

Chapter 3 Social and Economic Value of Coastal Camping

3.1 Introduction

Coastal camping attracts a wide range of participants from different socio-economic backgrounds. Often thought as being an activity dominated by older travellers in caravan, in reality coastal campers are from all age cohorts and participate in a range of styles of camping. Different user groups have different use patterns and social and environmental values. This chapter broadly describes the characteristics of the four most visible user groups. These are:

- Grey Nomads
- Recreational Fishers
- Surfers and Windsurfers
- Four Wheel Drive Tourists

The four groups are loosely bounded and do intersect with each other. For instance some grey nomads might also be classified as four wheel drive tourists or recreational fishers. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the implications of different use patterns for natural resource management. Opportunities for improved management programmes are identified.

3.2 Grey Nomads

The term 'grey nomads' generally refers to people aged over 55 years who travel for extended periods of time, have mixed budgets but are generally price conscious as the majority have low incomes (Tourism Western Australia, 2009). Statistical trends indicate that over the next decade, as the 'baby boomer' population retires, this segment of the the tourism market is likely to grow. Indeed, over the last decade in the Rangelands there has been a steady increase in grey nomads visiting, and moreover, an increase in the number visiting coastal camping locations.

The stereotypical image of grey nomads suggest they are not particularly sensitive to the social, cultural or physical environment. They are criticised for contributing little to the social, economic or environmental viability of destinations as many travel with fully equipped caravans or camper homes. However, this stereotypical image of grey nomads needs to be challenged.

Grey nomads participation in coastal camping is a more complicated picture than simply older travellers with four wheel drives and caravans stopping a few nights or weeks in particular places. Grey nomads come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. There is also a considerable degree of difference in the equipment carried, activities undertaken, time in the region and destinations of grey nomads. Grey nomads, despite frequently being presented as a homogenous group, are far from this. The following paragraphs provide some preliminary observations about the activities of grey nomads in the Rangelands, however, given this group is expected to grow over the coming decade, a more systematic analysis of grey nomads across the Rangelands (including inland destinations) is recommended.

Grey nomads who visit the Rangelands coastal area can be, simplistically, divided into three groups. These are:

- i) Long term, repeat visitors based in a single location for some months. This group can be separated into two subcategories. The sub-categories are:
 - a) those who stay at caravan parks
 - b) those who stay in bush camps
- ii) Short term repeat visitors based at a single location for up to a month a year. Again, this category can be separated into two subcategories. The sub-categories are:
 - a) those who stay at caravan parks
 - b) those who stay at bush camps
- iii) Mobile, once-off visitors travelling from place to place along the coast. These visitors mainly use caravan parks and formal campgrounds.

3.2.1 Long Term Campers (Group i)

Long term campers tend to cluster at particular points along the coast. These include (but are not limited to) 14 Mile Camp at Warroora Station, Lefroy Bay on Ningaloo Station and 40 Mile Beach south of Karratha. Many of these campers often stay for extended periods of between two and four months. Some destinations have a limit on the length of time visitors can stay. For example, 40 Mile Beach limits stays to three months and Three Mile river camp near Onslow limits stays to six weeks. Nevertheless, many of these remote destinations are popular with long term campers.

Long term campers in these remote areas are extremely well equipped and largely self sufficient. They bring drinking water, chemical toilets, safety equipment and other necessary items. The main recreational activities are fishing, swimming, beach walks and, to a lesser extent, four wheel driving. Long term campers also participate in a range of informal social activities, from informal aerobics classes to nighttime campfire sing-a-longs.

One of the important characteristics of this group is the strong sense of place and community that is formed. Campers form deep attachments to the environment and also the people. Extensive research on coastal campers in the Rangelands, conducted by Lawrie between 2002 and 2006, showed a strong ethic of environmental stewardship amongst this group. This ethic of stewardship developed due to the campers sense of 'ownership' of, and responsibility for, the environment. Damage to the environment was seen as effectively damaging 'their place' and, as such, campers had undertaken various informal management and restoration projects. Lawrie (2007) concluded that this sense of ownership and attachment was critical for good management outcomes in the region. Figures # and # show some informal restoration works undertaken by campers at Lefroy Bay to reduce the number of vehicle tracks through the dune area.

