

## 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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