THE DYNAMICS OF A COASTAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT
attitudes, perceptions and processes

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Technical Reports

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT V

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT V

SUMMARY VI

CHAPTER 1  INTRODUCTION 1

THE DYNAMICS OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT 1

FOUNDATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT 1

COMMUNITY OPPOSITION TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN AUSTRALIA 2

COMMUNITY OPPOSITION TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA 2

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES 3

CHAPTER 2  CASE STUDY PROFILE 4

MAUD’S LANDING 7

TIMELINE 8

CHAPTER 3  COMMUNITY OF INTEREST 14

METHODOLOGY 14

PLACE AND LOCATION OF RESPONDENTS 14

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY 15

ATTITUDES TO THE CORAL COAST REGION 15

POSITIVE QUALITIES OF CORAL COAST REGION 16

Fresh/Clean 17

Relaxation 17

Heritage and Community 17

NEGATIVE QUALITIES OF THE CORAL COAST REGION 17

ATTITUDES TO TOURISM IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA 18

ATTITUDES TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA 19

BAD DEVELOPMENT 19

GOOD DEVELOPMENT 20

ATTITUDES TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE CORAL COAST REGION 21

MAUD’S LANDING DEVELOPMENT 24

KNOWLEDGE OF THE MAUD’S LANDING DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL 24

SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE MAUD’S LANDING DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL 25

Media Coverage 25

Friends and Family 25

Save Ningaloo Action Group 26

Other Sources 27

ATTITUDES TO THE MAUD’S LANDING DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL 27

Strong Opposition 28

Supportive 28

Ambivalent Attitudes 29

Ill-informed Attitudes 30

INVOLVEMENT IN THE MAUD’S LANDING DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL 30

SECTION SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS 31
CHAPTER 4 CONCLUDING REMARKS ...................................................... 33
REFERENCES .................................................................................. 34
AUTHORS ..................................................................................... 35

LIST OF FIGURES
Figure 1: Coral Coast Iconic Experiences ........................................ 7
Figure 2: Case Study Overview ....................................................... 9
Figure 3: The Appeal of the Coral Coast for Visitors ....................... 16

LIST OF MAPS
Map 1: Case Study Area ................................................................. 5
Map 2: Australia’s Coral Coast Region ......................................... 6

LIST OF TABLES
Table 1: Place of Origin and Location of Respondents, 7/2003 .......... 14
Table 2: Comparison of Place of Origin of Respondents in CRC & Curtin Research, 7/2002 – 7/2003 .... 15
Table 3: Reasons for Visiting the Ningaloo Reef Region, 7/2002 (Curtin University, Wood 2003) .... 16
Table 4: Perceptions of Good and Bad Forms of Tourism Development ........................................... 19
Table 5: Scope of Public Involvement .............................................. 30
ABSTRACT

In Western Australia, similar to other parts of Australia, opposition to large scale development has been strong in recent times, well organised and effective, with proposed developments not proceeding as planned. This was, for instance, the case with a large scale development proposal at Maud’s Landing in the north west of Western Australia, which had attracted a great deal of predominantly negative publicity. It appears that the group of opponents to such development has broadened over recent years to include both the general public and tourists themselves. Notably, this ‘general public’ opposition is far wider than the residents of planned development sites and appears to include the general population and visitors to specific regions alike. Given that this opposition appears to be strengthening there is a need for research to understand what needs to be improved to ensure future tourism developments are supported by the ‘community of interest’. By understanding the responses of the ‘community of interest’ to tourism development, whether support or opposition, development alternatives can be selected, which will minimise negative social and environmental impacts and maximise support for tourism development.

The overall purpose of this study is to describe, analyse and explain the political processes which led to the Western Australian government’s decision to reject the proposed resort and marina complex at Maud’s Landing in July 2003. The project’s findings are presented in two parts; first, an introduction to the case study area is given, followed by a detailed analysis of the history of the events and documents surrounding the proposed development at Maud’s Landing. Second, primary research with the ‘community of interest’ is presented in an effort to explore and understand the attitudes and perceptions of intrastate, interstate and international visitors to tourism development at Maud’s Landing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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SUMMARY

In July 2003, the Western Australian Premier, Dr Geoff Gallop visited Coral Bay, a small coastal community in the North West Cape Region of Western Australia. The purpose of his visit was to announce the Western Australian government’s decision to reject, on environmental grounds, a proposed resort and marina complex at Maud’s Landing, 3 kms north of the popular tourist destination. The site for this proposed development resided within a stretch of coastline from Carnarvon in the south to Exmouth in the north [referred to here as the ‘Coral Coast region’] which is fringed by the renowned Ningaloo Reef. The proposed resort complex had been on the development agenda for more than 15 years. By the time it was rejected it had become the subject of a great deal of mostly negative publicity largely stimulated by the activities of one action group. This group formed in 2000 and was responsible for the widely embraced ‘Save Ningaloo Campaign’ slogan as well as the associated paraphernalia, rallies and petitions. This group’s actions in opposing the resort proposal gained significant momentum so much so that demonstrations, petitions and bumper stickers reading ‘Save Ningaloo Reef: Stop the Resort’ were soon spotted throughout Western Australia and further afield. As the ubiquitous stickers spread, so too did support for the group’s campaign to reject the proposal. The majority of protests against the proposed resort took place in Perth, more than 1,000 kms south of the planned development, suggesting that the ‘affected community’ of a remote tourist destination such as Maud’s Landing/Coral Bay extends beyond the local residents.

Objectives of Study

This project investigated the political processes which resulted in the emergence of vocal and widespread public opposition to the proposed resort/marina development complex at Maud’s Landing, and culminated in the Western Australian government’s decision to reject the proposed development. More specifically, this project serves to illustrate the visitor attitudes, perceptions and knowledge of tourism development in the Coral Coast region and particularly, the proposed tourism development at Maud’s Landing that was incidental in the decision to oppose the development. These findings will then be used as a platform to gain an enhanced understanding of tourism development in general including the factors that drive negative publicity, the type of people most in opposition to tourism development and the recommendation of ‘good practice’ for tourism development.

