

**From Colonial Outpost to Popular Tourism Destination: an
Historical Geography of the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region
1829-2005**

Dale Sanders

BA Honours Curtin University of Technology

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of
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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work, which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Dale Sanders

Abstract

While much of inland rural and regional Australia in the early 21st Century is struggling to survive through a tough restructuring period and significant population decline with its associated impacts on local services, many coastal locations are experiencing unprecedented development including non-urban population growth and coastal subdivision. There is an urgent need for a more holistic approach to future development in coastal communities around Australia that recognises the contribution of past land uses and the implementation of sustainable policies and practices that link the environment, people and the economy. Many of these coastal locations share a similar post contact history of a constant effort to create and maintain sustainable communities. Most have experienced several different dominant land uses since European occupation as various political and ideological forces have promoted new ideas and technologies to exploit the available natural resources. Remnants of these past activities, including pre European land use, still remain and have now become an important component of the cultural heritage and tourist product in these coastal regions.

The Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region occupies the extreme south western corner of Western Australia approximately 250km south of the city of Perth and is one location that shares this experience. The region is presently one of the fastest growing areas in Western Australia outside of the metropolitan area. Between 1991 and 2001 the population of the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region increased by 65% to 31, 911 (ABS 2001). Although the region has been experiencing unprecedented growth since the late 1980s, it had previously comprised mostly small rural communities struggling to maintain their populations and economic viability.

The Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region has been ‘discovered’ no less than seven times since European occupation in 1830. It has been ‘invaded’ by a series of different people from both the public and private sectors who have initiated diverse land uses for different objectives. Each new land use activity was initiated from outside the region as people reappraised the environment with little consideration of the knowledge of the local environment obtained through past land use activities. These new land uses were usually politically or demand driven and related to the broader development of the state rather than the long term viability of the local region. Whilst the phenomenal development associated with tourism constitutes the most recent land use activity, tourism was preceded by Early European agricultural Settlement from the 1830s; the timber Industry from the 1850s; the Group Settlements and establishment of a dairy industry from the 1920s; the alternative lifestyles from the 1960s and the viticultural industry from the 1970s.

This thesis will explore both the historical and contemporary processes which have played a significant part in shaping the region’s cultural landscapes and underpin the current development issues it is experiencing. It is argued that much of the land use history of this region has been framed by a consistent frontier ethos and that it is only relatively recently the concept of sustainable development has begun to be implemented even though ironically its principles were effectively guiding land use practices for centuries before European settlement. This thesis concludes that for the most recent land use activity of tourism to achieve the long term sustainability that has eluded so many past land uses, development must facilitate multiple land use management and encourage the continued incorporation of past land use activities to maintain the region’s cultural, social and economic diversity rather than tourism

overpowering them to become the dominant activity. At the same time, of course, these multiple land uses must themselves be managed by contemporary and evolving principles of sustainable development. All stakeholders both within and outside the region need to adopt a more holistic sustainable approach to managing the region's resources learning from both past land use attempts and the principles of Indigenous cosmology including the importance of the interconnectedness of people, environment and economy. If this is achieved then it is more likely that both current and future generations will have a high quality of life with long term economic security that also ensures the long term maintenance of their socio-cultural and environmental resources.

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CONTENTS

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	vi
List of Figures	x
List of Plates	x
List of Tables	xi
Acronyms	xii
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Introduction	1
Study Site	6
Aims of the Thesis	10
Structure of the Thesis	12
Research Methods	23
Conclusion	29
Chapter 2 Theoretical Perspectives	30
Introduction	30
Historical Geography Perspectives	31
Sustainable Development	39
Indigenous Land Ethics.....	45
Sustainable Tourism Development	48
Conclusion	56
Chapter 3 Physical Setting and Indigenous Occupancy	58
Introduction	58
Climate	63
Geology	67
Physiography.....	70
Swan Coastal Plain.....	71
The Southern Coastal Plain.....	76
Leeuwin - Naturaliste Ridge	78
Margaret River Plateau	81
Blackwood Plateau.....	83
Coastal Zones	84
Pre European Land Use.....	86
Conclusion	93
Chapter 4 Early European Land Use 1830-1850	95
Introduction	95
Dutch and French Connections	97
British Exploration and Invasion	102
Outpost at Augusta.....	104
Appraisal of the Local Environment.....	107
Conditions and Difficulties Experienced at Augusta.....	110

