

**PUBLIC**

G. Cream

The Hon. Brian Ellis MLC  
Chairman  
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs  
Parliament House  
PERTH WA 6000



Dear Chairman

**Re: Petition No 50 – Shack Site Communities**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs in response to the petition on Shack Site Communities tabled on 26 November 2009 in the Legislative Council.

The reason for generating the current Shack Site Communities Petition is to convince the Government to undertake a policy review and to highlight the increasing public support to protect sites capable of providing affordable coastal family holiday destinations.

Shack communities are an untapped resource which can generate great investment in tourism assets and provide a far wider range of recreational and tourist facilities and experiences. These resources can also facilitate an increase in the access to and use of these sites rather than the narrow view expressed in the 'exclusivity' claims made at the time the Squatter Removal Policy was promulgated.

The recent report released by the Economic and Industry Standing Committee (E&ISC) of its review of the Caravan Park and Camping Ground industry, highlighted the need to protect "a central part of the WA way of life" and of the need to collect data to better plan for and manage suitable sites.

I believe the formation of a new Special Purpose Committee to investigate and recommend a framework under which shack communities could transit into evolving local management plans would ensure the needs now being met and benefits produced could be maintained.

Yours faithfully,

Gary Cream

16th December 2009

## **Submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs**

### **Petition No 50 – Shack Site Communities**

**Promoter** – Mr Gary Cream, 12 Brndon Street Balcatta

(This issue has not been presented to the Parliamentary Ombudsman)

This petition was generated to initiate some action on Shack Site Communities after a lack of progress in addressing this area by the current State Government.

The Liberal Party made a pre-election commitment that an incoming Barnett Liberal government would re-activate the Wedge & Grey Taskforce convened in July 2008 to investigate how the settlements at both Wedge and Grey Reserves could be integrated into any future management plan.

The Minister for the Environment, Hon Donna Faragher, recently declared in the West Australian newspaper, via a spokesperson, "there was no formal election promise to reconvene the taskforce" and she "was not willing to reconvene the taskforce". Whatever the current reason or motive to not proceed, the 14,000 people who use the shacks, were under no misunderstanding as to what was intended.

The reason for generating the current Shack Site Communities Petition is to convince the Government to undertake this review and to highlight the increasing public support to protect sites capable of providing affordable coastal family holiday destinations. Over 13,000 signatures have been collected for a similar petition directed to the Lower House. The focus is now directed to the Upper House and two additional batches totalling 1100 signatures were presented to members recently but were not tabled before the House rose on 26 November. Petition signatures will continue to be collected over the summer holiday period to be presented when parliament resumes in February/March.

It is not just the Wedge and Grey sites that are at risk, but include locations from the south coast to the northwest. This is an issue that affects the whole of government, not just the Environment portfolio. It also impacts on Lands, Planning, Tourism, Heritage & Local Government and Indigenous Affairs.

The Taskforce was a mechanism, an open process, to review how other States have incorporated retention of conforming shack site communities into long-term site management plans to better utilise these areas to enable traditional family 'way of life' holidays to coexist with emerging tourism and broader public access needs. The approach taken in NSW, SA and Tasmania has been far more enlightened, taking into account cultural heritage values as living examples that should be retained. At the same time the 'technical' issues relating to building standards, environmentally sustainable services and general public access have been satisfactorily addressed.

My family originally had two shacks at Billy Goat Bay, north of Greenhead in the Shire of Coorow from 1985 till they were demolished in 1995. This area, including Little Anchorage, supported about 100 shacks and was a thriving recreational community providing healthy sea side activities for the kids and social interaction for all. The Squatter Removal Policy decreed this use of Crown land was to cease. This site that was held up as a rehabilitation example by CALM, post shack removal, became a car park bordered with koppers logs and an ablution block. No more laughter of children or bustling community activity. How does this best serve the public interest?

In 2000, after trying five years of family holidays down south, we purchased a shack at Wedge Island and it reignited that 'sense of place' or 'soul' which had been snuffed out at Billy Goat Bay. My youngest daughter, now nine years old, and her friends, would not have known the joy of a shack community life had Wedge suffered the same fate. If this Standing Committee wants to understand the true value of these communities, take the trouble to ask the kids who will become the community leaders of tomorrow.



It appears the focus of government, especially Tourism WA, is on the high yield facilities aimed at the top end tourism market. Of course to attract developers to invest, prime sites are needed and a theme needs to be created. The 'sense of place' that exists in shack settlements, apart from the underdeveloped physical environment, is the 'community feel' and cultural heritage.

These are the qualities that have resulted in the National Trust registering Wedge and Grey as sites of cultural significance and will lead to a Heritage Management Plan being developed. Social geographers such as John Selwood PhD and Alan May also recognised the tourism opportunity afforded by retention of these types of communities.

However, depending on the site, it is possible to have a mix, it is not a matter of servicing one need to the exclusion of another. The Wedge Island Protection Association Inc, for example, has developed a Wedge Shack Settlement Model concept that provides for a range of needs, including commercial tourism operations, that are integrated around a central tourism theme.

A site-specific plan cannot exist in isolation and needs to fit within an overall policy framework. At present, that framework is still the Squatter Removal Policy that was developed in the late 1980s when the focus was to halt the uncontrolled expansion of unauthorised structures being erected on Crown land. That policy has served its purpose.

The current framework under which Shack-based recreational use of Crown land is managed is neither universally supported nor consistently applied by the government agencies vested with managing such Crown land. Since the Squatter Removal Policy was introduced in 1989, values have changed dramatically and if the best interests of the State are to be protected, ie a balance between economic, social and environmental needs, the Policy requires revision.

The Taskforce was intended to be the vehicle for the review process to be implemented. If, as the Minister for the Environment, Hon Donna Faragher has stated, the Taskforce is not to be re-instated, then another mechanism needs to be activated.

The review mechanism, a **new Special Purpose Committee** for example, should have representatives from each of the key portfolios mentioned earlier as well as professional experts and shack community representatives. The Committee's purpose would be to investigate and recommend a framework under which, shack communities that conformed to specific requirements, could transit into evolving local management plans and ensure the needs now being met and benefits produced could be maintained.

The needs that are being met by these shack communities have never been accurately measured as the settlements are regarded as illegal, and if the site management body sanctions the occupation and use of the site, there is a reluctance to highlight the ongoing acceptance of the arrangement. The recent report released by the Economic and Industry Standing Committee (E&ISC) of its review of the Caravan Park and Camping Ground industry, highlighted the need to protect "a central part of the WA way of life" and of the need to collect data to better plan for and manage suitable sites.

The recreational issues addressed by the E&ISC, are reflected in the demand for access by the general public to shack community sites. However, this demand is not recognised and the capacity of the current sites to respond to the demands is also not acknowledged.

Shack communities are an untapped resource which can generate great investment in tourism assets and provide a far wider range of recreational and tourist facilities and experiences. These resources can also facilitate an increase in the access to and use of these sites rather than the narrow view expressed in the 'exclusivity' claims made at the time the Squatter Removal Policy was promulgated.

My family, the Wedge community and broader public do not want to see the outcome implemented at Billy Goat Bay replicated at Wedge Island or other shack site communities.