

**ECONOMICS AND INDUSTRY
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**HOUSE REFERRAL OF PERMANENT
PARK HOME RESIDENTS MATTER**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 31 AUGUST 2011**

SESSION ONE

Members

**Dr M.D. Nahan (Chairman)
Mr W.J. Johnston (Deputy Chairman)
Mr I.C. Blayney
Ms A.R. Mitchell
Mr M.P. Murray**

Hearing commenced at 9.17 am**BUCKLAND, MS STEPHANIE****Chief Executive Officer, Tourism WA, examined:****FLETCHER, MR CAMPBELL****Policy Manager, Tourism WA, examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: I will read an opening statement. Thank you for your appearance before the committee today. This committee hearing is a proceeding of Parliament and warrants the same respect that proceedings in the house itself demand. Even though you are not required to give evidence on oath, any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as contempt of Parliament. Before we commence, there are a number of procedural questions I need you to answer. Have you completed the Details of Witness form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you receive and read the Information for Witnesses briefing sheet regarding giving evidence before parliamentary committees?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have any questions about your appearance before the committee today?

The Witnesses: No.

The CHAIRMAN: Today's hearing has been called mainly to obtain information responding to a request from the house that the committee consider the appropriateness of undertaking an investigation of all park home sites that have been closed or have collectively evicted long-stay tenants since 2006, and to ensure compliance with all aspects of appropriate legislation. Particularly of relevance to you, the committee is also using this opportunity to obtain relevant follow-up information from its earlier inquiry into caravan parks and camping grounds. You have been provided the questions in advance, and we will go through those. Do you wish to make an opening statement that addresses the department's response to those questions?

Ms Buckland: No, thank you.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much for coming today. One of the major findings of the report was that there are many government departments involved in caravans and camping. It is a diverse issue that goes from tourism to housing and to consumer affairs of course, and since most of them are overseen by local government, it brings in the Department of Local Government and many local governments. One of the recommendations of the inquiry was that tourism—the department of tourism, Tourism WA—take the lead on that. One of the reasons we did that—even though I think it was the main source of tension—are the long-stay tenants, which is of less concern to the tourism department. The major focus of the inquiry was caravan parks and the demise of caravan parks as a viable tourism alternative.

Ms Buckland: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Is the Western Australian Tourism Commission taking the lead on the follow-through of the committee's report on camping?

Ms Buckland: Initially, as I understand it—I am relatively new as the CEO of Tourism WA—but as I understand it initially the government's response to that recommendation was that Tourism WA should not take the lead. However, in the last eight months, as you would be aware, we have a new Minister for Tourism, Dr Kim Hames, and he has a slightly different view to the former minister. He has asked us indeed to play a leadership role in regard to establishing a caravan and camping strategy framework for the state. I can give the committee an update on where we are with that if you like.

The CHAIRMAN: Please do.

Ms Buckland: I might just refer to some notes if that is alright with you.

The CHAIRMAN: If you have any prepared notes or data you could always provide it to us in a supplementary submission.

Ms Buckland: We would be happy to do that. In fact, we do have some answers to the specific questions that you asked with the numbers and so forth. We have got those as handouts for today, and then we can follow up with any additional information. What we are in the process of doing now, at the request of the minister, is preparing what we are calling a caravan and camping strategy for Western Australia. The object of the strategy is to provide a framework, which will inform planning across the state and take into account the roles and responsibilities of all those various government departments and, in fact, the private sector, in delivering appropriate product for the consumer. Initially, what we are working on is identifying key locations around the state where additional caravan park infrastructure is required, as well as other infrastructure that people who undertake caravan and camping holidays might use; for example, dump points and rest stop areas, which are not necessarily camp grounds but places for people to have a rest on their journey. So initially we are doing a gap analysis and looking at the whole state, doing an audit, identifying what is there, and then identifying where the gaps are in relation to supply and demand. The other thing that we are doing is we will be identifying the roles and responsibilities of other government departments in regard to delivering or helping to close those gaps. Some might not be the responsibility of local governments. Some may be the responsibility of the Department of Planning and some, for example, might be the responsibility of DEC or the Department of Regional Development and Lands. The view is that then in regard to actually delivering that infrastructure to where there are gaps, and on behalf of the minister, is to prepare a recommendation and a business case to substantiate a funding proposal. So all of that is something that is in progress at the moment, and the aim is to have that completed by the end of this calendar year so that it can flow into the budget process for the next financial year.

The CHAIRMAN: This might be a leading question, and I would understand why you might want to walk away from it somewhat, but I would like to congratulate the minister and Tourism WA for taking up this initiative. It is a very important one. In fact, we would argue it is the most important one, and to follow up with a recommendation. Are other departments on the same page? That is one of the major purposes of this inquiry.

