



Visit to Wedge and Grey

Honourable Bill Marmion MLA, Minister for Environment; Water

February 2012

A visit by Bill Marmion, Minister for Environment; to Wedge and Grey settlement was conducted on 8th February, 2012. This followed many requests from WIPA/GCCA to meet and discuss the government's vision for the sites and process to achieve a local management plan.

The Minister had responded in August 2011, contrary to the recommendation of the Shack Sites Inquiry (to remove shacks at Wedge & Grey), that the government would temporarily extend leases pending examination of options for a level of shack retention.

This was an informal visit by the Minister, similar to a visit to the Donnelly River huts earlier in 2011. The Minister was accompanied by Jason Foster, an adviser from his office, but did not include any DEC staff.

Itinerary for the Visit

The Minister spent 3 hours at Wedge in the company of WIPA Committee members and included a guided tour of the site, inspection of a sample of shacks, lunch with locals and GCCA reps, then proceeded to Grey for a similar, but shortened tour.

Although the visit was informal, the itinerary was very structured and text prepared to ensure key points were covered.

Objectives

WIPA's objectives for this visit were:

- Minister to experience the Wedge 'sense of place' and hospitality through access to shacks/selected locals and casual interaction
- A small range of key messages to be defined and reinforced during the visit to both Wedge and Grey

- Messages from WIPA
 - WIPA can Deliver at Wedge
 - Deliverable public access
 - Deliverable unique cultural experience
 - Deliverable capacity and affordability
 - Deliverable timetable
 - Why can WIPA deliver?
 - Collective expertise and site experience
 - Collective resource base
 - Examples of problem solving action e.g. Recycling services, Car Tip action, Heritage assessment and local Aboriginal Heritage Act protocol
- Provide an overview of the vision for an integrated recreational/tourist/fishing activity and an outline of the steps for this to be achieved.

A file of handouts provided to the Minister covered issues raised and supporting documentation for:

- Vision for integrated recreational/tourist/fishing activity at a unique tourist destination
- Waste Management documentation and Recycling report
- Excerpt from a Heritage Assessment Report from NSW based social heritage consultants, GML.

Challenges and Issues

The visit by the Minister also provided an opportunity to discuss key challenges and issues identified by the WIPA Committee that must be addressed during implementation of the integrated shack settlement/tourist facility.

The challenges and issues include:

- Building code compliance - provisions of new National Construction Code and Building Act are a good base for shack standards. The Minister was not concerned with perceived shack compliance issues being represented by bureaucrats
- High water table and storm water management - no track maintenance has been allowed over last 6 years, plus erosion has dropped levels and created spillways. Tracks can be easily crowned but ground disturbance is an AHA issue. The Minister, being a civil engineer, accepted there were simple solutions to storm water management
- Opposition to Wedge and Grey - in particular from Shire of Dandaragan and other Government agencies, historical and linked to government policy on squatter shacks. The Minister was keen to understand why the Shire was so adamant in its opposition to retention of the shack settlements
- Deliverable access to shack settlements such as Wedge – this is the real question when the issue of equity is raised. The Minister was keen to understand how the public could access shacks and the site management role WIPA could play. He mentioned the importance of the shack experience being affordable and cited his Rottneest experience as not being value for money. He also stated that he understood the cultural heritage significance of retention of the settlement footprint and community structure.
- Sea Level Rise and coastal processes - most likely an eventual reality, making the site unsuitable for any other commercial public facility
- Public opinion – generally positive from radio talkback and petition collection activities.

Report on Meeting

The visit to the two sites proceeded according to plan, with only some minor changes to timing for some of the activities. The key messages were delivered and the Minister was an active participant in general discussions.

With some heavy rains in the days prior to the visit and high temperatures on the day, the Wedge settlement was, as always, a unique and contradictory place.



A crayfish lunch for the Minister and Jason was an opportunity for an informal chat with shack leaseholders from Wedge and Grey and was appreciated by the Minister.

Feedback from the WIPA Committee was that the guided tour and discussions provided the Minister with first-hand knowledge of the settlement and information on the deliverable solution that can be realised for Wedge.

Outcomes

- Within a week of the visit, the Minister announced a further lease extension till 30 June 2013
- DEC is to convene a working group meeting and the agenda to include the Community Settlement Model report presented during his visit