Specifically, the report seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. Gain an in-depth understanding of the attitudes and perceptions towards tourism and tourism development in general, and in the Ningaloo Reef area specifically.
2. Determine what factors in large scale tourism development in general drive both negative or positive attitudes towards development and their relative importance to different groups of people.
3. Identify the level of knowledge and awareness about the Maud’s Landing development amongst visitors to the Ningaloo Reef area, the sources of information used to derive that knowledge, and a timeline for the acquisition of this knowledge.
4. Develop an understanding of visitors’ attitudes/perceptions towards the Maud’s Landing development, how these opinions are formed, and what ‘drivers’, or factors in tourism development can be identified behind these attitudes.
5. Determine the relative importance of these ‘drivers’ in shaping negative and/or positive perceptions/attitudes towards tourism development, and specifically the Maud’s Landing development.
6. In broad terms, describe what type of people may be more strongly opposed to tourism development.
7. From a development perspective, identify ‘good practice’ in tourism development, and compare this with current practice, with the aim of increasing public and visitor approval of such developments, illustrating this with examples from the Maud’s Landing case study.

Methodology

As residential and, more recently, tourist opposition against tourism development appears to be strengthening, an important component of this research was a series of interviews with visitors to the Coral Coast region in July 2003 which coincided with the rejection of the resort proposal. The interviews were conducted with intrastate, interstate and international visitors at station camps, in the Coral Bay township, and at Turquoise Bay in the Cape Range National Park, Exmouth. These interviews examined a range of issues regarding visitors’ opinions about tourism development in Western Australia generally, and more specifically, in remote areas such as the Coral Coast region.
Key Findings
The research suggested that the Coral Coast region was seen to typify the best of Western Australia in terms of its unique beauty, its isolation, and fragile ecosystem and identified the Ningaloo Reef as the ‘jewel in the crown’ for Western Australian tourism. While the majority of respondents were generally positive about the promotion and development of Western Australian tourism and more specifically for the Coral Coast region, caution was observed regarding the potential for additional tourism growth to incur irreversible environmental damage on the area. Specifically, respondents felt that the region’s pristine environment could easily be spoilt by inappropriate development threatening the current visitor’s attraction for the area. While a few people felt that there should be no further expansion of tourism in the area, the remaining respondents stressed that any tourism growth would need to be sensitive to the environment and sustainable in the long term. It was emphasised that any development needs to be site specific, in relation to its scope, scale and appearance. Moreover, respondents felt that any future tourist development in the region should remain small scale and unobtrusive so the height, materials, landscaping and colour tones were consistent with the surrounding landscape. Specifically, any development should be limited to the existing accommodation types, particularly more camping and caravan sites, with the possibility of the development of eco-lodges, safari camps or other low impact developments. There was a resounding ‘No’ to the prospect of any high rise or large-scale developments in the currently undeveloped parts of the region. Respondents stressed that any future tourist development needed to be well planned and managed, with strict and well policed controls and regulations in place and educational opportunities for visitors to further protect the environment.

Respondents’ attitudes to tourism development in the region in general mirrored the attitudes toward the proposed Maud’s Landing development. It is worth noting that while many people had strong views regarding the development, their depth of knowledge was generally low and in a number of cases, misinformed. Respondents were unsure about many aspects of the proposal, including the location, size and facilities of the resort complex and marina. The majority of respondents had become aware of the development proposal over the previous two years, corresponding with the advent of the ‘Save Ningaloo Campaign’. Most people stated that they had first heard about the development through the news media (television and newspaper coverage), while others became aware of the plans through information displays or conversations with people while visiting the region. While respondents felt that the news media had been the most influential medium in the formation of their opinion about the Maud’s Landing proposal, the role of the ‘Save Ningaloo Campaign’ in gaining media attention through their spokespersons and protest activities was recognised as critical to the exposure the issue received. The action group recruited celebrities as spokespersons for their cause, and many respondents were able to name celebrities involved in the campaign. The ‘Save Ningaloo Reef’ bumper stickers distributed by the action group were the most frequently mentioned source of awareness about the proposed development, although a number of respondents acknowledged that they were not sure exactly what the stickers were protesting about.

Respondents were asked their opinion of the planned Maud’s Landing resort complex. A significant number of respondents were completely opposed to the Maud’s Landing development proposal based predominately on environmental grounds. Most of these people were very concerned about the potential impact of the resort complex on the pristine environment, particularly in the construction and use of the marina and also raised concern over the potential environmental impact created by the additional people and boats attracted to the area. Furthermore, most did not believe the developers’ rhetoric that emphasised the development would be sensitive to the environment. A number of those opposed to the development stated that a proposal for a smaller resort without a marina might be more acceptable. The impact of the extra tourists in the area on the holiday experiences of existing visitors and the already-strained infrastructure of Coral Bay was another raised concern. Some respondents perceived the development as being the ‘beginning of the end’ for the area for relaxation and unsophisticated holidaying for Western Australians and suggested the development aimed solely at the international market. For other respondents it was the location of the proposed resort which led to their opposition suggesting large-scale developments are more appropriate in larger townships such as Exmouth or Carnarvon.

The respondents in favour of the resort complex and further tourism development cited many benefits to the region but emphasised development must be consistent with the environment. Some suggested that a resort at Maud’s Landing might alleviate Coral Bay’s current problems relating to the overcrowding of people, cars and boats and thereby preserve the existing holiday experience in the township. Others highlighted economic benefits and the additional international visitors it would attract to the region. The provision of facilities, services and infrastructure for both the visitors and local community were cited as other important reasons to support the proposal. Many of those in favour of the proposed resort complex felt that opponents had overemphasised the impact the development would have on the flora, fauna and the Ningaloo Reef itself. Moreover, it was suggested that the development would ensure greater environmental protection based on the premise that the development of the Maud’s Landing site would have occurred in accordance with strict environmental guidelines and regulations rather than the perceived current ad hoc regulatory nature of development at Maud’s Landing. This
development proposal was seen also as a way to provide funding and resources to deal with existing infrastructural problems in Coral Bay relating to water and sewage. These respondents felt that the developers had displayed a commitment to the environment and education and that the Western Australian Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) and the Western Australian government would have played a central role in environmental management of the ongoing development of the area.

**Future Action**

Based on the findings of this research, a number of recommendations can be made for future tourist development in the Coral Coast region. Firstly, it is apparent that visitors to the region are attracted primarily by the unique natural environment of the area, and the activities in which they participate are driven by this natural environment. Any future development must be mindful of the current market for the area and be sensitive to the potential to undermine the experience of existing visitors to these remote destinations in their planning, either through the scale or nature of the development proposal. The continual monitoring of the effects of visitors on the natural environment, supported by greater resources to educate visitors about their impacts on the sensitive environment, is a crucial component of any future development in the region.

