

**ECONOMICS AND INDUSTRY
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO THE PROVISION, USE AND REGULATION OF CARAVAN
PARKS (AND CAMPING GROUNDS) IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT PERTH
TUESDAY, 28 JULY 2009**

SESSION ONE

Members

Dr M.D. Nahan (Chairman)
Mr W.J. Johnston (Deputy Chairman)
Mr M.P. Murray
Mrs L.M. Harvey
Mr J.E. McGrath

Mr D.A. Templeman (Co-opted member)

Hearing commenced at 11.30 am

WOOD, PROFESSOR DAVID STEPHENSON
Chair, Ningaloo Sustainable Development Committee,
Curtin University,
examined:

JONES, DR TOD STEPHEN
Research Fellow, Curtin Sustainable Tourism Centre,
Curtin University,
examined:

LEWIS, MISS ANNA ROSE
Doctoral Researcher, Curtin University,
examined:

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: On behalf of the Economics and Industry Standing Committee, I would like to thank you for your interest and appearance before us today. The purpose of this hearing is to assist the committee in gathering evidence for its inquiry into caravanning and camping. You have been provided with a copy of the committee's specific terms of reference. The committee is a committee of the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of Western Australia. This hearing is a formal proceeding of the Parliament and therefore commands the same respect given to proceedings in the house itself. Even though the committee is not asking witnesses to provide evidence on oath or affirmation, it is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as contempt of Parliament.

This is a public hearing. Hansard will be making a transcript of the proceedings for the public record. If you refer to any documents during your evidence, it would assist Hansard if you could provide the full title of the document for the record.

Before we proceed to the questions we have for you today, I need to ask you a series of questions. Have you completed the "Details of Witness" form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form about giving evidence to a parliamentary committee?

The Witnesses: Yes

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Did you receive and read the information for witnesses briefing sheet provided with the "Details of Witness" form today?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you have any questions in relation to being a witness at today's hearing?

The Witnesses: No.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Would you please state the capacity in which you appear before the committee today?

Prof. Wood: I will perhaps start, if I could. I am an academic at Curtin University. I am Pro-Vice Chancellor of Humanities at Curtin University. I am here because I have a long-term interest in

research at Ningaloo. I have been researching up there since the early 1990s and have very specifically looked at camping in the area. But I must also declare another interest: I am chair of what is left of the Ningaloo Sustainable Development Committee and I am a member of the Western Australian Planning Commission. I chair the state's Coastal Planning and Coordination Council, which looks at planning right up and down the coast.

Dr Jones: I am a researcher at the Curtin Sustainable Tourism Centre. I have been working on a CSIRO sustainable tourism research centre project based at Ningaloo looking at tourism planning for the past two years. I was working on other projects related to Ningaloo for the year before that.

Miss Lewis: I am a doctoral researcher with Curtin University. I am about 1.5 years through a three-year doctorate degree. I have been up north now for about four months, total field work.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Given that you have not made a formal submission to the inquiry, perhaps it would be worthwhile if you wanted to make a statement or provide some information that you felt relevant to our terms of reference.

Prof. Wood: The most recent work—Tod referred to the auspices under which this work is being done—has been funded by CSIRO and the Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre, which is based at Griffith University in Queensland. It has got about \$3 million cash in it. It has got an enormous amount of “in kind” support from universities around the country. I lead that project. Tod has been working on it for some time and Anna is a PhD student in it. What we have been doing most recently is building what we call a destination model. It gives an opportunity to develop scenario plans for the place. I will give a very brief example that relates very specifically to camping. We have done some work recently or some presentations in Exmouth and Carnarvon where we can allocate a piece of land to a four-star hotel—say, 500 beds in a four-star hotel or 500 beds in a camp ground. We can look at water consumption, waste generation, money into the economy—which obviously concerns you. We look at the tourist spend, like the loading on beaches, the number of people that will snorkel—all those sorts of things. It is a way of planning scenarios. That work is coming to its conclusion. We are going to be publishing it very shortly and will furnish you with a copy of the data that sits behind it.