Ms Buckland: Yes, because there were so many departments that had a recommendation or two or three or 10 that were attributed to them in their area of responsibility. You may be aware that there was a major restructure and refocus of Tourism WA that was undertaken by the board, but with the endorsement of cabinet well over a year ago now, and one of the key objectives of that restructure and refocusing of the agency was to get other government departments to be playing a role in regard to their area of responsibility in regard to tourism. I have had many discussions with my counterparts at other agencies and I think there is a lot of goodwill, which is good. That is a good first step, but we are also working on a state government strategy for tourism with the endorsement or the support of the minister to develop that strategy and, of course, under the guidance of the Tourism WA board. In the past, Tourism WA has had strategies. In fact, in preparation for today I read the *Hansard* for the last time a Tourism WA executive appeared in front of the committee,

which was about two years ago—I believe they tabled the Tourism WA strategy—so in the past Tourism WA has had strategic plans. To my knowledge there has never been any government-wide strategic plan for tourism, so that is something that we are working on. We have got a draft. The next step is to actually sit down with each one of those government departments and agree with them what specific actions they will be undertaking and incorporating into their plans to advance tourism. So I guess that is sort of a longwinded answer to your question. In summary, there is goodwill and we have got a plan to turn that goodwill into action, and that relates to the whole of how we tackle tourism in this state as well as specifically how we address the issue of caravan parks and camping grounds.

The CHAIRMAN: What about local government? How do you pull in those near to 130-plus local governments?

Ms Buckland: Well, when we audit the supply and demand gaps with regard to that caravan and camping industry, and when we identify a gap, that will definitely involve us consulting with the relevant local government. In regard to any recommendations we put forward, we obviously need to discuss those recommendations with the relevant local governments. I do not think we will find gaps across the state. I think there will be certain hot spots when we are done with the research, and then we will need to engage those local governments in helping to be part of the solution. My observation from my preliminary discussions with some of the local governments is that in some areas I think there is quite a focus and a will to be part of the solution, and in other local governments perhaps—not that there is not a will—there does not appear to be the capability to drive things forward, so they may need more support and assistance in that regard.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Can I firstly say that your approach to this issue is very refreshing compared to—if you read the *Hansard* from the last time we had a conversation with Tourism WA, I think it was pretty clear from the way the committee reacted to the answers that we were a bit surprised about the approach, so it is very refreshing to hear your approach today and it is very pleasing that there is a new way of going ahead. One of the recommendations regards local tourism strategies. I am wondering how far through those local tourism strategies do you think the parties are.

Ms Buckland: I might ask Mr Fletcher to address some of the specifics there because there have been a number of local tourism strategies that have been finalised in the last two years.

Mr Fletcher: I guess there are probably six that have been finalised since the initiative commenced. Probably about 2007 was when the initial recommendations were put forward for local governments to prepare local tourism planning strategies. Those local governments would be Busselton, Mandurah, Bunbury, Albany and Dandaragan. Exmouth, I think, has started one but it is in a draft form. The other five—if I have got my numbers right—or six have, I guess, progressed to the stage where they are either approved by the local council or on their way to the Department of Planning for that final sign off. I guess there are a variety of different approaches that have been taken by each local government in preparing those strategies and how they address the planning parameters associated with tourism, and I guess that relates in some ways to the importance of tourism in those particular local governments and the type of issues that each of them have to face. In each of those local governments you have got some quite major tourism areas that have actually started preparing those strategies. Of the six that have been prepared, I guess you have got some of the larger local governments. I guess Dandaragan is probably an exception to that, but Busselton, Bunbury, Albany and Mandurah are all quite large local government areas with resources to progress that initiative as it has been intended.

Ms Buckland: I think in all of those instances it would be fair to say that Tourism WA provided input to those strategies, and they all would have identified sites for caravan parks and camping grounds.

Mr Fletcher: Yes, I think that is correct. The approach that has been taken is probably confirming some of the zoning arrangements and the importance of those sites from a tourism perspective, and the need to protect those as part of our overall tourism strategy and tourism focus for that particular local government area.

The CHAIRMAN: One of our recommendations, I think, was based on Albany's tourism plan, where they went out and identified sites that were usually higher value along the coast, and restricted them to only short-term tourism. Then they found ones slightly back that had a mix of long stays, and then a third tier could have even more long-stay tenants or be more flexible. So they categorised them and put a lot of effort into restricting the zoning for the higher-valued sites. Is that the approach usually taken?