Furthermore, in light of the sensitive and fragile environment, it is recommended that any future development in the majority of the Coral Coast region remain small scale, which reflects the current appeal of the region. Outside the main centres of the region, accommodation options should be limited to forms of camping (from tenting and caravanning to more permanent ‘safari’ tents), or eco-lodge accommodation. While there may be the possibility of additional family-style self-contained accommodation, this should remain small scale so as not to detract from the existing experiences on offer.

There is fairly widespread acceptance amongst visitors to the region for the addition of more substantial tourist development in the larger centres of the region, particularly Carnarvon and Exmouth, which are currently seen as underdeveloped as tourist destinations.
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The Dynamics of Tourism Development

Australia’s coastal zone supports around 86% of the total population (Pirie 1995: 3). Over the past 20 years coastal areas have experienced significant increases in development, population, and tourism. The coastline ‘provides the highest proportion of recreational and tourism opportunities in Australia and has been deemed a ‘priceless national treasure’ (RAC 1993 cited in Barker 2002: 1). Similar to other forms of development, tourism development occurs in an environment where diverse interests compete for control of scarce resources. This ‘competition for, and consumption of resources represent the politics of tourism’ (Fallon 2001: 481). Land use and the conflict over whether and where development is appropriate as in the case of the Maud’s Landing Proposal (the case study area) ‘constitute the political and economic essence of any locality’ with local communities existing as ‘aggregates of land-based interest’ (Molotch 1976 cited in Madrigal 1995: 87). Thus, as Liu (1994: 20) argues, tourism development is a ‘dynamic process’ which occurs in an ever-changing environment and is ‘a blend of economic, political, cultural, technological and geographical realities and events’. It involves a wide range of actors, public and private and non-profit, at various levels (e.g. local, regional, national and international) with diverse interests, roles and responsibilities (Pearce 1991: 55). The process of tourism development, policy making and planning thus involves the values of individuals, groups, organisations and governments (Hall & Jenkins 1995: 33, 66). Public policies are therefore a representation of value choices. The impacts of values on public policies occur at numerous levels of analysis and throughout the policy process operating at the macro, meso and micro levels (Hall & Jenkins 1995: 33). It is the interaction between these spheres / levels which is particularly significant and problematic in policy processes (Ham & Hill 1984 in Hall & Jenkins 1995: 12). ‘Policy is therefore a consequence of the political environment, values and ideologies, the distribution of power, institutional frameworks, and of the decision-making processes’ (Simeon 1976 in Hall & Jenkins 1995: 5).

Foundations for Sustainable Development

Models of tourist development such as Miossec’s (1976, 1977), Butler’s (1980) and Gormsen’s (1981) focus on the spatio-temporal and evolutionary elements of tourism development with Butler and Gormsen acknowledging the levels of local, regional and national participation in development (in Pearce 1991: 18). The growing economic and social significance of tourism coupled with political and environmental factors has seen tourism development attempt to change its focus from narrow ‘boosterism’ approaches to sustainable development involving the integration of economic, environmental and socio-cultural values (Hall et al. 1997: 20).

Such a sustainable approach to tourism development necessitates the involvement of all affected groups in the development and planning process, commonly referred to as ‘strategic planning with stakeholders’ (Lui 1994: 23). A stakeholder is defined as ‘any person, group or organisation that is affected by the causes or consequences of an issue’ (Bramwell & Sharman 1999: 395). This definition is, however, of limited analytical power, especially with a limited reading of it. That is, if a direct effect is assumed then the definition is not capable of encompassing the political dynamics of a planning and development situation that attracts attention beyond the immediate ‘community’. In a globalised world, planners and policy-makers will therefore have to extend their working definition of stakeholder to encompass tourists, non-proximate individuals (i.e. who live beyond the site), NGOs at a national and international level and businesses with no immediate or obvious stake in the development.

The need to understand community views on tourism development has been increasingly recognised as one foundation for tourism’s sustainability in the future (e.g. Getz 1994; Murphy 1985; Pearce et al. 1996). In this context, many projects have been conducted in the past to better understand local resident opposition to tourism development. This view restricts our thinking to the ‘local’ while the ‘community of interest’ in relation to some developments is far wider than residents and other local stakeholders as outlined previously. Evidence is now available that suggests that opposition to some development proposals has broadened over recent years to include both the general public and visitors to specific regions. Notably, this ‘community of interest’ is far wider than the residents of planned development sites (particularly given that relatively undeveloped areas often do not
Community Opposition to Tourism Development in Australia

Organised protest against tourism developments in Australia is not a new phenomenon. Many forms of tourism development in different areas have met with protest from diverse members of the community. In 1982 a proposed tourism development in the Nightcap Range led to local residents declaring the whole Nightcap Range to be considered as a National Park (Hayes 1982: 13-14). In 1987 a group of 100 formed to protest against the construction of ‘The Kuranda Skyrail’ the world’s longest continuous cableway through Barron Gorge Park, New South Wales. In 1994 a proposed $13m track to be bulldozed through the heart of Tarkine Wilderness in north west Tasmania to allow easy access for tourists met with protest from environmentalists (Brown & Collins 1994: 9). Moreover, the Victorian Government’s decision to allow a 45 bed privately owned commercial lodge in the Wilsons Promontory National Park, resulted in a small group of protesters displaying placards with ‘Hands off our Prom’. Their campaign strategies included appeals to developers and blockade (Australian Financial Review 1997: 37).

Planned developments in Australia’s coastal areas have met with similar protests. In 1993 a proposal from Club Med to develop an $80m resort village at Byron Bay drew more than 2,000 people to the ‘Byron in Crisis’ demonstration where concerns about environmental and financial impacts of the multinational development were expressed (MacDermott 1993: 32). Byron Bay continues to be embroiled in more recent protests against the Melbourne based developer Becton’s proposal for 1,000 holiday homes on the old Club Med site (ABC Online 2003). Similarly, other eastern states’ coastal regions have experienced ongoing protests. A campaign against the development of a $100m resort at Port Hinchinbrook in the mid-1990s resulted in more than 100 people storming a shipyard on the Ross River with several protesters chaining themselves to dredging equipment to stop a dredge digging an access channel for a marina. The proposed resort was located between two World Heritage Areas, the Wet Tropics and Hinchinbrook Island, and was seen as a threat to dugongs and other wildlife which were viewed as ‘icon issues’ (Meade 1997: 7). Similarly Port Stephens in New South Wales, experienced resistance when 600 residents protested against the re-development of the Shoal Bay Hotel site. Protesters were trying to protect the coast from over development and high rise buildings which were seen as ‘Gold Coast type’ developments (Chandler 1999: 53).