As I alluded to before, it is part of a continuum of research that I have been doing at Ningaloo for some time. The last task that we did was to establish a dollar value for the Ningaloo Reef. That work was done in about 2004-05 and led very directly to examinations of funding. Why I mention that is that there were also reports prepared out of that work that fed in very directly to the development of the coastal strategy for Ningaloo. Obviously it is possible to acquire a copy of the coastal strategy. Perhaps I can send to Loraine some of the background papers we prepared. The significance of that is that we have been looking at the impacts of camping at Ningaloo between Carnarvon and Exmouth for many years. Most recently we have been doing that under the guise of the destination model. There has been a lot of data feeding into the Ningaloo strategy, and I might start, if I could, by talking about that very briefly. I suppose I do that having a hat that relates to a state committee.

The Ningaloo strategy is an interesting document supported by planning legislation or mechanisms that give it teeth under the planning system. Effectively what it did is it looked at people and the places at which they stay on the Ningaloo coast between Carnarvon and Exmouth. It has allocated land very specifically to numbers of beds. There are a number of beds set in Coral Bay. I think from your perspective what is important about that is that there was a very strong equity principle in the allocation of those beds. There were to be beds for hotels, there were to be beds for camping, and they were preserved as such under the strategy. That certainly relates to the town sites.

There are also sites allocated up and down the coast. Some of them are termed what would be high-end camping sites, so the sorts of things you see at South Mandu, which is \$600 a night in a tent. I hope I have the number right; it is fairly close. But then also at the moment there is a very large amount of uncontained camping on the coast, which is very specifically camping sites on the

stations. Probably Warroora and Ningaloo are the two big ones that have unconstrained camping, although they are starting to regulate it. You have got very large numbers of people staying there.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: When you say “large numbers”, what do you mean by that?

Prof. Wood: Andrew Kingham quantified the number of visitor nights on Ningaloo about four years ago at about 120 000.

Dr Jones: Maximum 120 000 visitor nights.

Prof. Wood: But the Department of Environment and Conservation has been flying that coast for years counting the number of camp sites. It is quite easy to work back the numbers. Some of the work we did, in looking at the economic values of Ningaloo and that whole stretch of coast, was to compare the activities that people were involved in with their spend and where they stay, because what we find is that you get the highest contribution to the economy from people staying in formal hotel accommodation in the town sites. We get a little bit less from the organised camp sites in the towns. You get less from the Department of Environment and Conservation camp sites on the coast. That is about the same as what is spent at the informal camp sites or the station camp sites on the Ningaloo coast. What is interesting about it is the way the spend is distributed. What we find is, for informal camping, there is a limited contribution to the local economy. The more formal it gets, the more upmarket it gets, the more money sits in the local economy. That is really what we were particularly interested in. I think the other thing—I will finish after this point—is that in terms of activities, at the top end, if people stay in the town sites, you get much more snorkelling on the reef as an activity. As you get into these less controlled camp sites, where there is no access to the retail sector, you get a much higher interest in fishing because effectively a lot of the people live a subsistence existence. The less formal you get, probably the more strain on the natural resource and the less input into the economy. The more formalised you get into the town sites, the more impact you get on the economy, but also of course on services, which is an issue for government because the more people there are in the towns, health services are stressed a bit more, for example. I can end there. Why I mentioned the coastal strategy is that a lot of that research data fed into the development of the coastal strategy and the notions of fixing bed numbers at designated sites and distributing those so that there was equity for poorer families who would camp, and there was also access to higher-end accommodation for people who had more money, which fitted the state strategy as top-end tourism of Western Australians. It also proposed formalising the less formalised camping on the coastal strip.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I am trying to paraphrase what you said, but you said that the higher the high end, four or five-star accommodation, then the more contribution to the local community. Are you saying as a percentage of the contribution? If it is \$600 a night, are you saying that a larger percentage of that money sticks in the local economy or a larger amount —

Prof. Wood: More money and a larger percentage. What that has to be mitigated against—if you look at sustainable tourism—if you have got spa baths, they use four times as much water and they generate more waste. It is an interesting conundrum.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I do not know any research in relation to tourism in Australia, but I have read a lot of research in relation to tourism in the Third World, where what happens is that tourists come and expect the exact same food they have in their own community and there is not much food being consumed from the local area. Is that something that you found in your research, or is that not relevant in Australia?