Mr Fletcher: That is certainly an approach taken by Albany and probably most other local governments. I guess there are slightly different interpretations of that. The Albany approach is that hierarchical type of approach, sort of mapping down from, as you said, the sites that must be retained for tourism to those that are slightly less important but still have high tourism value, to that third tier where there are probably more opportunities for that mix of permanent versus short stay tenants. I guess with the higher-ranked values you are almost saying that that needs to be entirely for tourism. Busselton probably takes a similar sort of hierarchical approach and talks about percentage breakdowns for permanent versus short stay, and Mandurah similarly talks about that percentage break down. I think the Albany one went a little bit further in outlining plans where there might be areas on each site that could be developed for permanent versus short-stay tenants; so actually identifying at the next detailed level that these would be the sorts of areas you would look at for that sort of split on uses.

Ms Buckland: I think the other thing that would probably be important information for the committee—if you are not already aware—is that just recently the WA Planning Commission issued a planning bulletin for tourism, which is planning bulletin 83. That planning bulletin, which was prepared with the input of Tourism WA and also the Tourism Council of WA, which is the industry representative body, allows for local governments to assess tourism development proposals on a case-by-case basis. In the past there was a 25 per cent maximum amount of residential development that was allowed on a tourism-zoned site. Even though that was still only a guideline, most local governments took a hard line on that. The feedback both to the WAPC and to Tourism WA from the tourism industry and from prospective tourism developers was that they felt each proposal needed to be evaluated on its own merits rather than putting a strict guidance in place in terms of percentages. I suppose the positive side of that is that it will allow for some more flexibility and potential creativity in regard to developments on tourism-zoned land. The guidance still says that the majority of the site must be developed for tourism, but it leaves it to the local government authority to work through that with the developer and to come up with something that makes sense for that local area. I think it is an improvement over where we were in the past. The upside is that it is done on a case-by-case basis and it is more flexible. The potential downside is that it does put the responsibility back into the hands of the local government authority to make sure that they are knowledgeable about tourism development and about what is the best sort of mix to deliver a good tourism outcome and to encourage development, and obviously that is going to vary across the state.

[9.35 am]

The CHAIRMAN: We got the strong impression from your predecessor during the evidence that tourism was really focused on higher-priced tourism—\$200 or more a day. That was the view right?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Eight hundred dollars a day.

The CHAIRMAN: Oh, \$800. Has that changed? One of the issues is that caravanning is often low cost. They have to spend a lot on the caravan but it is a low-cost holiday, or they can be—especially with the grey nomads—known as bit of a tightwad.

Ms Buckland: I guess the short answer to your question is no. We are not exclusively focused on the high end of the market and encouraging developments in the high end of the market. At the end of the day, there are only a very small number of people who could afford that type of a holiday experience—I am not one of them—or would wish to afford that type of holiday experience. From a marketing perspective—and my background is in marketing—we focus on the attractions or the experience. We launched a new brand positioning for the state about 15 months ago called “Experience Extraordinary”. It is about all of the extraordinary experiences that you can have in Western Australia that you may not be able to have elsewhere in the world. Many, if not most, of those experiences are experiences in the natural environment. We do not, from a marketing perspective, attempt to prescribe to people what type of accommodation they might stay in whilst having those extraordinary experiences, whether that is seeing the many variety of wildflowers we have in the state, exploring the Bungle Bungles or whale watching in the south west or what have you.

I can give you an update on some of the marketing initiatives that we have undertaken directly targeted at the caravan and camping consumer. We have recently undertaken a number of initiatives to target those groups of people, and I will go through those in a minute. The other thing I wanted to mention is that every year we undertake a regional roadshow where we go around the state, meet with tourism operators and present business plans for the following year. We get feedback from the people as to how the industry is travelling and what have you. We are just finishing this year’s version of the roadshow and just a few weeks ago, the Chairman and I were in Shark Bay and did a site visit at the Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort. If you are familiar with that resort they have a range of styles of accommodation from nice hotel rooms to backpackers’ rooms, and powered caravan sites and non-powered camping sites. As we were having a tour I was chatting with the resort manager and asked him, “We hear the grey nomads do not spend any money. What is your perception?” He said, “Well, interestingly I thought that too, but we have just instituted a system in the resort whereby if you have a powered caravan site you can charge back to your overall bill anything that you have to pay for while you are in the resort, whether it be using the restaurant, going on a tour or buying stuff at the shop.” He said “I was amazed at how much money people are actually spending while they are here and staying in their own accommodation, as it were, and maybe only paying”—I don’t know what the cost is for a powered caravan site, let us say it is \$20 a night—“\$20 a night, but they are also spending money in our restaurant, on our tours and in our shop! Generally they are here for a lot longer than your average international tourist or non-retired person and so their spend per day might be lower but overall they put quite a significant injection of money into the economy.”