In addition to the long term campers at bush sites, there are the long term campers who gravitate towards caravan parks and formal arrangements. These campers seek an experience which includes showers, water supplies, rubbish disposal services, access to shops or a kiosk and more formal regulation of activities. These campers tend to establish their 'base' at caravan parks and move out for day trips or shorter visits to other parts of the coast. As with long term campers at less formal sites, campers at caravan parks had a strong sense of community and strong attachment to place. While campers' activities were more regulated at caravan parks, campers still participated in some informal management efforts. Amongst this group, the sense of community is still strong, as is attachment to place.

3.2.2 Short Term Campers (Group ii)

Short term campers are widespread along the Rangelands coast. Many short term campers are regular repeat visitors (often every year). Many visit the area as part of an annual holiday for a few weeks. Activities are usually based on fishing, swimming and four wheel driving. As with long term campers, short term campers can be broken into two groups; those staying at bush camp sites and those staying at caravan parks.

Some of these campers are drawn into the social networks of the long term residents. Short term visitors often quickly form part of the local sense of community. As with long term campers, short term campers, particularly those who repeatedly visit a site, form a strong attachment to place and sense of stewardship over the natural environment. However, given the short length of time these campers stay at sites, they are less likely to be involved in environmental rehabilitation efforts.

3.3.3 Mobile Once-Off Visitors (Group iii)

Mobile, once-off visitors often stay for relatively short periods. These visitors tend to be based in caravan parks and formal camping areas. While travelling, these visitors tend to thoroughly explore the region, stopping at many different rest areas and local communities. Very few once-off visitors stay at remote bush camps. However, while this is the general trend of the Rangelands region, the exception is the area between Carnarvon and Exmouth. Over recent years, increased marketing and public awareness of this section of coastline has resulted in more international and interstate 'once-off' travellers visiting the area. Visitors to this section of the coast do tend to stay at bush camps and, unlike short term and long term grey nomad campers, do not have the same ethic of environmental stewardship.

Once-off visitors participate in a variety of consumptive activities including fishing, swimming and four wheel driving. Importantly for management, these visitors are often less familiar with the regulations guiding human activities in the area. Also, they are often less familiar with environmental conservation efforts and less likely to participate in volunteer conservation projects.

This segment of the grey nomad group is likely to grow over the next decade, given current national demographic profiles. While many previous studies have recorded origin and destination details for this group, little is known about their specific activities at sites. Furthermore, little is known about their knowledge of landscape values and their sense of community or attachment to place.

3.3.4 Conclusion

Grey nomads are often incorrectly thought of as being a homogenous group. However, it is clear that grey nomads are a much more complex market. Some prefer to visit caravan parks while others prefer bush camps. Some prefer to spend a few nights at each site exploring the area as geographically widely as time permits. Others prefer to stay at a single site for many months, exploring, in depth, the environment of that site. Grey nomads also take part in a range of activities including fishing, bird watching, environmental conservation projects, heritage conservation projects, four wheel driving and swimming. The grey nomad market is a more segmented market than is often acknowledged and this has implications for management. The segmentation of the market needs to be better understood from a management perspective. To achieve this, detailed quantitative analysis

on their wider macro-geographical patterns (state-nation wide), looking at pathways, nodes, and the specific activities of grey nomads should be undertaken at nodes.

3.3 Recreational Fishers (Local Residents and Visitors)

This category of campers includes some grey nomads, some annual holiday makers and participants in fishing charters. Furthermore, this category includes people who simply spend a few days fishing and also those where fishing is the core activity of their holiday. For those visitors where fishing is the core activity of their holiday, they tend to be based at caravan parks or well equipped camping areas. Bush camps and remote locations are less favoured by this group.