Prof. Wood: I can tell you anecdotally that I am appalled by the lack of use of local produce in the tourism industry on the Ningaloo coast. We ship produce to the markets in Perth and buy back into the region. That is pretty typical right up and down the coast. It is interesting that in places like Exmouth there are some prawns consumed. In that region you have got fantastic horticultural products, great seafood, and the industry does not trade on it. The state, I think, does not get the

benefit—this is a personal view—of the region trading on it. We know that Kailis has a niche market product of prawns into Danish and Japanese supermarkets. They are lined up carefully. They all look in the same direction and whatever else!

I am not sure that we gain much benefit back to the region. Tourism should really be a combination of what is sold and what is consumed. It is a package. Does that answer your question?

[11.45 am]

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Professor Wood, I am interested in your comments about the whole sustainability aspect. This committee is interested in making recommendations about what needs to happen to allow people to enjoy the natural wonders of Western Australia, but doing it in a way that is low impact. You mentioned that your research has been carried out over a period of time. I am interested in your data that tells the story of trends in the types of visitors. Has that changed over the past 10 to 15 years? Are we seeing more mobile people or older people? What sort of flavour from your data tells the committee about the sorts of people who are choosing to visit Ningaloo? That is the first part of the question.

The second part of the question relates to the fact that obviously we are talking about a very sensitive part of Western Australia, and there are a range of issues that impact on the maintenance of that area from an environmental perspective. I am therefore interested in this whole concept of sustainability. What you have said is that in terms of economic impact, the high end delivers more to the region directly—the people who pack up their van, wander up, self-contained, dump their waste wherever it is dumped, have a huge supply of stuff that they bought at their local Coles or Woolies in their home town, do not spend much in town, maybe buy a bit of fuel. I am interested in who is the most sustainable tourist. These sorts of issues are very interesting for us as a committee to make recommendations about the sorts of things we should be recommending to maintain a viable caravan and camping perspective in WA.

Prof. Wood: What we have found over time—I will pick up on the first point—is that the nature of activities has changed dramatically over the past 15 or 20 years. Ross Dowling and I have written a paper about that. We can provide you with that. In the early 1980s fishing was the dominant activity. People went to Exmouth in particular and that strip of coastline to fish. By the early 1990s I found that snorkelling had become the dominant activity. There are still a lot of people who fish, but we looked at the importance that tourists place on fishing as opposed to snorkelling. The town-based tourists will typically place snorkelling first. The people who stay on the stations—the people you referred to—will place fishing as the most important exercise to them because they are sustaining themselves. That research was used to contribute towards the extension of the sanctuary zones at Ningaloo, which made me hugely popular in Exmouth for a while. I think that has been an important shift. The industry kept going and it has gone from strength to strength. There are other shifts that are interesting. It may reflect on the activities.

We have seen a substantial lift over that same period in the number of international and interstate visitors coming to the region, and they are the highest spenders. The interstate visitors traditionally tend to be the highest spenders. In terms of direct spend, the internationals and the interstaters are major contributors. They have become dominant. Just before SARS and the Bali bombs, they got to over 50 per cent of the proportion of tourists in April to June, which is the whale shark season. They had this amazing contribution. The other thing where there has been a shift with Europeans coming in is that they have ironed out some of the seasons. They will go and cook in January and February when you see the lobsters on the beach and in the streets. We have seen a change in the nature of the industry. That is because new market segments have come in. It is my personal view that the most sustainable tourism in the region is based in the towns. Because we have towns that have been built with infrastructure, the states spend an enormous amount of money in Coral Bay putting in sewerage, water treatment and electricity sources. The people who stay 20 kilometres up the coast

do not have access to those centralised services. Traditionally, they defecated in the sand dunes. Now they are using portaloos and stuff like that. I would be worried about where it is emptied. A lot of that is probably in the dunes. A lot of that could be addressed by having collection carts and whatever else.

If we look at the direct spend, the economic contribution of the unconstrained campers on the stations, they do bring in food and they do eat fish out of the lagoons. Part of the CSIRO project that we are involved in is trying to quantify the fish stocks in the lagoons. They spend a lot of their money on fuel, which often is a major part of their spend. You will pick those figures up.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: But if a person flies, they have spent far more on fuel than a person driving.