Community Opposition to Tourism Development in Western Australia

In Western Australia, opposition to large scale development has also been strong in recent times, well organised and effective, with proposed developments at Leighton Beach marshalling yards (Fremantle), Smiths Beach (in the south west of Western Australia) and Port Coogee (Perth) not proceeding as planned as a direct result of the opposition. Further proposals for a 13-storey apartment development at Scarborough, a 6-storey beach hotel development at Cottesloe and a resort and residential complex for 13,500 people at Moore River are some of the more recent proposals which look set to encounter similar opposition.

In a similar vein, a proposed large scale development at Maud’s Landing in the north west of Western Australia has attracted a great deal of predominantly negative publicity. Action groups have been formed and numerous activities including the display of bumper stickers, public forums, petitions and rallies have been well supported by members of the community. The Western Australian Tourism Commission (now Tourism WA) had received over 3,000 pieces of correspondence on the proposed Maud’s Landing development. This opposition has involved locals of the area, intrastate, interstate and international people. As briefly outlined earlier, whilst much research has been conducted in the past to better understand local residents and environmental activists’ opposition to tourism development, it appears that the group of opponents to such development has broadened over recent years to include both the general public and tourists themselves. Notably, this ‘general public’ opposition is far wider than the residents of planned development sites and appears to include the general population and visitors to specific regions alike. As Gunn and Var (2002: 75) state ‘environmental alarms, once the prerogative of minor environmental groups, are now being sounded by tourism interests.’ It appears that this opposition may be strongest and most negative when large scale development occurs in lesser developed areas. ‘The sacred cow of growth is now being questioned by observers and researchers of tourism’ (Gunn & Var 2002: 75).

Given that this opposition appears to be strengthening there is a need for research to understand what needs to be improved to ensure future tourism developments are supported by the ‘community of interest’. By understanding the responses of the ‘community of interest’ to tourism development, whether support or opposition, development alternatives can be selected, which will minimise negative social and environmental impacts and maximise support for tourism development.
Aims and Objectives

The overall purpose of this study is to describe, analyse and explain the political processes which led to the Western Australian government’s decision to reject the proposed resort and marina complex at Maud’s Landing in July 2003. It is widely believed that an important reason for the rejection of the development proposal, after 15 years on the drawing board, was the magnitude of opposition, and its vociferous nature, in the wider community. This opposition included Western Australian residents and visitors to the region (who were often one and the same).

Given that this type of opposition appears to involve the relatively new concept of tourists against tourism development, an objective of this project has been to explore and understand attitudes and perceptions of intrastate, interstate and international visitors to the Ningaloo Reef area toward tourism development in relatively undeveloped areas, using the proposed development at Maud’s Landing as a case study. More specifically, the research aimed to:

1. Gain an in-depth understanding of the attitudes and perceptions towards tourism and tourism development in general, and in the Ningaloo Reef area specifically.
2. Determine what factors in large scale tourism development in general drive either negative or positive attitudes towards development, and their relative importance to different groups of people.
3. Identify the level of knowledge and awareness about the Maud’s Landing development amongst visitors to the Ningaloo Reef area, the sources of information used to derive that knowledge, and a timeline for the acquisition of this knowledge.
4. Develop an understanding of visitors’ attitudes/perceptions towards the Maud’s Landing development, how these opinions are formed, and what ‘drivers’, or factors in tourism development can be identified behind these attitudes.
5. Determine the relative importance of these ‘drivers’ in shaping negative and/or positive perceptions/attitudes towards tourism development, and specifically the Maud’s Landing development.
6. In broad terms, describe what type of people may be more strongly opposed to tourism development.
7. From a development perspective, identify ‘good practice’ in tourism development, and compare this with current practice, with the aim of increasing public and visitor approval of such developments, illustrating this with examples from the Maud’s Landing case study.

In the following chapters, the project findings will be presented in two parts: first, an overview of the location of the proposed development, relevant local demographics, tourism profile, existing situation and planning characteristics will be outlined. A detailed analysis of the history of the events and documents surrounding the proposed development at Maud’s Landing will be presented in a ‘timeline’ format. The chronological order of pertinent events and documents provides a comprehensive background for the research project. Second, primary research with the ‘community of interest’ will be presented in an effort to explore and understand the attitudes and perceptions of intrastate, interstate and international visitors to tourism development at Maud’s Landing. This research took the form of in-depth interviews, which were carried out at Gnaraloo Station, Coral Bay, Exmouth and Cape Range National Park.
Chapter 2

CASE STUDY PROFILE

Maud’s Landing, the case study area, is located approximately 1,135 km north west of Perth in the Shire of Carnarvon (Gascoyne Region), which includes the coastal area around Coral Bay, a popular tourism town (see Map 1). Maud’s Landing is located 3 km north of that resort town on Bateman Bay. It is named after the landing of the same name, which was discovered by the Captain of the schooner ‘Maud’ about 1880. The port of Maud’s Landing was surveyed in 1897 by Commander Dawson, RN. The government considered establishing a town site at Maud’s Landing in 1896 and a reserve was set aside there for this purpose later that year. In 1898 the settlers of the Minilya, Yanare and Lyndon Rivers and the Banglemull Goldfields petitioned the Lands Department and subsequently a town site was gazetted in 1915 as Maud’s Landing. Carnarvon is the administrative and service centre of the Gascoyne Region and with a population of approximately 7,300 it is also the largest settlement in the region, accounting for about 60% of the total population. The Shire of Carnarvon has planning control over Coral Bay and subsequently also over Maud’s Landing.