Most recreational fishers tend to participate in both boat based and beach based fishing. The type of fishing depends on weather and tidal conditions. A small proportion of fishers only participate in beach based fishing or only only participate in boat based fishing.

Recreational fishing in the Rangelands is managed by the Department of Fisheries. The Department of Fisheries has a multitude of policies guiding recreational fishing practices which draw on strategies such as species bans, bag limits and spatial limits to control fishing effort.

Most long term campers tend to only catch small amounts of fish for their personal daily use. This type of fishing can be termed subsistence fishing. Campers who visit the area on a regular basis (for example, for their annual holidays) also tend to participate in subsistence fishing.

It was widely perceived that campers, with a core activity of fishing, tended to catch freezers full of fish during visits to the region. This practice was perceived to be unsustainable and a priority threat to the marine environment. Evidence suggests that currently very few fishers participate in this type of activity. Increased regulation of recreational fishing, particularly in the area between Carnarvon and Exmouth, had deterred many fishers from this type of fishing activity. Evidence also suggests that fishers who participate in this type of fishing tend to locate at caravan parks or well serviced camping grounds, and do not locate at remote bush camping sites. Limited power supplies and active monitoring by fellow campers deter fishers from over-fishing.

Importantly, many recreational fishers frequently source replacement fishing gear, bait, fuel and other supplies in the coastal towns of the Rangelands. Recreational fishers are perceived to make an important economic contribution to some Rangelands communities.

3.4 Surfers and Windsurfers

The southern part of the Rangelands region has some of Western Australia's most pristine and challenging surfing and windsurfing locations. Generally, the area between Carnarvon and Exmouth is most popular with windsurfers and surfers visiting the area. The remote location of many of the surfing and windsurfing spots necessitates participants in these activities to camp at remote bush sites. This group intersects with 'type i' of the four wheel drive tourists group (as discussed in section 3.5).

Camping locations for this group are geographically linked to areas of good surf. Popular destinations include 14 Mile Camp (Warroora Station), Gnarloo, Point Quobba, Red Bluff,

Dunes (Surfers Beach), the Bombie and Vlamingh Head. A number of these sites offer access points to get to the outer reef, which seems to be where some of the best, though most dangerous, surfing is at.

While there is evidence to suggest that surfers and windsurfers are using similar sites to grey nomads, in many cases they tend to camp in smaller groups. However, at certain times of the year there are quite significant concentrations of campers at some locations, notably at Point Quobba, Red Bluff and Gnarloo. Surfers and windsurfers tend to be less attached to the wider community of users within the area, however often have very strong bonds within their own group. International research shows this is a common trait (Dolinclar and Fluker, 2003).

As with many long term and short term grey nomad campers, surfers often have a strong sense of attachment to place which evidence suggests is linked to a strong ethic of environmental stewardship. Indeed, the North West Surfers Alliance has a number of projects aimed at improving parts of the coast, and locals and visitors participate in these conservation efforts.

3.5 Four Wheel Drive Tourists

There is, of course, a fair bit of overlap between this category and the other three categories of campers previously discussed. Many grey nomads, fishers and surfers and windsurfers travel in four wheel drives. However, four wheel drive tourism is an important activity in terms of coastal management and does require specific attention.

The CRC Desert Knowledge identified four wheel drive tourism as a significant emerging industry in remote Australia. Three main types of four wheel drive tourism have been identified. These are:

- i) The 'activity seeker' who use four wheel drives to get access to places where they then participate in other activities such as fishing, bushwalking and surfing.
- ii) The 'group explorer' who likes the cultural aspects of being in the bush and in places where other people would not normally go.
- iii) The 'thrillseeker' who seeks to test the capabilities of their vehicle and driving skill.