Prof. Wood: And they have injected more.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: But in respect of that issue, they are spending far more on fuel.

Prof. Wood: You are quite right, but with that shift in the market segment, you saw more people using planes, and as more planes have come into the system because of Woodside's involvement in subsidising flights, there are more people on planes. We have all the proportions of people flying. My point was the nature of the spend. If you take a tourist who is in the town, they will spend a third of their money on food and sustenance, a third of their money on activities—they are typically the ones who go out in the snorkelling boats and the whale viewing boats, the organised activities—and they spend a third of their money on accommodation. That is a very similar profile right across the tourism industry.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: How much do they spend on getting there?

Prof. Wood: I do not think we have quantified the exact amounts. We may have in the latest data.

Dr Jones: The data we have shows a daily spend of \$80 for the entire region, so that is everybody. Travel expenditure in the region was \$10. That is not going to pick up plane tickets.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: You have answered a lot of the questions that I was going to ask. There is a lot of focus in this state not only on sustainable tourism, but also on the economic benefit of tourism. In my view, we have tended to shift our focus more to these people who are willing to cough up and spend the money from interstate and international tourists. There is also a huge social benefit to intrastate tourism. We are looking at unregulated camping along the Ningaloo coast. I have been there and seen it and been part of it. I understand that certain sections need to have better practices in place. If we looked at cleaning up those camp sites, do you have a view about the social benefit of intrastate tourism and how we should be weighing that up against this drive for the dollar?

Prof. Wood: I agree with you absolutely. There is a need to provide those opportunities, and I will be absolutely blatant about it. That is why the Ningaloo coastal strategy is important. It seeks to preserve access, preserve the opportunity to camp and to regulate it in a way that it will be more sustainable. That is important.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I suppose one of the things that interests me is how you prevent a place from being loved to death and swarmed by uncontrolled access. For example, one of the reasons Purnululu has not been overexploited is that the road in prevents ma and pa from Mandurah from taking their caravan in, unless it is a van with a big axle, and its distance. As soon as you put an improved road through, you will increase the numbers that can potentially get there. Infrastructure is important, but you can also put measures in place that prevent a place from being overloved. What you are saying to us today is that the Ningaloo tourist strategy is a way forward or is the map of sustainable tourism. What are the key factors of that strategy that this committee might be interested in that relate to its terms of reference?

Prof. Wood: I mentioned the strategy because it is useful for planning in other parts of the state. It allocated beds to particular uses. It dealt with those issues of equity. All Western Australians are going to want access to places. It also put in place a planning framework—perhaps I can talk about that more later—which was very considered. It set up some rules, and then the rules are tested all the time. So if someone wants to put in place a particular type of development, it was going to go through a committee process. The Ningaloo Sustainable Development Committee will be replaced by a Gascoyne Region Planning Committee. That is fine. I think that is good and it is sensible that it takes in Shark Bay as well. It gave planning a lot of power. In a place like that where growth is slow, there are not really very serious impacts if it goes a bit slowly in a place like that. You are able to consider everything. I will give you an example that addresses the exact question that you raised. One of the local authorities said, “Let’s pave the road from Carnarvon to Gnarlou and up to Coral Bay up the coast.” That would have introduced huge numbers of people to the coast. Our response was, “Let’s do some research; let’s work out whether that is a sensible and considered process.” You may remember from some time ago that there was also talk of paving the road through Ningaloo up over Yardie Creek and up the west coast. Again, that would be looked at within a framework; it would be carefully researched. I say again that I do not think that we are stopping economic opportunities by having that sort of regulation because, to be honest, the tourism industry is not growing so fast that you are going to lose out of it. The opportunity to plan in that way is important. I think you make carefully considered decisions about whether you want to put in a paved road. As planners, we could allocate numbers of beds to particular sites if you could control the camping on Ningaloo. I think that answers Lisa’s issue of being able to preserve the experience but control the numbers and the way in which it happens. In doing that, you may also be able to sell a little more to the punters who are going and get more of an economic contribution out of them.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I refer to the allocation of numbers—3 000 for Coral Bay, 100 for this type and 300 for that type. Do you have a formula or some kind of methodology that you use to determine those figures?

