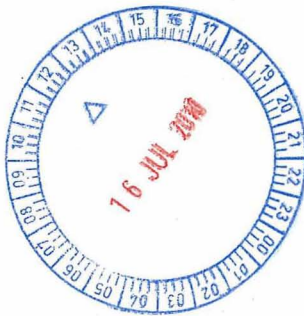


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Mr R Brown

Ms Linda Omar
Committee Clerk
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

The Chairman

Inquiry into Shack Site in Western Australia

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs.

I am a shack owner at Wedge Island. My family has had the shack for 14 years. We use the shack for holidays and long weekends or make it available for friends, and relatives who want a holiday or are visiting Australia from overseas.

As a shack owner at Wedge Island, I am a member of the Wedge Island Protection Association (WIPA) and active in their activities and programmes within the Wedge shack community. I am aware that WIPA is preparing a comprehensive submission to the Inquiry, and I fully endorse the views, assessments and recommendations contained within their submission.

I am concerned by the ongoing problems with various shack sites around W.A. caused by the application of the State Government Squatter Policy and the inconsistent treatment of these sites by Local Government Authorities and State Government departments. This is contrary to the experiences in other states which have established and retained similar shack sites and communities after successfully resolving any problems through consultation and recognition of their value to the community and its diversity, the economy and the environment.

Australia is often a destination for overseas tourists premised on its unique environment, wilderness and isolation. Shack communities like Wedge Island are capable of providing this experience for overseas visitors and residents of WA with affordable coastal family holiday destinations alike. This potential can generate investment in facilities and tourism related businesses through increased access to and use of these sites. The owners of the [Wedge] shacks and WIPA can, within an appropriate level of regulation and policy direction, provide those destinations.

I trust this submission (below) provides the Committee with information on shack communities in Western Australia, and that the Committee will be instrumental in changing policy related to shack sites so that the W.A public and visitors to this state can enjoy the benefits of these unique communities.

Yours faithfully,



Richard Brown

12 July 2010

**Submission on Inquiry into Shack Sites in WA
to
The Standing Committee on the Environment
& Public Affairs**

Introduction

This submission has been prepared in response to the Legislative Council of Western Australia's Standing Committee calling for submissions to the Inquiry into Shack Sites in W.A.

I am a shack owner at Wedge Island. My family has had the shack for 14 years. We use the shack for holidays and long weekends or make it available for friends, and relatives who want a holiday or are visiting Australia from overseas.

As a shack owner at Wedge Island, I am a member of the Wedge Island Protection Association (WIPA) and active in their activities and programmes within the Wedge shack community. I am aware that WIPA is preparing a comprehensive submission to the Inquiry, and I fully endorse the views, assessments and recommendations contained within their submission.

I am concerned by the ongoing problems with various shack sites around W.A. caused by the application of the State Government Squatter Policy and the inconsistent treatment of these sites by Local Government Authorities and State Government departments. This is contrary to the experiences in other states which have established and retained similar shack sites and communities after successfully resolving any problems through consultation and recognition of their value to the community and its diversity, the economy and the environment.

Background

My involvement with shack sites is exclusively at Wedge Island. I have had a shack located in the Wedge settlement for 14 years. In that period I have been able to regularly share the shack with friends and relatives, 45 from Western Australia and 12 from Europe and provide an experience they may not otherwise have had in metropolitan Perth or Europe. Their observations reflect values I have come to appreciate at Wedge; the isolation, sense of

community, natural surroundings and the ingenuity of people to integrate with and respect those surroundings by applying sustainability principals of reduce, reuse and recycle. At Wedge these are principals that are used every day. They are principals which will determine our society's future.

Wedge provides a unique opportunity for people to become involved in a small community. To lend a hand, share property, experiences and offer advice or contribute to a solution and participate in events. These are experiences which are difficult to replicate in cities and larger communities. At Wedge my children observe these behaviours and apply and promote them at school and at home.

Key issues affecting Shack Sites

The community at Wedge will be affected by the completion and opening of the Indian Ocean Drive highway to Cervantes. Its proximity to Wedge will create greater accessibility for the general population previously unable to access Wedge easily. Development of the road and the accessibility to Wedge exposes my shack and the others to theft and vandalism and degradation of the environment.

Ultimately, the increase in volume of visitors may determine the long term viability of our community and the loss of the shacks. This, in my opinion would be a disaster for WA. The shacks represent hard work and demonstrate the 'Australian Spirit' and the heritage value the Wedge shack community has developed.

The increased volume in visitors places greater emphasis for the need to develop a policy that will facilitate the retention of Wedge and its unique characteristics including the shack community. The additional traffic and volumes of visitors has the potential to degrade the environment.

Currently the community are the 'unofficial' custodians of the natural and built environments. We take care of things such as the rubbish removal though maintenance of the tip site. We control some traffic on the beach during busy times, providing a 'safe area' for children and families on the beach. Traffic signage has been installed also encouraging vehicles to slow

down. The community maintains the first aid post. If the Wedge settlement continues to grow through an influx of people, including campers and day visitors these things will become more difficult to maintain using the self regulating system adopted by the community over the last 40 years.

Suggestions for Change

The preservation of the Wedge Community, the shacks, the environment and the heritage that each of these components represent must be the long term goal for the government and the shack owners. I believe that the issue represents an opportunity to establish a partnership between government, its agencies and the community of Wedge Island. The development of policies through consultation and in conjunction with the expectations of government and the community, the area can be managed to ensure a sustainable future.

To create the sustainable future a partnership can facilitate:

- The retention of the shacks and the settlement's heritage by establishing a minimum standard for the construction of buildings. This would not necessarily impose the standards of the Building Code of Australia but a standard that means a level of construction that is not detrimental to the uniqueness and diversity in style that the shacks represents and preserves its heritage;
- The protection of the environment which will ensure that the community will be the custodians of the environment allowing the volume and behaviours of visitors to be regulated premised on policies developed by the government in consultation with the community and the conservation of the natural heritage, i.e. restricted access areas, clearly identified and serviced camping/caravan sites.

Creating a partnership that will realise a sustainable future must consider the long term future of the shacks. This can be fulfilled by establishing or extending the existing shack leases. An extension of the leases will at least, provide an opportunity for a partnership to formalised and demonstrate its capacity to fulfil the objectives referred above.

Summary

The Wedge Island issue is actually a unique opportunity for the government to preserve Western Australian heritage through the maintenance of the quaint building style of the shack community and built a partnership with that community. Together we can work to build a showcase of a sustainable, environmentally empathetic community settlement providing family holiday accommodation and a tourist experience.

I trust this submission provides the Committee with information on shack communities in Western Australia, and that the Committee will be instrumental in changing policy related to shack sites so that the W.A public and visitors to this state can enjoy the benefits of these unique communities.

Yours faithfully

Richard Brown

15 July 2010