

24th August 2006

The Secretary
Inquiry into Australia's National Parks Conservation Reserves and Marine Protected Areas

Submission from
Diana Morrison

My submission is on behalf of the PGA from the point of view of a committed long-term pastoralist and neighbouring landholder of the conservation estate Pimbie Station.

I would like to bring to your attention issues that arise from the lack of physical presence and direct management ...the effect of this on the social structure of the community and overall regional wellbeing

Pimbie was acquired by CALM as part of the Gascoyne Murchison Strategy with no opportunity of lease adjustment being offered to adjoining properties. Pimbie homestead and much of the infrastructure was abandoned and partially demolished. Part of the demolition was conducted under tender. The rest remains in a dilapidated state. Management practices at the time of hand over were inadequate to cater for the welfare of remaining domestic, feral and native animals.

Property Management issues.

- **The detection and control of wild dogs and dingoes.**

CALM is actively involved in regional baiting programs, however due to the lack of physical presence on the property do not have the ability to respond to incidental infiltration. Pimbie is located in a historically dog free region setting it apart from inland properties. It is imperative for the economic survival of the southern Gascoyne small stock producers that this region remains so. It is only with constant surveillance that this situation of control can remain. Although artificial waters have either collapsed or have been closed down, the Wooramel River with its natural water holes provide a highway from the inland dog infested areas to the coastal regions. These water holes require surveillance and constant management. It is difficult to sufficiently stress the importance of this control being maintained.

- **The early detection of fire threat**

Fire is an integral part of maintaining the health of the environment. Pimbee Station is a predominately gidgee sand ridge lease with dense stands of wanderie grasses that make it prone to fire events when ungrazed. The intensity of fire created from large fuel resources could put the intent of the conservation in jeopardy. Fire is a valuable tool in pastoral management, however if under managed damage to both brittle environments, stock and infrastructure can be devastating. A proactive approach to fire detection & control is required.

- **The maintenance of boundary fencing, fire brakes and fire access tracks**

Without the every day operations of a pastoral business, access tracks that form part of a fire break infrastructure become overgrown and impassable. It is this ability to gain access that makes it possible to have some control over areas of country to be burnt or maintained. Without easy access, the ability to burn back to create a break is impossible. If it is a requirement to extinguish the fire to protect a neighbour's rangeland, stock or infrastructure there is little ability to do so. The same goes for the ability to protect

sensitive areas that it has been deemed necessary to conserve. It is difficult to see what is happening from the air.

▪ **The control of feral animals[cats and foxes and goats]**

Feral goats prefer to graze and water in places free of sheep and have an ability to seek out fresh country. This has obvious implications for area set-aside for conservation. The control of foxes and feral cats in a conservation estate could be of equal significance.

▪ **The control of plants and weeds**

Melons and double gees have spread in areas where hay has been fed in past times. The seed continues to germinate with appropriate rain events. Spraying and picking is required if control is to be maintained.

▪ **The social implications of no physical presence**

The pastoral community has always been a sparsely populated one however with the advent of the conservation land grab; increased technology, the mining boom, the national rural downturn and now the drought *people* are becoming the endangered species. By creating voids in the community there are simply fewer people to do the things required to make up a "community". People to sit on committees to ensure some representation.... children attending School of the Air, children to make the numbers for the annual Christmas tree, people to man the bush fire brigade, people to cater for the latest Bush Bash car rally, people to cut up and distribute the dog baits...or make up a cricket team...the list goes on. It may seem ridiculous to think that a family of five, a couple of station hands and the overseer and his wife could make a difference but I assure it can. I imagine in the *future* these conservation estates becoming **vibrant members of the community** with permanent management staff providing guidance for environmental studies students, for research scientists, for school camps, for bird watchers, for remote adventure seekers and for traveller's wishing to explore part of Australia's national heritage. By taking this roll we would all become givers.

▪ **The economic implications of no physical presence**

Rates paid by land holders go towards the up keep of rural roads.

The mail truck maintains viability by delivering mail, fuel and goods. The empty mail truck syndrome.

People pay taxes by being employed in meaningful work

Land has been taken out of production....production that creates income.

Abandoned land does not automatically regenerate and the future economic implications of *saving* this land again will be costly to the triple bottom line.

Further economic implications arise from the fact that the opportunity for neighbouring leases to increase in size was passed over. "**The whole property purchase policy**" has been counter productive creating management issues for all concerned.

▪ **The safety aspect of no physical presence**

Pimbie Station is still marked on most road maps and could be considered by an inexperienced traveller as a location for fuel and water. With the properties on the eastern boundary of Pimbie being Aboriginal lands and often abandoned the road leading to Gascoyne Junction and on to the tourist attraction of Mount Augustus is lonely one.

▪ **Lack of observation to ward against the illegal collection of native wild life and Timber**

In recent time smugglers have been intercepted attempting to take native birds, snakes and lizards from the region.

The remnant timber found on the Pimbie lease is a rare and valuable hard wood.

Neighbouring pastoral landholders provide without charge the only supervision between the infrequent visits of the designated land managers.

I believe *all* land holders are vested with a duty of care and to act with due responsibility. The overall protection of the environment is the only way to a sustainable future. I believe future sustainability is being put in jeopardy by current government policy. This protection may come not only by careful land management but also by way of alternative land use. The lifting of restrictive legislation allowing diversification will have positive outcomes for the rangelands .

I believe current landholders both in coastal regions and the inland need to be given the opportunity to provide both their experience and expertise to carry these lands in their entirety on for the appropriate use of future generations.

Diana Morrison