

To the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs

Regarding Petition No. 066 – Geraldton Camp School

I am writing in regards to the decision by the Labour Government to remove the Geraldton Camp School from the Department of Education. The Camp School is one of six Camp Schools being put out to tender by the Minister for Education, Sue Ellery in an avalanche of cuts to rural and remote education announced in December 2017, that also include but are not limited to Lansdale Farm School, the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre and the closure of the Moora Residential College.

I believe that these cuts are short-sighted, that the Ministers involved are ill advised and that this decision will have widespread repercussions for the children and communities that use them.

The Geraldton Camp School is utilised by over fifty schools in the Geraldton and associated wider regional area and by remote schools throughout Western Australia (see maps of school locations and Camp School catchment area attached). It is used by children with disabilities and children from remote Aboriginal communities and also by Schools Of The Air. It is through Meekatharra School Of The Air (MSOTA) that I became aware of the many diverse activities offered to these students by the Camp School as my children (through MSOTA) attend camps there two or three times each year.

The highly qualified teaching staff offer many curriculum based courses focusing on leadership challenges and team building skills and a wide range of activities from archery and mini golf to BMX safety skills (all activities with links to education such as maths, health and the sciences). Removing the teachers from the Camp Schools would potentially remove the adherence to and regulation of curriculum based outdoor lessons.

Minister Ellery has repeatedly cited the removal of these facilities as 'budget repair'. Considering the teaching staff will still be paid by the Department of Education and the running costs for the Camp Schools are covered annually by revenue they generate, the 'budget repair' to government in this case is a paltry one-off \$2 million, with Geraldton, the saving would only be approximately \$350,000. The Minister has on many occasions stated that the Camp Schools will remain 'available and affordable' to the community. I don't see how she can make this claim as the Department will relinquish any control over the running of the schools at the end of 2018. Although there is a recommendation in the tender documents concerning availability for the Schools Of The Air, and regarding costing, this appears to be more of a suggestion than a direct instruction.

The aspect of socialisation provided by the Camp Schools is integral in the development of social, emotional and physical skills especially for those students who live remotely and for whom, the camps provide almost all of their annual integration with their peers and classmates. I would like to refer you to the Gonski Report (2018, see attached), specifically pages 45 and 46, which talks directly about the need for students to participate in outdoor activities, team building and leadership challenges and socialisation and the importance of this being delivered as a component of educational services and not as an optional extra.

Although there are six Camp Schools going out to tender, Broome Camp School will remain within the jurisdiction of the Department of Education. When I queried this, I was informed that Broome catered to a large percentage of remote students. As this is the case for all Camp Schools I suspect that Broome being situated in a new Labour electorate may be the actual reason for its exemption.

Geraldton Camp School lists a large percentage of schools in rural and remote areas as clients as well as several schools and organisations for students with disabilities. Although all the Camp Schools offer different activities and courses, Broome does not appear to exceed the other six in any particular way, yet it is to remain open. This further suggests that the government have identified the importance of the curriculum based component of Camp Schools to some degree, given that they have chosen to keep one within the Department of Education, however, Broome is not central to Western Australia and is out of reach to the majority of the State, particularly those remote students who are already facing the challenge of access to the education based programs at their respective Camp Schools due to distance.

I strongly believe, as a parent and home tutor, that the removal of the Geraldton Camp School from the Department of Education will have a negative impact on the socialisation and interaction it provides the students of Western Australia. Once it has been handed over to a Non-Government Organisation, the need for it to provide curriculum based activities at an affordable price (in my opinion, the very business of a camp school) may very well not be met. This decision is not one that can be easily reversed once made, if the Camp Schools are removed from the Department now, it is unlikely we will ever get them back.