All of these types are active on the Rangelands coast, and are linked in one way or another with coastal camping.

Activity seekers and group explorers tend to confine their activities to existing tracks and pathways, as they are seeking access to places with a particular attraction (for example, good fishing and surfing). While there are some environmental impacts associated with this activity, impacts can, and are, being moderated. Impacts are very confined and include track blowouts, the formation of new tracks along side badly corrugated ones, and the gradual expansion of camp sites along some tracks. Figures 2.18 to 2.21 show examples of environmental impacts associated with four wheel drive tracks in the Rangelands.

Thrillseekers were more evident in the southern part of the Rangelands, largely between the Carnarvon to Exmouth area. The attraction to this part of the coast was the ability to explore dune areas and lesser used tracks. Little is known about the impact of these campers on the natural environment, however, it is probable that the impact each individual thrillseeker makes is greater than that made by activity seekers and group explorers. However, it is worthwhile noting that there are far few participants in the thrillseeker group compared to the other two groups. Overall, the impact each group makes on the natural environment is not well understood.

3.6 Conclusion: Implications for Management

The review of campers along the Rangelands coast found that many campers had a strong ethic of environmental stewardship. Subsequently, campers had undertaken many and varied informal conservation and rehabilitation efforts. Campers' ethic of environmental stewardship, and subsequent patterns of environmentally conscious behaviour, were closely linked to their perceived sense of community and belonging at camp sites. Long term visitors and short term visitors who return year after year to sites tended to be those with the strongest perceived sense of belonging to particular sites. Short term visitors in this group include surfers and windsurfers, recreational fishers, grey nomads and four wheel drive tourists. This group, who are already participating in environmentally sensitive behaviours and actively pursuing efforts to improve the condition of the natural environment could prove an important resource for future natural resource management efforts.

Short term visitors, particularly those who do not have a strong sense of connection to place or community, are more likely to participate in activities that are potentially environmentally harmful. Furthermore, these visitors are less likely to be involved in site conservation or rehabilitation efforts. Visitors from interstate and international origins are also unlikely to be familiar with environmental management and safety protocols for the coastal area. Given probable development scenarios the Carnarvon-Exmouth region is likely to experience the largest numbers of short term visitors (particularly those from interstate and international origins) over the next decade. This area will also likely undergo a concurrent reduction in the number of long term and short term 'environmentally sensitive' campers. This trend will be a result of a move to reduce the number of bush camps and concentrate camping into designated nodes. Low cost camping options will be reduced, which will cause many long term campers to move to other areas. Consequently, the processes that have resulted in widespread environmental stewardship in the region will be severely undermined.

Over the last decade, across the northern parts of the Rangelands region, camping has been increasingly effectively managed. Much of the camping in this area occurs on Aboriginal Reserve land. Campers stay at bush sites, and are largely self sufficient. Indigenous community groups, and more recently Indigenous ranger groups, have had an important role in establishing and implementing effective management strategies for coastal camping. The management models employed by these groups could be effective in other parts of the Rangelands.

Within the Rangelands there exists considerable opportunity to engage 'camping communities' in management. Grey nomads, repeat visitors and formal users groups (such as the North West Surfers Alliance) all could have a higher order role in coastal

management through their participation in coastal camping. Indigenous ranger groups are also a potentially important resource for coastal management, and again could be involved in this higher order objective through management of coastal camping.