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: I think that is a relatively expensive caravan park. I do not think you would get many of your really true grey nomads staying there.

Ms Buckland: Well, if they want to visit Shark Bay —

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: They would just do it as a day trip from Denham.

Ms Buckland: Then they would have to stay in Denham, but I guess the point is—there were an awful lot of people staying there and some of them looked pretty old to me, and their caravans were not beautiful, flash, or the Winnebago types. They looked like pretty average, run-of-the-mill caravans.

So yes, you are right, that is just an anecdote. That is not a—

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Sure, but it is consistent with what we found when we travelled very extensively on the inquiry. We went to Broome, Karratha, the Ningaloo coast, and all around the south west, and the experience of the committee was that people—we met a guy I remember we were talking to and I would not call him a grey nomad. I would have called him a brown nomad because he had spent three months on the Ningaloo coast! Their spend per day was pretty low but

their spend overall was pretty high, and they did stuff. They would spend four days in the bush and two days on a cruise ship or whatever. They mixed up their experience, there is no question—

Ms Buckland: I think the other point is that they have to get provisions along the way, so even if they were only buying groceries and petrol in Western Australia, they still have to get provisions. One of the complaints that I had from people when I chatted with them in Denham was that the people staying in the caravan park unhitched their caravan and then drove to Carnarvon to buy all their groceries there, and then drive back to Denham. So that is not so great for Denham, but it is alright for Carnarvon.

The CHAIRMAN: But Denham people do the same thing.

Ms Buckland: If you live in Denham, yes I guess you do.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: The other issue too is that this is also about the rights of the people to visit places, and I think we all made comments in our tabling speeches that the caravanning experience is an important opportunity for people. It is not just an economic activity, but also a cultural and personal activity, and people need to have that ability to do those things.

The CHAIRMAN: One thing that the committee did not look at—we looked at some research in New Zealand and Queensland and their approach to not only have a strategy but also actually target grey nomads or the caravanning group. We were rather impressed from what we saw—not physically—from particularly New Zealand, and also Queensland. It is a long drive from Queensland to WA, but our perception was there is a huge potential there as the baby boomers age.

Ms Buckland: That is right, and I think we have got to address it from both angles. We have got to address it from marketing and how you position WA as a travel destination, and we also have to address it from the infrastructure side. So the strategy that I spoke about will hopefully go a long way towards providing some leadership on the infrastructure side. On the marketing side, we are doing a number of things that I am hoping that in the meantime, because it will take a while to close those infrastructure gaps, will maximise the opportunity whilst it is in front of us, I guess.

So we have a quite a strong cooperative marketing program with a range of different travel and tourism operators. One of those that would be relevant to the caravan and camping industry would be the likes of Big4 Holiday Parks, which has a number of parks in WA. We are doing some cooperative marketing with them to highlight the features of WA and to encourage those people who are resident in WA to travel the state, as well as those people from outside of WA to come into the state.

[9.45 am]

We also attend caravan and camping shows—these are consumer shows—in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. We generally have a fairly strong Western Australian contingent at those shows. Tourism WA attends those shows, the regional tourism organisations send a representative so they can each speak in-depth about their region, and often operators, caravan park owners, come along to the show to promote their specific products. Also, annually we do quite an extensive wildflower campaign, which focuses on wildflowers and the wildflower experiences you can have across the state in all of the regions. We produce a hard copy wildflower brochure which is distributed through visitor centres but it is also available electronically so people can do some planning in advance if they are internet-inclined. The brochure includes a lot of self-drive trails. There are some suggested itineraries that people can take.

You probably know about our relationship with the regional tourism organisations. Five non-profit membership-based associations represent industry in each of the five tourism regions in the state. The state government, through Tourism WA, funds them in excess of \$3 million per year, collectively, so they each get the same amount.

The other thing that we do is support and promote to prospective caravanners through our public relations programs. We regularly contribute to the *Caravanning Australia* magazine. Recently we supported two dedicated episodes of the *Making Tracks* TV program on Channel 10, which is aimed at caravanners and self-drivers. We regularly distribute press releases about self-drive opportunities and interesting things to do in the regions, whether towing a caravan or not. We broadly focus on natural experiences, which I think the caravan set is probably more attracted to than not, and then specifically focus on caravanning and campers.

The CHAIRMAN: We found that there appeared to be quite a change in the demand pattern; that is, self-contained RVs, campers, especially the grey nomads. They did not really want the traditional facilities like we have in Mandurah where you put your tent up and let your kids run wild for two weeks, you have a swimming pool and those sorts of recreational facilities. The demand is changing and that was affecting the economic viability of some parks. One of our recommendations was to look at the changing nature of the parks, the eco focus, the limited facility provision and the pricing. Can you make a quid if you are a private operator providing RV parks?