[12 noon]

Prof. Wood: We did not. A lot of it came out of experience. The history of allocating land at Ningaloo is long and arduous. It probably became most specific in the early 1990s when Jones Lang LaSalle went up there and produced a report that said, “This is where you can have tourism developments.” Jones Lang LaSalle had looked at where people stayed. That was effectively the north-facing bays of the places that were protected.

Out of that grew almost a truth about where tourism could be. People looked at the number of beds in Coral Bay, the sort of demand that was there, and the 3 000, if you like, supplies more than there was in the past, but it is also slightly less than the overflow you used to get when you had people camped up and down the street. The strategy is due for review and those things need to be reviewed. It may be that you jack Coral Bay up to 6 000 beds, and we actually do not have ownership because we are leaving the destination model that we have built in the public domain, so that it can be used by planners and developers in the future. But we do have the tool now to look at what the impacts of that are likely to be. We can probably tell you that if you increased the beds and if you looked at the proportions you wanted to increase it on, we could probably give you a very good sense—it cannot be absolutely perfect—of what the economic impacts would be and whatever, so you could explore scenarios.

Similarly, a lot of those 100-bed sites were positioned on the basis of a group going up and down the coast saying, “That looks good.” I think that is fine, because what that does is establish a notion of where something could be, but you would certainly need to be discursive about where you actually put the building up. You would need to assess it. These things need ongoing assessment.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: In that respect, we have had a lot of people come to us and talk about the RV experience, which is these self-contained campervans and caravans. Is there any

comment about how these self-contained vehicles are changing—I do not mean just the Winnebago style; I mean caravans that are capable of, we are told, going for a month without having to plug into services. Is this having any impact or changing the way that people go camping on the Ningaloo coast?

Prof. Wood: We have not got any evidence. You might, Anna; you have been there most recently.

Miss Lewis: From what I have seen up there, there does not seem to be anything that fancy up there; let us just say that. I mean, people with Winnebagos, I have found that even if there are public toilets, they choose to still use their Winnebagos because it is more comfortable. They often then require a dump point; they ask for dump points such as in a national park, even though they can use the facilities that are provided. They are certainly not going into any off-road areas or anywhere that caravans are not going. You often see the Winnebagos and the caravans in the same areas. That is a concern, of course, with road access. That is one of the biggest things that people have spoken to me about. If you do level the roads and make them accessible for people with caravans and Winnebagos, I guess it is not only the impact of more people visiting these areas, but also the demographic changes. For example, at the bluff they are saying that the older-style caravanners will get in there in April, and then the surfers get there in June, and there is nowhere to stay because everyone is there with their caravans, fishing. That is just something to consider as well.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: You have mentioned this demographic issue, and traditionally Ningaloo was one of those places where the happy campers would all gather and there were almost communities.

Miss Lewis: Are you saying Ningaloo Station?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: As an example.

Miss Lewis: Yes.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: From the field work you have done, is that still a trend?

Miss Lewis: It is wonderful, yes. It is very much a very strong community camper feel. You will find as you go along different sites along the coastline, not only in the unregulated areas, but also in the more regulated areas up at Cape Range National Park, that people have a very strong sense of community, no matter what the demographic is in these areas. After having stayed in areas such as Coral Bay and, I guess, other more full amenities caravan parks, you do get that sense of community feel, but just personally from anecdotal evidence, it is not as strong as in these other areas. I think it is because people need to band together to help out with day-to-day living. For example, if your generator breaks, you go down and see Bill who is a generator guy five camps down. If you are having troubles with your toilet or your this or your that, “Oh, yes, Merv’s the guy.” If you want some homebrew it is, “Oh, yes, this guy’s got it down there.” It sounds funny, but it actually turns into its own little community, and they actually help each other out with mass rescues. They have had people go out and overturn and capsize and the campers are like, “Oh my gosh, what’s happening to Bill over there?” and they all race out. Before even the camp hosts or anyone else or any authorities know about it, they have got a boat out there and they are saving this guy and they are having a debrief like a full business would have if some sort of disaster happens. It is a very strong community. You do find that up in Cape Range National Park they get together and have all their evening drinks and nibbles from about five until 5.30. I timed it quite well actually to go and do the survey around that time.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Do they look after the place? In your experience are they saying to themselves that they have a responsibility?

