

PUBLIC

Submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs.

PetitionNo. 50

Promoter Dr Peter Sheppard.



This issue has not been presented to the Parliamentary Ombudsman

This petition has been undertaken to highlight the plight of the remaining shack communities in WA. The political promise made by the Liberal Party prior to the last election to reconvene the Labour party initiated Wedge and Grey Taskforce has not being honoured to date.

The taskforce was to be the mechanism to discuss the retention of all remaining shack communities in WA. Other states have addressed this issue successfully and this was a mechanism to determine a way forward for WA shack communities; the largest of which are at Wedge (350 dwellings) and Grey (135 dwellings).

Since the current shack removal policy was approved in 1989 all of the smaller shack settlements have been demolished by the Shires. At the time, Wedge and Grey were placed under the control of DEC (CALM) and the shacks leased back to their owners. The current leases expire in June 2011 and current policy does not provide a mechanism to extend them further.

My family shack is at Grey and two other shacks are leased to family members. Many shacks now have their fourth generation visiting for what are increasingly rare low cost Family oriented stays where there is a true sense of community and place.

There are no 'on tap' services or facilities yet some thousands of family are welcomed annually by owners to these unique locations in a natural bush setting.

When the minister Donna Faragher visited Grey last year I gave her and the speaker, Grant Woodhams a personal tour of Grey. Not to the beach but specifically to our self managed rubbish tip as a prime example of how a community can organise and manage its own issues and maintain this natural environment for future generations to enjoy.

We also have a vested interest in protecting these locations and have active programs involving rubbish collection (mainly day visitors/campers), controlling tracks and in recent years I have successfully revegetated the rouge sand dune to the south of Grey. This involved DEC and Commonwealth government approval and sponsorship; Envirofund grant of \$6,700 supplemented with over 1500 hours of volunteer labour. As recently as last weekend (22nd of May) twenty Duncraig SHS bushranger cadets assisted by planting out thousands of seedlings that I have nurtured during the summer. See <http://www.duncraigshs.det.wa.edu.au/brwa/> for more details of their activities. As expected there was no shortage of shack owners wanting to billet these students.

With the near completion of the Indian Ocean Drive we acknowledge that things will change in the future. What we want is a voice at the table and the chance to demonstrate that we want to be partners in the future development of these shack sites while maintaining our heritage

and cultural values. Our view is to keep any development low key to preserve the essential nature and atmosphere of Wedge and Grey. This satisfies a niche requirement for the preservation of an unsophisticated way of life at this unique hamlet.

In summary (copied from the Grey/ Wedge document currently distributed to members of the WA Parliament

“Suggested enhancement

The State Government Squatter Policy served its purpose during the 1990s in halting construction of new dwellings and facilitating the removal of random and unsustainable shacks.

The policy allows concessions for professional fishers based on a ‘legitimate’ argument linked to their WA Fishing licence.

If other ‘legitimate’ argument categories were identified, then a pathway would be created for those assessments to be made.

Such categories could include;

- Formal heritage assessment
- Remote community recreation need
- Tourism servicing

The existing policy would not be scrapped but amended and the remaining sites would be required to;

- Justify consideration for retention under one or more of the ‘legitimate’ argument categories
- Comply with any conforming requirements
- Demonstrate benefit to the public

Existing sites have not evolved by accident. Some have been utilised for 80 years. It is inevitable that future use of such sites will have competing demands, even between government agencies. One example would be the high yield/ high-end tourism market vs. the family caravan/camping holiday site demand. The review mechanism needs to recognise this fact and establish a process to deal with this eventuality.

Therefore the key portfolio areas of Environment, Planning, Heritage & Local Govt, Lands, Tourism and Indigenous Affairs should be involved.

Sites other than Wedge and Grey that will come under consideration in the near future include Naval Base, Blowholes, Dampier Archipelago, Donnelly River as well as recently negotiated long-term lease extensions such as Peaceful Bay.”

Regards

Peter Sheppard