Ms Buckland: I think it would be difficult as a private operator to make a business out of exclusively providing powered and unpowered sites and even some toilets and showers for people who may choose not to use the facilities inside their own caravan. However, I think some of the suggestions or some of the recommendations relating to caravan parks on crown land, which may be vested in a local government to oversee and manage, may go some way towards resolving that issue. It may become more economically viable if the government provides the land on a peppercorn lease so you can get a private operator in there to run it and manage it, and perhaps they can provide other amenities such as a shop or a restaurant.

The CHAIRMAN: Or tours.

Ms Buckland: Yes, and tailor their product to what the needs of the consumer are now. The needs of consumers in a range of different categories are shifting and changing over time. It is incumbent upon the business owners to figure out how they are going to tailor their products. One of the challenges we are finding stems from some of the feedback that I have had from caravan park owners when we have talked about this strategy that we are going to be undertaking. It is interesting that you bring up the example of Queensland because here in Western Australia some of the private caravan park owners have seen that as a bad move on the part of the Queensland government because the very low cost and free facilities that have been provided have competed with the privately owned caravan parks in that state. I think it will be really important for us in doing this analysis, this audit, that we bring that forward as a risk or an issue for the government to consider. I think you have to balance the interest of the industry versus the interest of the end consumer as well. A fine balance will have to be struck.

The CHAIRMAN: If you use too much force to get the RVs to go to parks that are too costly because of infrastructure, the RVs go elsewhere—alongside the road or in people's paddocks.

Ms Buckland: That presents a whole host of other issues that need to be managed from a safety and sanitation perspective, and then local governments become the villain when they try to enforce rules and regulations around "free" camping.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: In that question of free camping is exactly what rights people have to free camping and what we saw as a lack of understanding from some councils to the entitlement to free camping in a road reserve in which a safety question is involved. You cannot expect people to drive all day, so they are entitled to rest in a road reserve.

The CHAIRMAN: We went to a few sites, one south of Karratha and another in Ningaloo. There were literally hundreds of caravanners. There are almost thousands of people—grey nomads, average age about 65, except for a few Wicked campers who disrupt that. They were on the edge of legality. They were having a great time. Usually they were exploited in a situation in which it is too

far for the shire to help but we were rather worried about the hard force of the law because they were providing a facility that was the preference of the users, which they could not get anywhere else. They were often isolated, they had a bowling green sometimes, daily barbeques, a barber shop and all sorts of things in that little town. During the off season it would disappear. One of them was, I remember, provided by a farmer and that kept his farm viable. There are some shades of legality there that are showing where the market is going.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Are there any examples of caravan parks that have been able to be facilitated through what I think is called Landbank?

Ms Buckland: Two have progressed significantly since the last time Tourism WA appeared before the committee. One is in Broome north. We are just awaiting the final stages of that site being vested in the Broome shire, which is making very good progress. As soon as it is vested in the shire, they will go out to prospective operators with an expression of interest and hopefully we will have a caravan park up and running there before too long. The other one we have been working on with the local government is in Lancelin. You mentioned a farmer. The other thing that has perhaps progressed in the past few years is this rangelands review. Tourism WA has had some input to the pastoral diversification regulations or policies. That has yielded some new product. A caravan park has come into operation in the past several months. I cannot remember the name of the station but it is adjacent to the Bungle Bungle range and is run by a pastoralist named Jack Burton. From my perspective, again, that is playing to the needs of the consumer. He has a few chalets there but most of it is powered caravan sites. It definitely meets a demand. On a recent visit to Kununurra, I noticed that all of the caravan parks were overflowing. You talked about local government—I do not want to say turning a blind eye—being a bit stretched in how they manage these things. The local government in Kununurra, the Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley, is very stretched at certain times of the year in trying to manage that—where people park, how they dispose of their waste, if they go to a proper caravan park or if they park some other place.

The CHAIRMAN: Are you aware that the Department of Local Government has undertaken a review of all its caravan parks through a survey of their shires in local government?