In the past decades tourism has become the largest and fastest growing sector of the regional economy. On the other hand the traditional economic base of pastoralism and fishing are steadily declining in economic importance for the region. Tourism and particularly nature-based tourism therefore has been considered as a significantly economically viable alternative for the region. Since 2004 the Shire of Carnarvon, including the case study area, is located in one of the five new tourism regions of Western Australia, namely Australia’s Coral Coast region (see Map 2). However, despite significant tourism growth in the area, there is a lack of reliable data to establish a regional overview of tourism activities. Based on figures provided by the Bureau of Tourism Research, the Western Australian Tourism Commission (now Tourism WA) estimated that in 2002/03 a total of 724,200 people visited the Coral Coast Region (81% intrastate, 9% interstate and 10% international visitors). However, the Coral Coast Region covers a much larger area than the study area. Based on estimates provided by Tourism WA and Wood (2003), approximately 20% of tourists to the Coral Coast Region visit the Shire of Carnarvon. Another study suggests that approximately 210,000 to 220,000 visit the Ningaloo coast annually (Wood & Hopkins, 2001). Furthermore, Wood (2003) highlights that Coral Bay has a higher proportion of international visitors (29%) than the remainder of the Coral Coast Region (16% from interstate and 55% from WA).
Map 1: Case Study Area

[Source: Carlsen & Wood 2004]
Map 2: Australia’s Coral Coast Region

It is the mix of the Coral Coast’s rich and varied natural attributes that gives the area its unique tourism potential for both domestic and international tourists. It is home to the world’s longest fringing reef, the Ningaloo Reef which supports 350 kms of diverse marine life including turtles, dugongs, rays and reef fish. The accessibility and the scenic beauty of the area creates a unique and popular setting for water based activities including scuba and snorkel diving, fishing, boating, windsurfing and sea kayaking. These features have led to expectations of it becoming Western Australia’s premier water-based/ecotourism destination (see Figure 1) with the ability to compete with the eastern states for international markets (Tourism WA 2004). The Western Australian Tourism Strategy Issues Paper (Coopers & Lybrand 1994), for instance, states that there is great opportunity for growth not only for the interstate but also the international markets (e.g. Asia). To achieve this goal, a number of major infrastructure development projects have been proposed, one of them being the so-called Coral Coast Marina Development, the case study of this project.
Maud’s Landing

The southern portion of the Maud’s Landing town site comprises 11 properties in both public and private ownership whilst the northern portion is vacant Crown Land. Land use in Coral Bay reflects the recreational/tourist nature of the settlement. While there is no formal residential area in the settlement, some 60 people reside in Coral Bay, generally in accommodation within one of the caravan parks. The bay itself, also known as Bills Bay, is the focal point of recreational/tourist use. Car and trailer parking facilities, storage for tour operators and ticketing facilities are situated on the foreshore. The vacant Crown Land within the town site remains undeveloped. Overcrowding is a common occurrence particularly during peak season. The daily population in Coral Bay at peak times is approximately 2,500 people. The pressure from surging tourist numbers in combination with limited infrastructure as well as deficiencies in adequate planning models pose a threat to the natural environment. To ease the pressure on Coral Bay and the natural environment through overcrowding and a lack in infrastructure, a significant tourism development incorporating a marina, tourist resort as well as residential properties was proposed at the end of the 1980s. Only recently, however (in July 2003) the proposal was rejected by the current Western Australian state government.
Timeline

This timeline provides a detailed chronological outline of the many notable political events, planning documents and planning processes, which contributed to and shaped the decision making process in the rejection of the Maud’s Landing development proposal in July 2003. The area including Maud’s Landing has been involved in over twenty government planning documents, survived four changes of state government as well as being nominated for World Heritage Listing and become Western Australia’s most controversial development proposal. Although this timeline contains many of the most important events in the development’s history, it is by no means comprehensive due to the longitude (seventeen years) and complex character of the proposal and the political processes involved. As mentioned earlier, Maud’s Landing was gazetted as a town site reserve in 1896 and this has provided the grounds for development to proceed in more recent years. Tourism and recreational activities were not significant for Coral Bay until the late 1960s. As tourism grew, a local was approached by the Dowding Government (Labor) to plan a development at Maud’s Landing. The proposal was put out to tender and two further development proposals were received (see Figure 2).

Coral Coast Marine Development Pty (CCMD), which was formed specifically for the purpose of the Maud’s Landing development, was chosen as the ‘preferred developer’ in 1987.

Although the Coral Bay area has been without a comprehensive development plan for the past twenty years, it has been included in over twenty planning documents. This ad hoc approach to appropriate planning together with a dramatic increase in tourism and recreational use has resulted in Coral Bay experiencing many pressures such as overcrowding and insufficient infrastructure. One aim of the proposed Maud’s Landing development was to alleviate some of the above problems experienced in the area.

The Maud’s Landing development proposal was approved with conditions by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) twice, in 1995 and 2002. On both these occasions the decision was appealed against by members of the public and Government ministers. The 1995 approval was stopped by the then Liberal Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Cheryl Edwardes, in 1997 due to pressure from the Greens WA and environmental groups. In December 2000 Environment Australia (Commonwealth) advised that the proposal be assessed by a Public Environment Report (PER), as the matter was of national significance. Over 7000 PER submissions were received for response by the developers.

The five years between 1995 and 2000 were a particularly active time for the development proposal. One of the most intriguing characteristics of this period was the contradictory nature of various pertinent planning documents and the support and aid of certain State Government officials and Government bodies throughout the development process. In 1995 the Liberal Planning Minister publicly backed CCMD’s right to develop; an agreement was signed but was not available for public consideration due to the ‘commercial in-confidence’ exemption. Also during 1995 CCMD secured Native Title clearance for a 12 month period and gained town planning permission from Carnarvon Shire Council. Subsequently, the area was re-zoned as a ‘Resort Development Zone’. In the same year the Legislative Council Select Committee recommended against shore based developments on the western side of Cape Range, which could have affected Ningaloo Reef, but the Maud’s Landing Development proposal was exempted from this ban on marinas.

Various planning documents from this period highlight the ad hoc and contradictory nature of the planning process. In 1996 the Gascoyne Coast Regional Strategy supported the concept of channelling the expected growth in tourism to the Maud’s Landing project. This was seen as the most appropriate location outside existing settlements. Alternatively, the Coral Bay Taskforce recommended that Coral Bay’s infrastructure requirements be assessed separately from the Maud’s Landing proposal as Coral Bay’s needs were more urgent. In March 1998 the EPA’s Preliminary Position Statement on the Cape Range Province recommended that there be no major development on the west side of Cape Range. This statement was issued despite the fact that the EPA had approved the development proposal previously and went on to approve it again in 2002. Moreover, the Exmouth-Learmonth Structure Plan (1998) recommended that major tourist development be located within Exmouth and did not consider the Coral Bay area at all in the plan. Also in 1998 the then Liberal Minister for Tourism proposed that the Western Australian Tourism Commission (now Tourism WA) be the lead agency to progress the development of the Maud’s Landing town site in collaboration with the proponent; this proposal was approved development at Coral Bay and Maud’s within the town site of Maud

