly the circumstances that have occurred in many of the regional areas of Western Australia. The committee made findings and recommendations about the road forward, and I think we have mapped out some very important milestones, if we like, for the way forward. Certainly, in this report we have requested some responses from government and ministers because some important things need to be tidied up, if we like, or brought to a conclusion and formalised. Some very clear decisions need to be made by government if we are to continue to have quality caravanning and camping opportunities in this state in the future.

The report has implications for the Minister for Local Government, the Minister for Planning, the Minister for Lands, the Minister for Environment and the Minister for Transport, but ultimately it is about what we think needs to happen so that we can continue to ensure that families of the future can have an affordable tourist experience in the beautiful regions of Western Australia. As my committee colleagues have highlighted, there is a range of findings and recommendations on that.

I want to focus on probably four key areas that I think are worthy of note that, first of all, are directly related to the tourism portfolio. One thing that we found in our deliberations was that the importance of tourism to the local region is dealt with by local government authorities to varying degrees. Some local governments have been very proactive and developed very clear and extensive tourism strategies that focus on the importance and value of tourism to the region. Some local governments are not at that stage yet. Some local governments need guidance, and the committee made a recommendation asking the Minister for Local Government to take a lead role, if we like, for local government responsibility in ensuring that these strategic tourism plans, which we believe local governments need to take seriously and get up and running, can be done. May I add, perhaps sneakily, that it might be a wonderful criterion that the minister could put on to the issue of amalgamation?

Mr G.M. Castrilli interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is a really important matter and I am sure that the minister will respond to that because it is important for local government.

We have called for all local government authorities to have their local tourism planning strategies in place by the end of next year. As I say, some local government authorities are on the way but others are dragging their feet. I think that if the Minister for Local Government took some leadership in that matter, it would be fantastic, because whether local governments like it or not, some of them are best placed to take up responsibility for the operation of caravan parks in the future. In the past, local governments divested these parks, which is why we are in the current situation whereby we have lost so many parks, particularly in the Peel region and the south west region, which I know the minister represents. Therefore, those tourism issues are very important.

Another issue is the government's responsibility. Where can we find land that is appropriate? The Department of Environment and Conservation is, in my view, one such government agency that could do that. I note that the Minister for Tourism made a brief ministerial statement this morning—great! However, I think that we need to put a bit more pressure on DEC to find land, and I am talking particularly about the Peel and south west regions where planning schemes are in place—the Peel region scheme and the proposed greater Bunbury planning scheme—that have, and will have, allocated land for regional recreation through the regional parks. I think that land is ideal for camping areas, and that option should be looked at by DEC in particular, because a lot of that land will be under DEC's control when it is gazetted. That is the ideal land, although DEC will say, "We can't just use the national parks for camping; we can't do this and we can't do that." But I think we must say, "DEC, look, there's some land that is going to come under your control; that is the land that you should be looking at very seriously to see whether that can actually provide opportunities for caravanning and camping into the future." Therefore, I urge the Minister for Environment and the Minister for Tourism—I know they are working on it now following their announcement—to focus on that as the next stage.

Another thing, of course, is the long-stay issue. For me, Mandurah is in fact the canary in the coalmine—the litmus test—for this issue. The region of Peel has lost nearly a dozen caravan parks in the past 15 years. All the

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existing caravan parks in Mandurah are located on very valuable land, particularly the ones in town. They are the Belvedere Caravan Park, the Lucky Caravan Park and the Timbertop Caravan Park, and in the member for Dawesville's electorate, the Miami Holiday Park. The reality is that they are now basically lower income or affordable housing. More than 87 per cent of the people in those parks are long-term residents. If they are threatened, and they are threatened, by the nature of what is happening, we must help them. One recommendation in the report is to ensure that if those trends continue, we work with those people who face displacement. Government and local government have a role in this, and the interagency group that has been mentioned also has a critical role to work with those people. The government should not let caravan and camping grounds become a dinosaur. They are not a dinosaur; they are an important part of Western Australia's tourism industry. If we work across government to ensure that that is valued, we will have a viable caravan and camping industry in the future.

MR P.T. MILES (Wanneroo) [11.18 am] — by leave: I want to make a comment and thank the Economics and Industry Standing Committee for doing a very extensive report on this issue. I look forward to actually reading that report later when I get home, if not this afternoon. The grievance that I raised on behalf of the residents of the Kingsway Tourist Park was obviously the catalyst for this inquiry being initiated through the Minister for Commerce, Troy Buswell.

I point out to the house that today is the actual eviction date for Kingsway residents. Although many of the residents have had to move on and have moved on, there are still some 30-odd residents who are down there today, and the owner has extended their time for another three to four months while the new property or new space allocations in other parks are being readied. My office and I, as well as the offices of the member for Kingsley and the Speaker of the House, have been extensively involved in helping to relocate some of these people. Some 11 or 12 residents will go to the new Moora caravan park and 26 residents will go to the Cherokee Village Mobile Home and Tourist Park in the electorate of Kingsley. It has been a very emotional 12 months for these people. We have had to use the services of many ministers in this house to guide them through. It is a question of affordable living for most people who live on these everyday home-site tourist sites. These are not big multinational sites with a guaranteed 60-year lease and all the protection that is offered by having a big company.

I look forward to the government's response. I want to say a special thank you to minister Troy Buswell for his office's help in the form of Ben O'Rourke, who has been able to assist my staff and me during a very trying time. Some of members have talked of local government playing a major part. I agree with that. I think that even city-based councils should be prevented from selling their landholdings when it comes to existing caravan and camping sites. I thank the committee and look forward to reading the report later on today.