Miss Lewis: Every comment that I got back from people who are long termers, as in a month plus, do emphasise that they look after the place. They go along the beaches and they clean up the rubbish. If anyone leaves a spot that is a little bit dirty, they will go and tidy it up. They are the ones who get together to take out the trash and take out the recycling. If one person is going out, they

will go around and ask people if they have recycling to take out. I believe they do have certainly the best intentions is all I can say. I think that any challenges there might be in terms of environmental impacts could be fairly easily—I would not say overcome, but I think that there could be some small things put in place that would make things better. Just a bit of money and resources could change or alleviate problems that you might see there currently.

Prof. Wood: I am not so convinced. If you look at the stations, they were heavily grazed for a long time by sheep and goats, so there has been a certain amount of damage done there. If you fly over the stations—particularly Ningaloo, I suppose, more so than Gnaraloo—there are tracks all over the place where the four-wheel drives have ripped the place out. The thing is that you have very, very low rainfall, so the capacity for that land to regenerate itself is very limited. I come back to Liza's point that I think it could be regulated. They stay on the stations because they do not like being regulated; they do not like DEC. They like to be able to have fires so they collect all the wood from the station, so you lose habitat. They have been defecating in the sand dunes for a long time. This reflects what David asked, but there are periods when you get an incredible mix, a huge density of people. In the April and July school holidays masses of people are there, and then you get the school holiday mob—the younger mob as well as the older people. Some of the older ones come up after the young ones go because they do not want to really fraternise. I have been in one bay at Ningaloo and we did a headcount of 400 people in one day. A lot of them then were camping in the marine park. Ningaloo has pulled them back out of the marine park—the marine park goes to 40 metres above the high-water mark and they have now pulled a lot of them back out. But it was like putting the Perth Hyatt on a beach without a toilet. I think there are impacts.

Winderabandi on Ningaloo—it is right at the top end—is the place where they do camp on the beach, and on Warroora they camped on the beach and there are tracks. So there are differing views on it.

Dr Jones: I just wanted to add to that that recently one of the stations put in a two-week limit on a certain part of the camp site; that is certainly a sign that the number is increasing. I heard from another PhD student who is working with us that people were getting there up to four weeks earlier than they really wanted to, to make sure they got the camp sites they wanted. I think there are indications that coastal camping is on the increase.

Prof. Wood: Can I make one more comment. What has always scared the hell out of me—and none of you is the Minister for Tourism—is that we have had a natural, slow growth into the place, but what we know about tourism to the region is that it is not driven by Tourism Western Australia advertisements; it is driven by word of mouth and the internet and Lonely Planet. If Lonely Planet published this wonderful experience to international visitors, you could have bedlam on the coast.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: It does the raise the question of where do tourists go after WA Tourism ads.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I am probably one of the beach campers you would like to see ruled off the place to a degree, but there is in-your-face regulation and then there is regulation. Your comment that people go to those places because they do not like to be around this regulated environment is quite valid to a degree. But when you are talking about foraging through the bush for wood and all of those sorts of things, there are some very, very simple things that can be done such as providing wood for the barbecues, providing specific sites where fires can be lit, providing toilet systems and some rudimentary facilities that are basically there. If they were there, people would use them. People are basically lazy. If there is wood that they can go and get from a pile, they will go and get it rather than go foraging through the bush for it. Whilst your point that people go there because they do not want to be in a regulated environment is valid, I think that we can have less in-your-face regulation and still attract people to those areas without necessarily degrading them. I wonder if you have a comment on that.