Chapter 4 Conclusion: Managing Coastal Camping

Balancing the social, economic and environmental values of coastal camping to achieve an effective management strategy for camping sites is an inherently complex task. Firstly, it needs to be considered that coastal camp sites are used and valued in a variety of different ways. For example, some locations attract long term tourists with fully-equipped caravans or camper vans. Other localities tend to attract particular user groups such as recreational fishers, bird watchers or surfers. Secondly, the level of services and infrastructure provided at camp sites varies considerably. For example, some camp sites physically supply little more than an area of partly cleared ground and are rarely visited by management authorities. Others offer powered sites, maintained lawns and gardens, boat ramps, toilets and shower facilities and have full-time on-site caretakers. Thirdly, there is no single agency responsible for managing coastal camping sites, with local government, the Department of Conservation and Environment and pastoralists all having important management roles. And lastly, there is no consistency in the tenure of coastal camping sites, with sites spread across unallocated crown land, local government reserves, State reserve land, Aboriginal Reserve land, pastoral lease holds and areas found to have non-exclusive native title. These factors all contribute to a complex planning and management environment.

Further to those issues outlined above, the Rangelands region is sparsely settled, and has limited resources available for natural resource management. Consequently, it is widely recognised that strict regulations governing camping, delivered through mechanisms such as spatial bans and on-site management, would not be effective in most parts of the Rangelands. In addition, providing increased on-site management and services at coastal camping sites based on a user pays model (ie increase fees for camping) is not likely to be an effective management approach in the Rangelands. This type of management would simply result in campers moving to more remote, less regulated camp sites so as to avoid strict regulations and high fees. Adopting a user pays model for coastal camping would result in unintended environmental impacts.

The nature of camping in the Rangelands has generated a potentially valuable asset for natural resource management. Low cost, low regulation style camping has resulted in the area attracting many long term or repeat visitors. These individuals often have a strong ethic of environmental stewardship and consequently establish or participate in environmental conservation and restoration activities. Along the rangelands coast there are many examples of grey nomads, surfer groups, recreational fisher groups and four wheel driving enthusiasts developing comprehensive environmental conservation and restoration activities. Any future management strategies for coastal camping in the Rangelands should consider actively engaging these volunteer and informal efforts and should avoid strict and prescriptive regulations.

Indigenous communities also have a potentially valuable contribution to make to the management of coastal camping areas. Along much of the Dampier Peninsula coastal camping is managed by Indigenous communities. There are regulations in place to guide visitors activities so as to minimise the potential for environmental damage. However, the nature of these regulations and other management efforts still enable visitors to experience the 'wilderness style' camping they seek. This demonstrates that managers can effectively balance the desires of campers with the need to protect the natural environment from potential harm. Indigenous rangers have an increasingly important resource in these management efforts. It is highly probable that expanding Indigenous ranger programmes

in the southern parts of the Rangelands region to include the management of coastal camping areas could benefit the overall management of the coastal and marine environment.

Managing coastal camping sites in the Rangelands is an important part of a larger agenda of coastal management. The Rangelands is a large region, with few resources available for intensive, active management. Therefore, caution needs to be taken when applying management models developed in areas of high population density. Coastal camping is also an iconic activity in the region. It is of social and economic importance to many people within the region, and also of social importance to many people from other parts of Western Australia. Again, caution should be taken when applying management models developed in different places as they might not adequately account for the social and economic value of coastal camping in the Rangelands.

When developing future management strategies it is important to consider the particular nature of coastal camping and to fully investigate the environmental problems and opportunities. Management should focus on harnessing the positive environmental outcomes being generated by coastal camping, such as volunteer conservation efforts. Management should avoid traditional strict regulations including spatial bans and user pays services. Rather management should focus on better utilising non-traditional environmental management resources, many of which are already in place in the Rangelands. Such resources include long term and repeat visitors with a strong ethic of environmental stewardship, user groups with volunteer conservation and restoration projects, and traditional owners and Indigenous ranger groups.

Given the remoteness of much of the Rangelands, the limit of formal management resources, and the social and economic importance of coastal camping, it is imperative that future management seeks solutions which are 'outside of the box'. The Rangelands NRM potentially have a role in facilitating an increased role for Indigenous ranger groups to be involved in the management of coastal camp sites. The Rangelands NRM also potentially have a role in facilitating further research into Grey Nomad camping across the entire Rangelands region and developing a strategic regional management plan for this market.

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