In 1999 the Environmental and Planning Guidelines for Tourism Development on the North West Cape recommended low scale development at Coral Bay and Maud’s Landing and specifically excluded developments within the town site of Maud’s Landing. Also in this year, the decision was made to issue new guidelines to the proponent CCMD, resulting in a Revised Structure Plan being submitted by CCMD with a 40% reduction in size. The issuing of new guidelines to the developer was viewed by Members of the Greens WA and the WA Conservation Council as ‘special treatment’. Again in April 2000 State Cabinet endorsed the project to proceed with the North West Cape Task Force in charge. Also, CCMD concluded Native Title negotiations with the Baiynga Aboriginal Corporation, Gnulli Claimants and the Cardabia Pastoral Company.
Figure 2: Case Study Overview

Public awareness of the Maud’s Landing Development proposal increased with the advent of the ‘Save Ningaloo Campaign’ in 2000/01. The so-called Save Ningaloo Reef Organisation (SNRO) was established as a single interest group to protest against the proposed Maud’s Landing Development. SNRO was supported by the Wilderness Society, the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, the Conservation Council of Western Australia, World Wildlife Fund and other environmental groups. Organised protests by the group included rallies, concerts, celebrities, bumper stickers and automated submissions as part of the campaign strategy. Also during this period, there were numerous calls for particular political actors who were against the development to be removed from the decision-making process. The then Liberal Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly called for three actors to be removed, these were Dr Judy Edwards (Minister for the Environment and Heritage) on the grounds that she appealed against the 1995 EPA decision whilst in opposition. Dr Barry Wilson as Chairman of the Marine Parks and Reserves Authority was removed on the grounds that he was also the Chairman of the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, a known supporter of the Save Ningaloo Organisation. The Appeals Convenor for the EPA, Mr Derek Carew-Hopkins, was also asked to be removed from the decision-making process as he held this role in the 1995 EPA appeals decision. In 2001 the responsibility for major tourism development including the Maud’s Landing proposal was transferred to the Department of Housing and Works along with key staff members from the Western Australian Tourism Commission. In November 2001 the Australian Labor Party confirmed their commitment for World Heritage Listing for the area. In May 2002 the Labor Minister for Agriculture met with members of the ‘Save Ningaloo Campaign’ to discuss alternative eco-lodge type developments for the area; these alternatives were first put to the Government by the Australian Wildlife Conservancy. A month later community leaders of the Gascoyne Region pledged their support for the proposed development. In October 2002 the EPA handed down its second decision on the proposal, approval with stipulations. This was followed by a ‘Rally for the Reef’ organised by SNRO in Fremantle where over 15,000 people marched against the development. On 4 July 2003 the Labor Premier Dr Geoff Gallop visited Coral Bay to deliver the final rejection of the proposed Maud’s Landing Development. The state government released ‘Future Directions’ which included outlining five sustainable tourism and land use scenarios for the area, the de-gazetting of Maud’s Landing as a town site and re-zoning for conservation purposes as well as formal notification of the state government’s intention to pursue World Heritage Listing and plans for community workshops to be held in the area and in Perth.

**Timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27 Nov 1876</td>
<td>Maud’s Landing gazetted as a town site reserve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Ken Ryan applies to Department of Land Administration (DOLA) for land at Maud’s Landing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Tourism and recreational values culminate with formal settlement at Bill’s Bay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983-1988</td>
<td>Burke Labor Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Coral Bay Coastal Management Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Gascoyne Region Tourism Development Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1987</td>
<td>Ningaloo Marine Park (State Waters) gazetted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Ken Ryan approached by Labor Government to plan for development. Following a tender process two proposals received</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Coral Coast Marine Development (CCMD) formed with specific purpose of developing Maud's Landing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Potential for tourism development recognised at Maud’s Landing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988-1990</td>
<td>Dowding Labor Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 1988</td>
<td>CCMD granted ‘Right of Entry’ to Maud’s Landing by DOLA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### THE DYNAMICS OF A COASTAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dec 1988</td>
<td>Dowding Government calls for expressions of interest in a Marina / Tourism Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1989</td>
<td>State Government gives conditional support to CCMD Proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-1993</td>
<td>Lawrence Labor Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Tourism and the Environment – An Interim Report on Residents and Tourists Opinions (Dowling 1990)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-1993</td>
<td>Project on hold due to recession and lack of financial backing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>North West Cape Tourism Development Study (Jones Lang Wootton - Special Projects)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-2001</td>
<td>Court Liberal Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Coral Bay Planning Strategy 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>CCMD secures financial backing and re-negotiates agreement with Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Court Government confirms CCMD’s right to develop. Agreement with CCMD signed enabling planning to proceed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 1994</td>
<td>Carnarvon Chamber of Commerce gives support to Maud’s Landing Proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Coral Coast Resort Master Plan submitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Aug 1995</td>
<td>Shire of Carnarvon Town Planning Scheme No 11 gazetted. Under TPS No. 11 area zoned ‘Resort Development’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>CCMD secures Native Title Clearance under Public Works Act for 12 months. Rezoning of land and town. Planning approval from the Shire of Carnarvon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Proposal assessed by Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). EPA Bulletin 796 (Position Statement No 1) concludes proposal acceptable with stipulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>WA State Government releases response to Select Committee’s Report supporting intent and principles of the recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Parliamentary Legislative Council Select Committee of Cape Range National Park and Ningaloo Marina Park recommends generally against large-scale developments at Maud’s Landing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Gascoyne Coast Regional Strategy. Coral Bay / Maud’s Landing identified for increased tourism. Development proposal supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 1996</td>
<td>Gascoyne Regional Ecotourism Draft Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 1996</td>
<td>Coral Bay Taskforce Report on infrastructure requirements for Coral Bay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>EPA Appeals Convenor determines that CCMD had not completely assessed environmental implications during appeals process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Due to pressure from the Greens and other conservationists Environment Minister Cheryl Edwardes (Liberal) rejects application and stops process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Government convenes interagency committee (Gascoyne Coast Planning Coordinating Committee) to set down precise guidelines to resolve planning and environmental concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1998</td>
<td>EPA Preliminary Position Statement on the Cape Range Province released</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1998</td>
<td>Exmouth-Learmonth (North West Cape) Structure Plan recommends major tourist development be located within Exmouth town site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Cabinet considers submission from CCMD, but no decision taken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1999</td>
<td>Environmental and Planning Guidelines for Tourism Development on the North West Cape. These guidelines for development established at agency level. EPA and WAPC give ‘in principle’ support for guidelines. Cabinet approves WATC as lead agency to progress development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1999</td>
<td>Ningaloo Reef Development Guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 1999</td>
<td>CCMD submits Revised Structure Plan and Development Proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 2000</td>
<td>Coral Coast Resort, Maud’s Landing-North West Cape Project Evaluation by WATC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2000</td>
<td>Cabinet endorses Task Force recommendation for project to proceed. Work commences with DOLA and WATC on Land Development Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 2000</td>
<td>CCMD submits Structure Plan Report to Shire of Carnarvon for consideration and recommendation to WAPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 2000</td>
<td>CCMD submits Public Environmental Review Document (PER) to EPA for consideration and recommendation to Minister for Environment and Heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 2000</td>
<td>CCMD concludes Native Title negotiations with Baiyunga Aboriginal Corporation, Gnulli Claimants and Cardabia Pastoral Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Dec 2000</td>
<td>Native Title Agreement formally signed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Dec 2000</td>
<td>Environment Australia (Minister for Environment and Heritage) advises that CCMD will require formal assessment of project under EPBC Act 1999 (Commonwealth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Dec 2000</td>
<td>Maud’s Landing Proposal - State Cabinet Adjournment Debate. Urgency motion raised by Hon. Norman Moore about issues in decision-making process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>since 2001</td>
<td>Gallop Labor Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2001</td>
<td>Save Ningaloo Reef Organisation established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 Jan 2001</td>
<td>Environment Australia (Minister for the Environment and Heritage) determines that proposed activity be assessed by a PER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2001</td>
<td>Details being finalised between DOLA and CCMD. Final draft prepared by DOLA to be ratified by Minister for Lands and Minister for Tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2001</td>
<td>Summary of PER submissions (over 7000) received by CCMD for response. CCMD preparing PER for Environment Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 May 2001</td>
<td>Minister for Environment and Heritage, DEC, DEP and community representatives meet at Coral Bay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2001</td>
<td>CCMD Structure Plan Report considered by Shire of Carnarvon and recommended (with conditions) to Ministry for Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 July 2001</td>
<td>Responsibility for Maud’s Landing Development transferred from WATC to Department for Housing and Works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Nov 2001</td>
<td>Federal Opposition Leader Kim Beazley (ALP) commits to nominate Western Australia’s Cape Range area for World Heritage Listing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 May 2002</td>
<td>Hon. Kim Chance meets with members of Save Ningaloo Reef Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 June 2002</td>
<td>Local leaders support Maud’s Landing Development Proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Sept 2002</td>
<td>Carnarvon Coastal Strategy renamed and extended to enable greater and more effective community involvement in planning for Ningaloo Coast. New Carnarvon-Ningaloo Coast Regional Strategy to be developed as result of community feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 2002</td>
<td>Carnarvon Coastal Strategy (draft) as summary of submissions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Oct 2002</td>
<td>EPA releases report and recommendations in EPA Bulletin 1073 Environmental Requirements WA (affirmative result with stipulations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nov 2002</td>
<td>Tourism Council of West Australia welcomes EPA Report on Coral Coast Resort Proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 2002</td>
<td>Dr Barry Wilson asked to disqualify himself from decision-making process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Dec 2002</td>
<td>Over 15,000 people in Fremantle attend ‘Rally for the Reef’ held simultaneously with meetings of supporters in Coral Bay and Exmouth to express opposition to proposed development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 Feb 2003</td>
<td>Politicians face Save Ningaloo Campaigners at opening of Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2003</td>
<td>Premier Geoff Gallop visits Coral Bay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2003</td>
<td>Government officials prevented from leaving station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 July 2003</td>
<td>Dr Gallop travels to Coral Bay to deliver rejection of Maud’s Landing Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 July 2003</td>
<td>State Government releases ‘Future Directions’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 March 2003</td>
<td>Coastal Planning and Coordination Council established by State Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 May 2004</td>
<td>Draft Carnarvon-Ningaloo Coast: Planning for Sustainable Tourism and Land Use released for public comment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 3

COMMUNITY OF INTEREST

Methodology

The research for this part of the project was undertaken between 3 and 11 July 2003. The study area was the North West Cape Region of Western Australia, which covers the area between Carnarvon in the south and Exmouth in the north (see Map 1). The specific locations at which the interviews were conducted during this research period included the Coral Bay township, Cape Range National Park, and Gnaraloo Station. Additional interviews were carried out at Ningaloo Station and Lefroy Bay.

This research took the form of qualitative, semi-structured interviews. A comprehensive discussion guide was developed, which aimed to explore in depth attitudes and perceptions of visitors to the Ningaloo Reef area towards tourism development. Respondents were asked questions relating to tourism and tourism development in general and their attitudes towards tourism development in the region. Their own preference for accommodation options in different settings (in general, in Western Australia, and in the Ningaloo Reef region) were investigated through the use of picture show cards. Following this exploration, respondents were asked their opinion of the proposed Maud’s Landing development, and where, when, and how they found out about the development proposal and how they had formed their opinions.

Most of the interviews took 60 to 90 minutes and were tape recorded to free the interviewer to concentrate on the interview itself, rather than writing notes, which given the outdoor location and length of most of the interviews would have been difficult. Tape recording of the interviews also enabled a more free-flowing and conversational approach, rather than a formal question-and-answer session. These tape recordings were later transcribed.

The respondents were chosen using convenience sampling, however an attempt was made to approach people from diverse backgrounds, accommodation types and places of origin. Most interviews took place either on the beach or around respondents’ accommodation sites (e.g. caravans, tent sites). Interviews were conducted with individuals, couples, families and groups of friends, with the largest group interviewed being a group of six. Generally, most interviews were conducted in pairs. This enabled interaction between the respondents, while also allowing the interviews to be manageable by restricting the incidence of respondents talking over the top of each other and allowing all respondents to be identified in later transcriptions. In total 32 interviews were conducted, involving 64 respondents in all.