Move to Vasse.....	112
Contact with Pibelmen and Wardandi Nyungars.....	118
Conclusion	124
Chapter 5: The Timber Industry 1850-1913	127
Introduction.....	127
Early European Colonisers.....	130
Convicts and the Timber Industry.....	132
Entrepreneurs	135
Karridale & M.C. Davies Operations.....	142
Combine.....	145
Sustainability and Timber Regulations.....	149
Wardandi and Pibelmen Nyungar People.....	154
Conclusion	156
Chapter 6: Group Settlement Scheme 1920-1940 and the Post War Land Settlement Scheme 1945-1960	159
Introduction.....	159
Group Settlement Scheme.....	162
Operations and Difficulties	170
Criticisms and Royal Commission.....	175
Outcomes and Impacts of the Scheme	176
Reasons for Failure	179
War Service Land Settlement Scheme 1945-1960.....	184
Operations and Difficulties	186
Dairy Industry	192
Tobacco.....	193
Conclusion	195
Chapter 7: Utopia Seekers 1960s onwards	198
Introduction.....	198
Surfers	201
Surfing in the Leeuwin - Naturaliste Region	205
Surfing Competitions	211
Alternative Lifestylers.....	214
An organic vineyard.....	217
Rajneesh.....	218
Intentional Communities - Boranup Case Study.....	219
Alternative Architecture.....	221
Conclusion	224
Chapter 8 Viticulture Industry late 1960s onwards	227
Introduction.....	227
Vines Before 1965	228
Origins of the Modern Viticulture Industry	230
Reasons for entering the Viticultural Industry.....	235
Location of the Vineyards.....	239
Difficulties	243
Viticulture, the Economy and Land Development.....	245
Conclusion	250

Chapter 9 Tourism 1980s onwards.....	254
Introduction	254
History of tourism in the region	255
Case study one – Coastal Holiday Towns.....	262
Historical Development	263
Community Structure	266
Recent Changes and Development Issues.....	271
Case study two - Wine Tourism.....	280
History of wine tourism	281
Regional Development.....	285
Wine Tourism Development Issues	288
Wine Tourism Conclusion	290
Linking the past to a sustainable future through tourism.....	291
Conclusion	295
Chapter 10 Towards a Sustainable Future.....	297
Introduction	297
Shire of Augusta-Margaret River Sustainability Projects.....	300
Augusta-Margaret River Sustainable Future Project	302
Shire of Busselton Sustainability Projects	306
Geographe Catchment Council – Geocatch	307
Busselton Biodiversity Incentive Strategy	313
Conclusion	320
Chapter 11 Conclusion	323
Introduction	323
Historical land use summary	324
Land uses in the new millennium.....	335
From an Unsustainable Past towards a Sustainable Future?	343
Conclusion	350
Bibliography	354
Appendices	391
Appendix 1: Nyungar Nomenclature for the Leeuwin – Naturaliste Region.....	391
Appendix 2: Brief biographies of the main timber entrepreneurs.....	392
Appendix 3: Details of the Group Settlement ACT 1925.....	395
Appendix 4: Land Use Maps for the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region 2000.....	397

