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Government of Western Australia
Department for Communities



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DATE: 27 May 2009

PAGES (Including this page): 4

SUBJECT: **ECONOMICS AND INDUSTRY STANDING COMMITTEE
INQUIRY INTO THE PROVISION, USE AND REGULATION OF CARAVAN PARKS
(AND CAMPING GROUNDS) IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

Please find attached letter addressed to you signed by Susan Barrera – Director General
Department for Communities.

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Department for Communities
Government of Western Australia

Our ref: DG-09:0275

Dr Loraine Abernethie
Principal Research Officer
Economics and Industry Standing Committee
Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Dr Abernethie

**Economics and Industry Standing Committee
Inquiry Into the Provision, Use and Regulation of Caravan Parks (and
Camping Grounds) in Western Australia**

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the above-mentioned Inquiry and I appreciate the extension of time in which to do so.

You will be aware that the Department for Communities has no jurisdiction over any legislation relating to the provision, use and regulation of Caravan Parks (and Camping Grounds) in WA. However, the impact of policy decisions and the implementation of those decisions, particularly relating to the closure of any caravan park, are keenly felt by those who have chosen to make a caravan park site their home.

It is known that stress and anxiety is associated with a move to a new residence. This stress is heightened for those in our community who are older when faced with forced relocation.

It is with this in mind that I submit the following information to the Committee and respond to point four of the Terms of Reference,

- (4) Impact of existing legislation, and state and local government policies regulating caravan parks, particularly relating to:*
- maintaining a viable caravan park industry,*
 - protecting the rights of operators and users, and*
 - providing an adequate mix of long- and short-stay facilities and sites*

and with particular focus on *protecting the rights of..... users.*

Ageing of the population

In June 2007, 17 per cent percent of the Western Australian population was aged 60 years and over. By 2041, this is estimated to be nearly one in three Western Australians will be 60 years and over.

With the ageing of the population, it is important that the State Government develops appropriate strategies to ensure all Western Australians have access to affordable and accessible housing choices to suit their lifestyle and physical requirements at all stages of their lives. The availability of appropriate and affordable housing throughout the life-course influences the health and wellbeing of individuals.

It is of note that the demographic change is impacting on a number of regional areas at a faster rate than on the state as a whole. In 2001, people 60 years and over made up more than 20 per cent of the population in three metropolitan local government authorities (LGAs) and eight non-metropolitan LGAs. By 2006 there were ten metropolitan LGAs with more than 20 per cent of their population aged 60 and over, while the number of non-metropolitan LGAs with a similar demographic make-up had risen to 35.

Age-friendly Communities

The Department for Communities seeks to facilitate active ageing and supports policies that create age-friendly communities. What this means is that in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan age-friendly communities, there is a culture of inclusion shared by people of all ages and ability levels. Policies, services and structures related to the physical and social environment are designed to support and enable older people to "age actively", that is, to live in security, enjoy good health and continue to participate fully in society.

All seniors who are home owners are faced with issues such as home maintenance, the location of their home in relation to the accessibility to public transport, access to support services such as health care facilities, and other factors affecting their ability to participate in society. Those who choose residential parks as their permanent home, also face these challenges along with the more unsettling issue relating to security of tenure.

Security of Tenure

DfC is aware of the legislative requirement for Park Owners under the *Residential Parks (Long-stay) Tenants Act 2006* to provide long stay residents with a minimum of 180 days notice prior to the closure of a park and supports this timeframe.

The *Information Booklet: Park Living* publication prepared by the Department for Commerce and required under legislation to be given to prospective tenants should continue as the primary source of information, thus enabling an informed decision by the prospective users of any park site.

However, although this new legislation contributes to a better understanding of obligations in the event of the closure of a caravan park for new long-stay

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users, those who are established long-stay park home residents do not have any greater security of tenure than existed prior to the *Residential Parks (Long-stay) Tenants Act 2006*.

The Department for Communities is a member of the recently formed Caravan/Park Home Interagency Working Group which is currently developing a Protocol relating to Residential Park Closures. DfC will continue to work with members of the group to establish practical alternatives for those residents who have been given notice of intention to close a park.

Balancing usage of a caravan park / camping ground

From time to time the Department for Communities becomes aware of friction that occurs when different sectors of the community are using the same caravan park, but for different purposes. This conflict often occurs at the end of the school year where 'leavers' will take advantage of a caravan site to wind down after the stress of the final school year. Long-stay residents may have come to expect noise levels similar to that of a residential suburb and become alarmed at the increased activity and noise when the park fills up with short stay users at holiday times.

The Department for Communities has a view these tensions may be lessened with appropriate information being given to all parties, short and long stay users, about restrictions on noise levels and what constitutes anti-social behaviour in the park at the point of signing of an agreement for renting a site. Similarly, information about the value of caravan parks and camping grounds for families and others to enjoy a holiday without the restrictions normally associated in a residential suburb needs to be conveyed clearly to long-stay residents.

Another practical option may be for owners of caravan parks to design a 'buffer zone' between long and short stay residents, if the site allows for it. By creating user specific areas within the park contact between the users may be minimised thereby reducing the conflict and increasing enjoyment of the park for all users.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to comment on this important community matter.

Yours sincerely



SUSAN BARRERA
DIRECTOR GENERAL

27 May 2009