Ms Buckland: Yes. One of the things that you asked us to address in the letter was to look at the data. We have got that. We have done some analysis of that data and we have a copy of that for the committee. I will make a few comments about the survey. It is a good start. It found that there were 360 caravan parks throughout Western Australia. They undertook to break down the number of short-stay sites within those caravan parks versus permanent residential sites and found that there were approximately 27 000 short stay sites and about 5 600 permanent residential sites. Those permanent residential sites were within 110 facilities, so not all facilities have permanent residential sites. I have a few comments about this. We know from looking at the data, from our analysis of the data—Campbell was the person who did the analysis—that there are some gaps in the data. For example, we know that there are caravan parks in Albany but there is no response from Albany as a local government that is included in that survey. Another question mark was the Shire of Augusta–Margaret River, where they say there are only three caravan parks, and we know that there are more than three caravan parks. It is a good start in the right direction but it is not as comprehensive as we would like.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Did you send this to the local government authorities and they filled it in and sent it back to you?

Ms Buckland: Tourism WA did not do the study; the Department of Local Government did the study. I understand that they sent the survey out to the local government authorities, which completed it and sent it back.

Mr Fletcher: It is worth clarifying that the data that is presented there is only for those shires that had sites with a mix of permanent and short-stay use. Sites that just had short stay are not included in that table.

The CHAIRMAN: And also not all of them responded.

Mr Fletcher: No.

The CHAIRMAN: Local government made it clear to us that this was a one-off. They recognise the weaknesses of it and someone needs to pick it up to develop it as a database. Is tourism going to do this?

Ms Buckland: Part of the strategy will have to be the collection, identifying what data sources are necessary and then identifying how we collect that data on an ongoing basis. Probably the point is that whether Tourism WA or another department such as the Department of Local Government collects the data, it needs to be provided for in the strategy and it needs to be resourced accordingly.

[10.00 am]

The CHAIRMAN: My guess is that the problem the Department of Local Government had was getting timely and adequate responses from local government. It is that line of communication that is crucial so you have to do it. Also, there are some issues, for instance, when some of them have overflow sites. When everything is full, they go down to the local racetrack. There are some dimensions of the industry that need to be information gathered.

Ms Buckland: Yes. As an initial start point, although it will just be one snapshot in time, that audit that we are doing will identify those things such as what is permanent as in a permanent caravan park, where the overflow place is, broadly how many people can be accommodated in the overflow places and where the gaps are.

The CHAIRMAN: When do you think this audit will be completed?

Ms Buckland: We aim to have that completed by the end of this calendar year so that can then flow into the budget for next year.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: I am curious about this. Just looking at my local authority, they have filled out the form to say they had two caravan parks but they have not mentioned the other two.

Mr Fletcher: They might have mentioned them but they may not have had permanent sites on them. They might simply be entirely short stay or they may not have filled in the form.

The CHAIRMAN: Some sites have permanents that are not officially permanent; they are just there for six months of the year.

Mr Fletcher: Yes.

Ms Buckland: It may also be our interpretation of the question that the committee asked in the letter. I think perhaps the way we interpreted this question, and maybe this was not the way you intended, was to focus on the last part of the question which referred to the respective breakdown of permanent and tourist sites at each facility. Stepping back from it, we probably could have just provided how many there are overall, even if they did not have any permanent sites in them.

The CHAIRMAN: One of the areas that we focused on was Mandurah and Busselton, particularly the “holy mile”. I think we had a section on the “holy mile”. The “holy mile” and these religious groups have large tracts of land that were coming up for lease. We thought that might be an area you could renegotiate and get a caravan park in there. It is obviously a strategic site. Has there been any movement on that?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: It is a good spot for about six high rises.

Ms Buckland: It is a good spot for a lot of things. I do not have an update on that.

The CHAIRMAN: I read in the paper that the lease was renewed for not 99 years but beyond that. Christian groups are not the dominant site of recreation in the summer as they used to be. What about Mandurah? The problem with Mandurah is that it is very close to the city. They had a lot of disappearing caravan parks. Has there been any focus on Mandurah?

Ms Buckland: Not specifically, with the exception of the input that we provided to their planning strategy, which then would identify sites that should be reserved for caravan parks. One of the issues that was raised two years ago related to people who own caravan parks now. If those caravan parks have a general zoning, the value of that land and the value of them selling that land, effectively, would be their life savings. Anything that is put in retrospective would be an issue but going forward, it is a matter of making sure that sites are zoned specifically for that use. As we understand it from the strategies that we have been involved with, that is happening. Sites are being set aside. The next issue is trying to attract development to those sites. In the current economic climate and, in particular, the current climate around being able to get finance for projects, we are finding that across the board for all types of tourism projects in Western Australia, nationwide it is an issue and not many projects are being advanced.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I do not know whether this is an accurate position but I have read that if you cannot strata title a development, it is almost impossible to get a tourism development going ahead.

Ms Buckland: I guess it depends on what the tourism development is. Strata titling is a model that has been used quite successfully in the past. I think that relies on investors being willing to purchase a unit or what have you. The demand for that has really dried up with the global financial crisis. Even strata titling is not as viable for developers as it once was.

