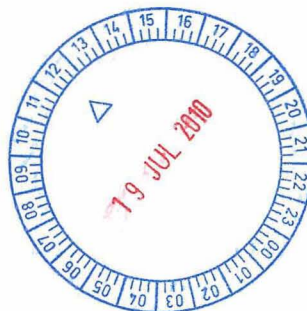


**PUBLIC**

Mr Murray Knowles

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

**Submission: Inquiry into Shack Sites in Western Australia**

I thank the Chairman, Hon Brian Ellis MLC for the opportunity to make a further submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs as indicated in his letter of 31<sup>st</sup> May 2010. My apology for not being able to lodge this submission earlier.

I am a life member of the Wedge Island Protection Association (WIPA) and active in their activities and programmes within the Wedge shack community and have owned a shack at Wedge for 13 years.

WIPA is preparing a comprehensive submission to the Inquiry, and I fully endorse the views, assessments and recommendation contained within that submission.

Further to my original submission on 12<sup>th</sup> April, I would like to provide a more personal perspective and focus on the intangible things that the bureaucracy seems to have difficulty in coming to grips with. Things like joy, well being, sense of belonging and pride.

I first heard of Wedge Island when I answered a for sale advert in the paper for an inflatable boat and trailer. The seller, a retired orthopaedic surgeon who lived in Dalkeith, mentioned that the boat had spent most of its life at his former shack at Wedge. His three children had grown up at Wedge and the boat was used for many family fishing and diving activities. He was pleased to sell it to another family that enjoyed the coastal holiday experience and we were taking it to our then regular two week camping trip to Ningaloo.

The annual holidays with the kids were always at a central or north coast location. We started in traditional town based holiday homes in Kalbarri, and then progressed to a campervan at sites further afield. Wanting a little more wilderness experience we then ventured into the more remote areas such as Tamala, Warra and Ningaloo Stations. Trips were usually organised with at least one other family but on some occasions up to five or six families.

The kids developed a love of fishing and water sports, were never bored and mixed very well with other families. This type of opportunity has almost disappeared, with sites restricted and DEC's policy of first come first served, very unsatisfactory for families travelling 1300km to be told 'sorry no room at the Inn'.

I went through a career change during the early 1990s, started my own business and time for family holidays became scarce. After taking stock and realising we needed a balanced lifestyle, I happened by chance to see some shacks for sale at Wedge in the Sunday Times, We ended up taking over an abandoned one in 1997 and it is the best decision I have ever made.

The irony is that the inflatable boat is now back at Wedge, being used in the same way as its original owner had done.

My son spent many weekends with various mates at Wedge helping bring the shack up to standard and now is a structural engineer. During his teenage years at Wedge due to his preparedness to help out neighbours he was invited to be taken to 'secret' fishing spots and was regarded as an equal with the adults. Due to his work commitments he doesn't get to Wedge as often as he would like, but he is asked of often and is welcome by a large number of Wedge people. I have not yet counselled him on the balanced lifestyle benefit, but what can you tell a twenty seven year old?

All our kids are adult now but still use the shack and we now have a third generation doing likewise. Our two grandchildren (six and three) identify with Wedge and the older one recently had her first solo trip with Nan and Pop. I can already see the same positive effect on them of the lifestyle and exposure to the environment, as happened to our children at their age. The beauty with a place like Wedge is you don't have to wait twelve months to enjoy it again.

Kids learn best when they can see and feel the lesson. Shack communities provide all those wonderful opportunities, from story tellers, to cooking experts, to mister fixits. Kids are included in all social activities, learn respect, are given freedoms but not without responsibilities and learn to be tolerant.

I would like my grandkids to continue to have the opportunity to be exposed to the good things that a shack environment can provide, especially during their younger years when their minds are sponges and their imaginations are thriving for stimuli.

On another tack, Wedge provides mental health benefits and stress relief for adults, especially men. Personally, and I have observed in many other males, the need to be creative, inventive and achieve something tangibly constructive is to the fore. This can manifest itself in the local collective wisdom of sinking a new bore, offers of materials and advice in re-sheeting a rusted roof or simply observing the repair of an outboard motor where not enough space exists for the many hands but the eyes look on and rejoice in a successful refit of the water pump. Tasks and projects are visible within the community and achievements are personally and collectively celebrated.

My wife has commented that I spend more time working on the shack at Wedge than I do on jobs at home. Both areas of work are necessary but the achievement at Wedge is more rewarding and satisfying. Pitting your wits against the elements to keep the services to the shack functioning and reliable is challenging. Good ideas are shared and the collective local knowledge base grows.

Settlements like Wedge have evolved into far more complicated organisms than what may be evident to the casual observer looking at corrugated sheds and an apparent disorganised layout. They play an important part in the social structure of our broader society and should be recognised as such.

The question for the Committee is how the existing policy and regulations can be modified to enable positive change rather than conduct a compliance test on the communities which they will obviously fail. Good governance is about recognising when change is appropriate.

I am happy to appear before the Committee if required.

Yours faithfully,



Murray Knowles  
16 July 2010