List of Figures

Figure 1.1: Location of the Leeuwin – Naturaliste Region.....	7
Figure 1.2 A Nyungar (Aboriginal) Interpretation: The Lower South West of Western Australia.....	9
Figure 1.3 Population of the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region 1954-2000	11
Figure 2.1 Environmental Ideas in Australia	34
Figure 2.2 Sustainable Development	40
Figure 2.3 Tourism’s Magic Pentagon.....	50
Figure 3.1 Physiographic Regions of the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region.....	61
Figure 3.2 Temperature in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region.	65
Figure 3.3 Rainfall in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region.	65
Figure 3.4 Rainfall distribution in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region	66
Figure 3.5 Geology of the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region.....	69
Figure 3.6 Topography of the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region	72
Figure 3.7 Drainage in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region	73
Figure 3.8 Soils of the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region.....	74
Figure 4.1 Land Alienation – Dunsborough 1858	116
Figure 4.2 Population of Sussex (Vasse) 1835 – 1850	117
Figure 5.1 Population of the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region 1848-1901	128
Figure 5.2 Millars Karri & Jarrah Company 1902.....	147
Figure 6.1 Population of the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region 1921 – 1961	161
Figure 6.2 Location of the Group Settlement Scheme.....	166
Figure 6.3 Group locations in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region	167
Figure 6.3 Group locations in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region	168
Figure 7.1 Major Surf Breaks in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region	208
Figure 8.1 Wineries in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region	235
Figure 8.2 Leeuwin-Naturaliste Wine Region	241
Figure 8.2 Leeuwin-Naturaliste Wine Region	242
Figure 8.3: Population of the Margaret River Region 1961-2001	247
Figure 9.1 Property Ownership Yallingup.....	268
Figure 9.2 Property Ownership Gracetown	269
Figure 9.3 Property Ownership Prevelly.....	270
Figure 9.4: Establishment of Cellar Doors in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region	283
Figure 9.5: Population of the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region 1954-2000.....	286
Figure 9.6 Tourism Product in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region 2005.....	292
Figure 9.6 Tourism Product in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region 2005.....	293
Figure 10.1 Geographe Catchment Location	310

List of Plates

Plate 1.1 Images of the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region 1.....	4
Plate 1.2 Images of the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region 2.....	4
Plate 3.1 Plants and Animals of the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region	60
Plate 4.1 Wonnerup and Ellensbrook Homesteads	119
Plate 5.1 Timber Felling.....	133
Plate 5.2 MC Davies Timber Operations	140
Plate 5.3 Karridale Race Course and Karridale Church.....	144
Plate 5.4 Timber Industry Infrastructure at Boranup	146

Plate 6.1 Group Settlement Housing.....	164
Plate 7.2 Alternative Architecture in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region, St Thomas More Catholic Church, Margaret River	223
Plate 9.1 Caves	259
Plate 9.2 Caves House.....	259
Plate 9.3 Smiths Beach Action Day January 2001.....	279
Plate 11.1 Current tourism product mix	336

List of Tables

Table 4.1: Settlers' Grants Augusta 1830	105
Table 4.2 Agriculture in the Sussex Region 1837-1850	118
Table 4.3 New Land Grants at Sussex 1837 – 1849	118
Table 5.1 Ticket-of-leave men employed in the timber industry in the Leeuwin- Naturaliste Region.....	135
Table 6.1 Groups' in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region	165
Table 8.1 Acreage under vine in the Sussex Region 1837-1880	229
Table 8.2 Wine Production in the Sussex Region 1885 – 1900.....	229
Table 8.3 Vineyard Establishment in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region.....	234
Table 8.4 Background Occupation of Early Viticulturalist's in the Leeuwin- Naturaliste Region.....	238
Table 9.1: Wineries and cellar doors in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region 2003	283
Table 10.1 Shire of Augusta-Margaret River Strategic and Environment Projects 2004.....	301
Table 11.1 Employment by sector in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Region 2006.....	344

Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AMR	Augusta Margaret River Mail
CALM	Department of Conservation and Land Management
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research
CWA	Country Women's Association
ESD	Ecologically Sustainable Development
RFA	Regional Forests Agreement
SFA	Surfrider Foundation Australia
WAPD	Western Australian Parliamentary Debates