Prof. Wood: I agree with you absolutely. I do not dispute anything you say. If you talk to the DEC officers in Exmouth, they do not stay at the DEC camp sites when they go away for the weekend; they head south of Yardie and they take their dog and they have a fire, too. It is a matter of how you manage it, I think. I love staying on the beaches, too; I have done it for years. It is a matter, I think, of how you regulate it and it is part of the experience. From your perspective as a committee, I am interested in how the economy can benefit a bit more and how we can get a reasonable position between economic advantage, if you like, and the environment. Some red data will be out soon, but there was some data published by the Department of Fisheries about eight years ago—we cite it in the preparatory documents for the Ningaloo strategy—that had this wonderful finding that 48 per cent of people only took what they needed. There is another percentage that will take the bag limit every day, and then there is about 20 per cent who do not give a toss. Again, I think you need to regulate it, because we will get to the stage when fish stocks will be completely depleted. That might be when the economy starts to benefit, because they will have to go to town to buy some steak.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: This is an inquiry into the regulation of caravanning and camping; it is not actually an inquiry into the economic impact of the process. From my perspective, I have been very keen to hear from the users who have come in and talked about it. Most of the organised groups that we have contacted have obviously been the older demographic, and it is very good to hear from Miss Lewis about the younger people and their experience of camping. Obviously, one of the questions we have to answer is about the fact that the south west of the state is losing its caravan parks at a rapid rate of knots, yet there are more campervans and caravans on the road. Where can they go?

Prof. Wood: Can I comment on that more generally? It is my demographic that is buying caravans and four-wheel drives, and hopefully I will have enough money in retirement to go and enjoy something like that in the not-too-distant future. We are seeing an increase in the number of recreational vehicles that are being bought. We have seen the eastern seaboard camping sites being consumed by strata title tourism developments. Let us be absolutely clear about it: they are the only tourism developments that are built now; they are all strata title.

Tasmania has got to the stage that it has run out of camp sites, and I think it starts to put huge pressure on Western Australia. I think that is a problem.

[12.15 pm]

Ningaloo is fine, because there is enough land to do lots of things and not to be too precious about it. There is an interesting conundrum, though. Another research program that I am just finalising negotiations for looks at the impacts of climate change and sea level change. We are looking at the south west of Western Australia as our case study. We will see more extreme events, and they will be more extreme. They will be really rough. It may well be that, as planners, we start to look at the reallocation of coastal land. One of the things that will happen over the next 30 years is that we will see some land coming out of prospects for built uses, and it will have to be put into short-term uses. I think some people will still spend \$1 million for a block of land on the sea even though they might only have it for 30 years, but in terms of corporate uses, you will probably see a change in the way we use the coast. I do not think that helps you to answer any of your questions in the short term, but I think it will become part of the planning horizon. More and more land will be too environmentally sensitive to build on, and you then have to debate whether building on it or sticking caravans on it is a better use. I believe, personally, that you will very carefully consider how a lot of land is used in the future. It is a worrying thought.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I know we have to finish, but I have one last question. You mentioned data a couple of times. You have some data that you will be releasing in the near future. How soon is that, because it may be of use to the committee in its deliberations?

Dr Jones: I have been preparing a technical report for the sustainable tourism CRC. We would like to have that published within the next two to three weeks, and as soon as it is done I will send it through to you.

Prof. Wood: That, though, is secondary data. If you want to see, Loraine, any of the original data, or if you want look at something specific, I am happy.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The secretary cannot answer directly to you, but the more processed the data is, the easier it is for the secretariat to analyse it and put it into the report. I am not encouraging too much primary data, because I know that we can get buried in it.

Prof. Wood: It is processed, but if you as a committee had a particular question you wanted answered, we could seek to do that.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Can I just ask one last question of Ms Lewis very quickly? This may be a bit off the planet, but those “Wicked” van things—have they been getting out into these places?

Miss Lewis: Not so much, to be honest. You do see them spotted around. We see quite a few Europeans head out there in their little station wagons, doing their best to deal with the environment out there, so it is definitely growing in popularity with Europeans. Generally, people in the surveys and the people that I have been speaking to are mostly Australian and there is a growing number of eastern states folk coming over to the stations, and there are certainly a few Europeans as well. I think a lot of them mostly come in the summertime for windsurfing in the area. But we do not see a lot of Wicked vans.

Prof. Wood: There is a troubling trend, however. One of those cheap hire companies has got hold of four-wheel drive vans, and that will be challenging.