The CHAIRMAN: Selling off the plan and getting part of your capital back is not as easy as it once was.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Is it a case of the council giving an operator a long-term lease?

Ms Buckland: Yes.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Is it up to the council to set the lease at whatever they want to, basically?

Ms Buckland: I guess it depends on whose land it is. If it is crown land that is going to be or has been vested in the shire, I would imagine that the state government could have an influence on the terms of that lease.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Does it?

The CHAIRMAN: It is crown land and they should have an ability, at least in the transfer documents, to determine the pricing and the uses. There is a place in Augusta that had that problem.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: I would have thought that the state government stays out of it and lets them charge what they like.

The CHAIRMAN: But they transfer the land to them. One of the issues that came up, and we looked at the economics of this and it is changing, as we mentioned, is that one of the solutions appears to us to be the need for the state, through one of its entities, to find land, probably vested in the shire, zone it tightly and maybe contract it out to the private sector. That is probably the major model that we have to go forward to acquire new sites as the existing sites get used up for other purposes. Is that the department's perspective?

Ms Buckland: That would marry up with what my belief is.

The CHAIRMAN: It requires us as a state as a policy through its various instruments to find land and vest it accordingly even though it will be losing money because this land can be used for other purposes such as housing, residential or light industrial. It is a major zoning and planning issue.

Ms Buckland: It is; that is right. At the end of the day, to the extent the state could sell that land or lease that land for other purposes, it has an impact on state revenue. It is interesting because, more broadly, we are having these conversations with our minister and more broadly across government I believe a policy stance will be adopted with regard to all types of tourism development, not just caravan parks but also hotels in the CBD, for example. Some measures will be put in place to

specifically say, “That piece of land or that development must have a hotel in it” and ultimately whoever comes in to buy that land and develop that product pays a lower price for it because the value of that land automatically goes down.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: It would seem to me to be a critical issue that where there is a broad planning process underway, the fact that there needs to be availability of caravan sites needs to be one of the objectives.

Ms Buckland: Yes.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: We had the Department of Planning here the other day and we made the point to them—and we encourage you to make the point through your processes—that there needs to be caravan sites in the metropolitan area, in the Peel area. To the extent that the planning process does not deliver caravan sites, that is a problem. I do not know how to do that. It needs to be seen in the same way as a medical centre, employment mode or a transport corridor. A couple of hundred caravan bays seems to be just as important as those issues.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: In addition to that, with the caveats, they cannot be on-sold after a period of time.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Sure. I mean that in the long term caravan sites need to be available. There are those development pressures if you do not have the same restrictions on the land use.

The CHAIRMAN: Is the Department of Planning involved in the strategy?

Ms Buckland: Absolutely.

The CHAIRMAN: Are you confident that they have the same priority for caravan parks as you might have?

Ms Buckland: Not 100 per cent confident that they would. I also think that it would be our responsibility through that audit that I spoke of to be quite specific and say that we need, for example, 50 identified around the state. Here are the five hot spots where they need to be. We need 10 here, three here and seven here, with however many bays or provision for how many caravans. I believe if we are quite specific, that is something they can help us deliver. One of the things that bothered them and one of the things I would be struggling with is I am not the expert in tourism and how many tourism sites are required. I do not think we can expect them to start at ground zero and do all the research to say how many caravan sites are required, how many hotels, how many caravan parks et cetera. I think that is our responsibility and it is then their responsibility to make sure that the planning strategies have the sites provided for.

The CHAIRMAN: Point well taken. Our perception is that they were not put in a top priority, let us say in the Cockburn/Peel planning. We asked them if they had places for light industrial and residential but they would not give us a commitment to caravan parks anywhere. Therefore, someone has to inject a priority in the planning process. It is probably you.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Where these caravan parks have permanent residential sites and tourist sites, are there any rules about that or is it up to the caravan park to determine that?

Mr Fletcher: The local government sets the parameters—the percentage breakdowns.

The CHAIRMAN: One of the issues that did come up was tensions between long stay and short stay tourists. There were some conflicts of interest. Older people may not like young families in the park whose kids use the swimming pool all the time. Is that an issue? What is the optimal mix of residents versus tourists?

Mr Fletcher: It is probably not so much an optimal mix; it is probably more the design, siting and separation of the particular activities and how they interact where there are common facilities.

The CHAIRMAN: It is probably up to the owner of the park to solve those kinds of issues.

Mr Fletcher: And I guess the local government in the planning of the site.