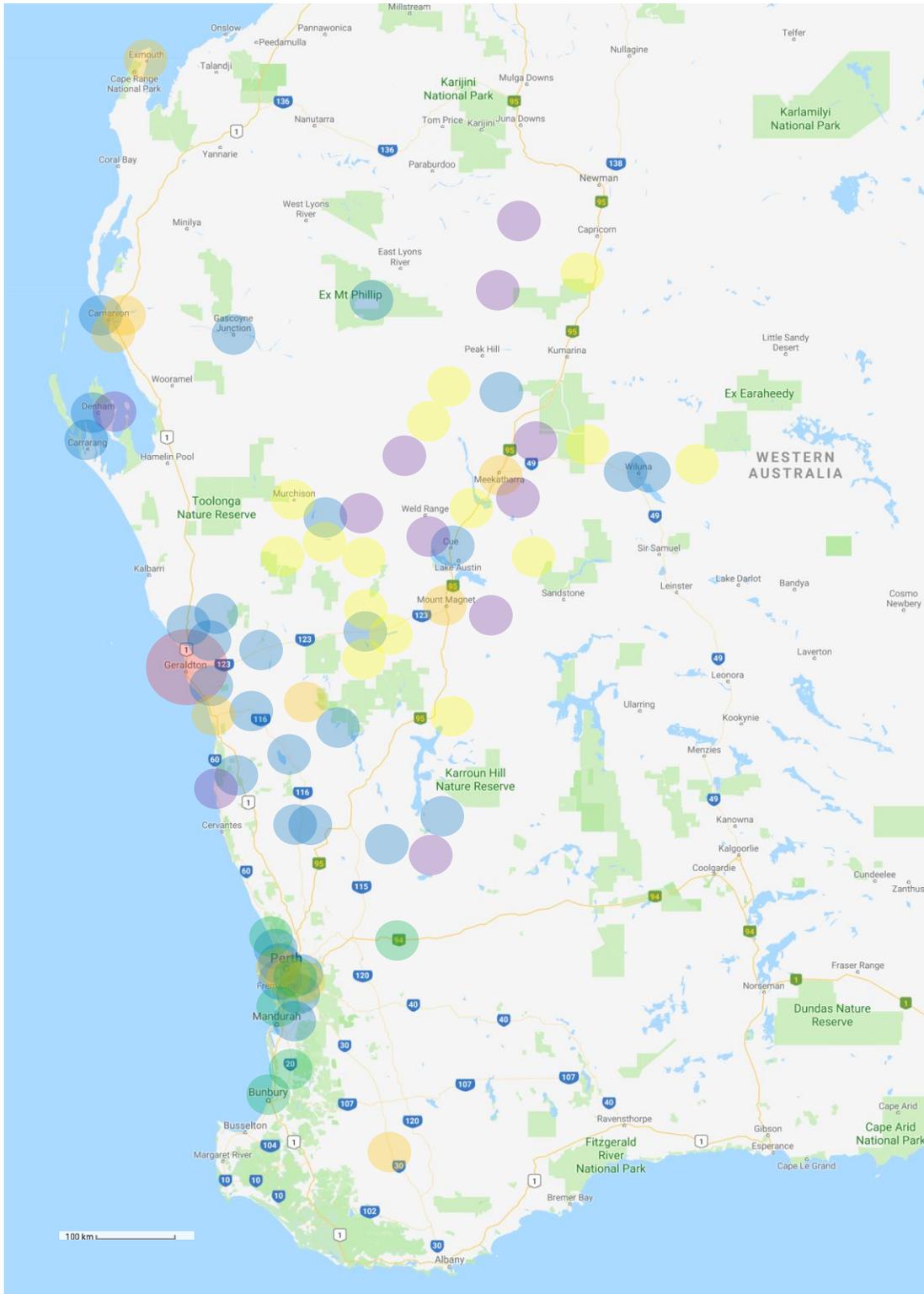
I have approached the WA Ombudsman regarding this matter.

I ask you to please enquire on behalf of the hundreds of schools and the thousands of students in Western Australia that rely on the Camp Schools as to why this potentially destructive decision has been made. I disagree with the Minister, the Camp Schools are most definitely the core business of education.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Ward

# Geraldton Camp School Student Locations



## Legend

- Geraldton Camp School
- Primary Schools that have used the Geraldton Camp School
- Secondary Schools that have used the Geraldton Camp School
- Schools with Primary & Secondary students that have used the Geraldton Camp School
- Meekatharra School of the Air students who travel to Geraldton Camp School for school camp and to attend school at the MSOTA building adjacent to Geraldton Camp School
- Recent past MSOTA students

# Geraldton Camp School Catchment Area