Dr Jones: The breakdown from the station survey is that we received 1 540 surveys: 70 per cent were from Western Australians, 20 per cent interstate and 10 per cent international. Most international respondents, as Anna said, were surfing on the two southern stations. That is just the stations, excluding the national parks.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We have had this discussion about what some people describe as illegal camping, free camping or camping out. Obviously they are doing it how they can on the Ningaloo coast, but obviously there might be coming or going from there. Is there any feedback about people’s experience in camping outside the coastal area?

Miss Lewis: I have had a lot of feedback about the environmental impacts of the rest areas. I have had a lot of people at stations mention that, in travelling up and down the coast in general, firstly, they find the bins are ineffective in the sense that they are not emptied often enough or there is too much use for the frequency they are emptied. Even though they have protective covers, the crows get in there and spread litter everywhere. They are saying they are feeling a bit put out, because they are trying to do the right thing by putting rubbish in the bin, and there is this rubbish everywhere. Secondly, there is a huge lack of restroom facilities along the strip in these rest stop areas. You go in there and there is toilet paper everywhere along the rest stop. When you ask about the free camping spots where people might pull over, that is exactly what is happening. I do not know how you would overcome that. I do not know whether anyone would want to go to a toilet at a rest stop. It would be quite an unpleasant experience, I would imagine. I am not sure whether something could be done so that people did have facilities. Some other folks that I was speaking to suggested at least signs in the rest stop areas saying “Leave no trace, please”—just something to guide people. I think they were concerned that people did not quite know what to do when they got there, because there were no facilities.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Department of Environment and Conservation made the point to us that it has taken all the bins out of the camping areas on its land, so maybe Main Roads needs to think about that in the rest areas.

Miss Lewis: A leave no trace, take everything with you policy, perhaps.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: This is possibly outside the terms of our brief, but one of the highest impacts I have found in some of these off-road camping areas is the impact of people who bring their generators—that constant noise and smell, and if you are downwind of one of them you end up with diesel fumes destroying your nature-based camping experience. Then, in the recreational fishing industry, back in the 1970s the main people accessing the Ningaloo Reef were actually the intrastate freezer-fillers, if you like, who would cart up a couple of generators to run their chest freezer, and once it was full they would come back home. Anecdotally, within the fishing industry, we have been told that that is all but finished, and I was wondering whether you have found much of an incidence of the generator and freezer—almost like high-end, quasi nature-based camping—along there.

Prof. Wood: Go and have a look about a kilometre south of Winderabanda Point and you will see a great big lighting tower and a very busy group of people. The days when you went up with a freezer full of frozen steak and cold beer, and ate the steak and drank their beer, filled the freezer with fish and went out again, as a rule, have gone, but there are some isolated examples.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I suppose it is important that regulation is not designed for the isolated examples, but rather for the general population.

Prof. Wood: Absolutely, and I think regulation of the fisheries —

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I was not specifically talking about the fisheries, I was just talking in general terms.

Miss Lewis: A lot of people, I notice, have given a lot of feedback saying that they only go out, do their wilderness fishing and get their catch for the night, and that is all they do, but there are people who come in and get their freezer loads. It is definitely out there, but they are frowned upon by the general long-term stayers. I think the pressure is there, but I would not say it is uncommon to see that. I have also noticed that a lot of people have made comments that they would like to see more presence of enforcing agencies out there, because they do not see enough of that and that is something they think might encourage that behaviour and things associated with it.

Prof. Wood: Can I just make one more comment about that? It is a practice that has gone, and I do not know how many people were doing it. If you talk to people who have been going to Ningaloo for a long time they will tell you there are fewer fish around and they are hoping the sanctuary zones will help with that. The problem, though, if we do end up getting more and more people, is about the gross fishing effort. You can put bag limits onto areas and control individual fishing efforts, but the impact is a function of the number of people who are involved in the activity. I think that is what has happened in Geographe Bay and places like that.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much for your evidence before the committee today. The transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made and the transcript returned within 10 days from the date of the letter attached to the transcript. If the transcript is not returned within this period, it will be deemed to be correct. New material cannot be added by these corrections, and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on particular points, please include a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration when returning your corrected transcript of evidence.

Hearing concluded at 12.24 pm