The CHAIRMAN: One of the major focuses of this, particularly given the demand for eco type sites, low impact demands, where they just drive a truck in and they might get electricity, is the importance of the Department of Environment and Conservation's ownership with large tracts of land. If you look around and ask what department owns a lot of land, DEC pops up. Are you having dialogue with them?

Ms Buckland: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Has there been any progress there?

Ms Buckland: We are having dialogue with them on an ongoing basis. I was speaking with the director general a fortnight ago. He mentioned to me that he had also been asked to come along. I think he has a long list of things that he wants to tell you about. I believe that they have made quite significant progress in establishing new camping facilities and also, importantly, improving the existing ones. I feel that they are making progress. We have an ongoing dialogue with them about caravan and camping activity in general and then also specifically we have a project that we are undertaking with them in which we have identified a number of sites within the national parks. We are working on getting those sites to be investor ready so we can get an investor to come in and develop low impact eco accommodation on those sites. There are two sites. One site was released last October. We hoped that the business would be up and running this season in the Bungle Bungle range but unfortunately due to the prolonged rains in the Kimberley, they were not able to get it built and open so it will be open next year.

[10.15 am]

That is at a site called Kurrajong. Mt Hart, which is also up in the Kimberley, is another one. I think the expression of interest for operators for that one has just recently closed, and that is one that we work closely with them on. There are about five or six other sites around the state that we are working on with them, one near Esperance, in Cape Le Grand National Park, one in Francois Peron National Park, in Shark Bay, and a few others.

The CHAIRMAN: One of the issues that we thought could be more fully utilised was internet communications, given that the grey nomads often have internet and smartphones. You could have a website, "Camping WA", that has all the sites and dump sites and information. Are you taking an online approach to marketing and facilitating?

Ms Buckland: Yes, some of the things we have done in the last two years. First of all, in regard to that, they have actually improved their online information that is available to people, so we have created links from our website to their website. I guess our perspective is that there is no sense in replicating their information, so that leads across to theirs, and then they keep that.

The CHAIRMAN: But you can get lost in theirs, because they do so many things.

Ms Buckland: Yes, that is true. But I think ours is specifically to the camping section of theirs.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Ms Buckland: So that is one thing. We have also implemented within our website self-drive itineraries, and that is something we have not had previously. In the last two years we have also had Google Maps, which we have available through our website. We are now in the process also of developing an iPhone smartphone application, so it will be available for iPhones, Androids and iPads, and that will come out in about the next six weeks. That will have things like visitor centres, national parks maps and all those things.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Can I just say on that topic that recommendation 54 was specifically on this, and the government did not accept it. I am not asking you to overrule government, but the more you can look at that issue, I think, the better. The grey nomads are wired in; it is not just

young people, it is everyone, so the more you can deliver in a single location the better. I accept that there is no point duplicating information elsewhere, but if there is one point that people can go to get the information that includes dump points, main roads, local government or whatever, that would be really, really good.

Ms Buckland: One of the things we have put online that we did not have available online before was the whole wildflower brochure, so that people could surf around on it online but also download it and print it and take it with them, if that is convenient for them, so that is something we have implemented in the last 18 months.

The CHAIRMAN: Now, the important issue of dump sites.

Ms Buckland: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: That was an issue in the recommendations for one, finding them, and two, communicating and paying for them. One of the issues was the contract with petrol stations. Do you have a dump site strategy?

Ms Buckland: That will be part of the overall audit, so we will be considering where they are and what the approach should be. I think, generally, it would be fair to say that we would support a user-pays approach, because there is obviously a cost to dispose of it, once it is in the receptacle.

The CHAIRMAN: Yes, it is also an issue to make sure that they stop illegal dumping, because there was a problem of people going alongside roads, but then you have to penalise them. Especially if you do not have adequate sites, you cannot blame them, but if you have adequate sites and you know where they are, then there is less excuse or need to illegally dump.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Any idea what it would cost?

Ms Buckland: Yes; I did not check it out recently, but our chairman and our executive director of marketing visited Geraldton and Kalbarri, and sought out the local dump point, and they told me it was about \$5.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: That is cheap.

Ms Buckland: Yes, a cup of coffee!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: A cup of coffee in Perth!

The CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much, and I must say it is refreshing. I will just make a closing statement. The transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Please make these corrections and return the transcript within 10 working days of the date of the covering letter. If the transcript is not returned within this period, it will be deemed to be correct. New material cannot be added by these corrections; the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information—do you have any more information, either data, numerical or otherwise?

Mr Fletcher: Yes, Local Government might have already provided this—the closed sites.

The CHAIRMAN: No. But if you have any additional information, provide it when you respond to the transcript. Thank you.

Hearing concluded at 10.21 am
