



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
SENATE

SENATE ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNICATIONS, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND THE
ARTS COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL PARKS, CONSERVATION RESERVES AND
MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

SUBMISSION

31 AUGUST 2006
CARNARVON - WESTERN AUSTRALIA

This submission addresses point (c) of the Inquiry's stated Terms of Reference, namely:

'any threats to the objectives and management of our national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas'.

Summary

The Senate Inquiry in part focuses on 'the what' and 'the how' of conservation management. This submission concerns 'the who'.

It would be a threat to the objectives and management of Australia's National Parks, other Conservation Reserves and Marine Protected Areas if the Government attempted to manage conservation areas alone and did not have the required ongoing resources (financial and personnel) to do so. This may result in land held for conservation purposes needing to be placed on the open market for sale to the highest bidder for commercial development. The large capital outlay and financial costs of purchase and development by a commercial developer would necessitate a high profit margin, dictating a certain style of development that may not be widely supported by the community.

Environmental protection and management of conservation areas is not a job for Government alone. Government should let the private sector, in the form of coastal hybrid pastoralists, assist it with this task.

For the coastal area from Quobba to Ningaloo, there is the advantage of existing land managers and conservationists with capacity on the ground, in the form of coastal hybrid pastoralists.

Hybrid pastoralists are pastoralists that have diversified into a wider range of activities than traditionally associated with pastoralism. Eco tourism is one form of such diversification. A coastal hybrid pastoralist is a pastoralist with full tourism and pastoral capabilities, expertise and know-how.

The most successful approach to conservation would be for Government and the coastal hybrid pastoralists to manage the coastal area from Quobba to Ningaloo together to achieve the best Triple Bottom Line outcomes for society as a whole.

CALM ownership and management is not the silver bullet to the problems of biodiversity protection and conservation faced by Western Australia. The crucial question remains as to

where the funds will come from for the required ongoing management of conservation areas given to CALM?

The answer to the issues of biodiversity protection and conservation faced by Western Australia is a partnership model between Government (including CALM) and the private sector, including the coastal hybrid pastoralists.

The Pastoral Industry is a cultural heritage icon, it is historically valuable and it contributes economically to the country. Just as the environment needs protection, it too should be protected.

1. A Partnership model would be the best solution for the required management of coastal conservation areas

At the moment, the coastal area from Quobba to Ningaloo is managed by pastoralists, who meet the required financial and personnel costs of such management. These coastal hybrid pastoralists have extensive site knowledge, familiarity and experience with local issues and challenges, and existing relationships with each other, including with indigenous stakeholders, which no external commercial developer could match.

The State Government intends to resume the coastal area from Quobba to Ningaloo and take over management thereof.

After the State Government has acquired the land, coastal pastoralists fear that it will argue that it does not have adequate resources (financial or personnel) to fund the required ongoing management of the land, which need to be undertaken to guard against various threats, for example, fire, feral animals, weeds, illegal or unmanaged coastal camping, or undesirable land-uses such as driving on beaches which are turtle nesting grounds. It is feared that the State Government will claim that it has no alternative and is justified in placing the land so resumed on the open market for sale by tender to the highest commercial bidders. Indications are that large private developers are already interested in development of various sites on this coastline.

Such sales would be an avenue for making millions in revenue for the State, by taking an asset without financial compensation and selling it on the open market to the highest bidders.

Management of the coastal portion should continue to be done by coastal hybrid pastoralists in partnership with Government, to the standards, requirements and benchmarks of Government.

If land is resumed by the Government for 'public purpose' in the form of conservation, the Government needs to continue to hold such land for conservation purposes and not carve it up and sell it on the open market to commercial developers.

2. Who in the private sector should manage these coastal conservation areas?

Given their long existing relationship with and spiritual attachment to the land, their site specific knowledge and familiarity with the environment, and their continued financial investments in the land, coastal hybrid pastoralists should partner with Government to develop and manage the coastal area from Quobba to Ningaloo. These opportunities should not be sold to external third party commercial developers who do not offer any of these advantages.

There is a new breed of coastal hybrid pastoralists with eco-tourism and pastoral capability, expertise, experience and capacity. Continuation of diversification is critical to their economic survival.

The State does not have to take the coastal area from Quobba to Ningaloo from coastal hybrid pastoralists to ensure proper environmental management thereof. Coastal hybrid pastoralists have the capacity and resources to undertake the required environmental management and any sustainable development of these areas. Where they do not have the required in-house knowledge or skills on a particular conservation or tourism issue, they seek and apply external advice and assistance from experts.

Many coastal hybrid pastoralists have a spiritual connection with land that has been cultivated and honed for generations and are heart felt conservationists. These pastoralists (1) view themselves as guardians and stewards of the land, (2) self regulate and (3) promote and implement environmental protection. For example, Gnaraloo pro-actively undertakes environmental management and has put systems, plans and procedures in place, such as Environmental Management Systems, without any pressure from Government agencies to do so.

Coastal pastoralists are already on the ground, in place, are managing the land and have been doing so for a long time. They want to work co-operatively with State Government agencies. Why take them away?

Gnaraloo's argument is to *'let the private sector do what it does best, is already doing, and is willing to do to the standards, requirements and benchmark of Government as policed and audited by Government on an ongoing basis'*.

3. Coastal hybrid pastoralists are being pushed out of business.

The State Government is pushing coastal hybrid pastoralists out of business by taking the coastal tourism opportunities away from them.

To make Pastoral Stations commercially viable and more environmentally sustainable, the State Government allowed tourism development. This income cross-subsidizes the pastoral business, allowing the rangelands not to be worked as intensively as it results in the need to carry less stock numbers.

The State Government is threatening to take the coastal tourism opportunities away from the coastal hybrid pastoralists, which will affect the commercial viability of the stations and may push them out of business.

4. Where will funding come from for ongoing management of coastal conservation areas?

Where will the money come from to manage the land in the coastal area from Quobba to Ningaloo on an ongoing basis once it is resumed by the State Government? This has been a large ongoing issue and problem in the World Heritage listed area of Shark Bay.

5. What does conservation mean?

Gnaraloo advocates use of an environmental management model where conservation pays for itself. In this model, conservation includes sustainable use such as tourism, where use does not exceed the assimilative capacity of the environment.