Place and Location of Respondents

Table 1 illustrates the place and location of respondents. More interviews took place at Stations sites (40.6%) than at Coral Bay (31.3%) or Cape Range National Park (28.1%). This table has also demonstrated that the majority of respondents were from Western Australia (67.2% overall); this was particularly the case at the Station camping grounds and in the Coral Bay township. The interviews were conducted during Western Australian school holidays which may have contributed to the greater percentage of intrastate respondents. The vast majority of respondents at the Station were intrastate visitors (84.6%) which may be explained less publicised nature of these sites as well as with access being restricted to visitors with private four wheel drive vehicles only. Furthermore, the requirement of campers to provide all their own provisions including camping equipment would restrict many visitors. By comparison, a greater proportion of those interviewed at Cape Range National Park were interstate and international. In fact, the majority of interviews conducted in the Cape Range National Park were with international visitors (55.6%). The greater publicity for this destination in international guidebooks and the fact that Exmouth can be accessed by public transportation and is highlighted as a stopover on the routes of the many backpacker buses that service this region of Western Australia may explain the predominance of international visitors in these interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Stations</th>
<th>Coral Bay</th>
<th>Cape Range National Park</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>3.8% (1)</td>
<td>5% (1)</td>
<td>55.6% (10)</td>
<td>18.8% (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interstate</td>
<td>11.5% (3)</td>
<td>15% (3)</td>
<td>16.7% (3)</td>
<td>14.1% (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrastate</td>
<td>84.6% (22)</td>
<td>80% (16)</td>
<td>27.8% (5)</td>
<td>67.2% (43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>40.6% (26)</td>
<td>31.3% (20)</td>
<td>28.1% (18)</td>
<td>100% (64)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparing the place of origin of respondents in this survey with a larger longitudinal study, which has been conducted over the past three years by Dr David Wood of Curtin University reveals some discrepancies in the distribution of respondents in this research project (see Table 2). Surveys conducted in the same region by Dr Wood’s team in July 2002 and April 2003 (also conducted during Western Australian school holidays) reveal that the current sample over-represents intrastate residents and under-represents international visitors. It should be noted, however, that Wood (2003) reports that a higher proportion of international visitors visit the region in April because of the chance to view the whale sharks.

### Table 2: Comparison of place of origin of respondents in CRC & Curtin research, 7/2002 – 7/2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coral Bay</td>
<td>Stations</td>
<td>Coral Bay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interstate</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrastate</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given the current interest in investigating the Maud’s Landing development proposal, which has received most attention in Western Australia, this bias in favour of intrastate visitors is seen as warranted. It was expected that intrastate visitors would know more about the proposal than interstate or overseas visitors, as was demonstrated in the findings (next section).

Before outlining the findings of this research it is important to acknowledge that the timing of the interviewing may have influenced the respondents’ comments. On 6 July 2003, the day before the researchers arrived to conduct interviews in Coral Bay, the Premier of Western Australia, Geoff Gallop, visited the town to announce that the Maud’s Landing Development would not proceed. Once this decision was made, some respondents may have felt that discussing their attitudes to the Maud’s Landing was less important than it would have been if the fate of the development proposal was still undecided or if the government had approved the development plan.

### Findings of the Study

#### Attitudes to the Coral Coast Region

The report aimed to highlight respondents’ preference opinion of the region (see Table 3). Almost unanimously, the main reason expressed related to some element of the natural environment of the area, coupled with the favourable climatic conditions experienced winter months. More specifically the access to the coast water-based activities available were central considerations to most respondent’s visits. Popular water-based activities included snorkelling, swimming, fishing, diving and boating. The wildlife attracted respondents also, with manta rays, whales, turtles and tropical fish all mentioned as important attractions.

There were variations in the responses depending on the location of the interview. At Gnaraloo Station opportunities to surf ‘one of the best left-hand breaks in the world’ was important for ten respondents, whereas surfing did not feature as an attraction in other parts of the region. At the Station, fishing was the primary attraction for many respondents. While fishing was also an important activity at Coral Bay, many respondents particularly those travelling with families suggested that the safe swimming beaches and opportunities for snorkelling provided an additional attraction for the children while the adults took their boats out fishing. For one Perth woman, the attraction for her was to ‘veg out’ while her children explored the area and her husband enjoyed water-based activities. In this way, she felt that all family members were catered for.

Snorkelling and viewing the reef were the most significant activities for most visitors to Turquoise Bay, in the Cape Range National Park. For other respondents, the National Park itself was the attraction. A couple of respondents mentioned that the whale sharks were an important reason for visiting, despite the fact that July is not the high season for whale shark viewing.

Differences where also seen among international, interstate and interstate visitors with international visitors being more likely to specifically mention the Ningaloo Reef as the primary attraction, based on word of mouth recommendations and international guidebooks. This was the case with a German backpacker travelling around Australia:

> For me everybody said ’ah go to Western Australia, go to Ningaloo Reef, go diving, go snorkelling’ and I said ’OK’.
Table 3: Reasons for visiting the Ningaloo Reef Region, 7/2002 (Curtin University, Wood 2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Coral Bay</th>
<th>Stations</th>
<th>Cape Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jul 2002 - % of respondents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency of Nomination (in %)</td>
<td>Highest Priority (in %)</td>
<td>Frequency of Nomination (in %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural environment</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ningaloo Marine Park</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Parks</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to the coast</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swim with whale sharks</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other¹</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: No.1 percentages exceed 100 because respondents’ reasons which were not prioritised were all counted as their No.1 reason.

Positive Qualities of Coral Coast Region

The qualitative nature of these interviews enabled this research to explore the appeal of the area for visitors in greater detail. The findings are summarised in Figure 3. It has been revealed that while the natural environment and water were primary sources of attraction, there were a number of other elements that contributed to the appeal of the Coral Coast region.

Figure 3: The appeal of the Coral Coast for visitors

¹ The high percentage of respondents stating ‘Other’ as a reason for visiting the region was further analysed to reveal that snorkeling or diving were popular incentives for visiting. ‘Snorkeling/diving’ was later included as a category in the April 2003 survey.
**Fresh/Clean**

The ‘unspoilt and natural’ state of the environment was an important factor by many in all interviewed locations. A young male camping at Gnaraloo Station explained:

> The ocean’s perfectly untouched .. clean … you can go anywhere and see fish everywhere and it’s beautiful clear water.

The lack of development was also seen to add to the unspoiled appeal of the place, as a male from interstate camping at Gnaraloo outlined:

> It’s interesting that for such a long stretch of land on the coast… it hasn’t been exploited or marketed by any huge company, I find that astounding, you’ve got all these natural resources, and I’m thinking “where are all [the developers]?” Like you go to the east coast and everything’s been plundered and developed and it’s totally extreme on this side … a lovely thing.

**Relaxation**

Being laidback was seen to be important in contributing to a relaxing holiday while ‘getting away from it all’ as the following station campers explained:

> [We’re] up here for the beach fishing … and apart from that, lots of rest, because we both have busy lifestyles and this is just magic to come to.

For a first time visitor to Coral Bay, the laidback atmosphere allowed her family to enjoy simple pleasures and not ‘worry about the things that bother you at home’:

> It … brings a bit of simplicity back into our lives, because we’re city people … and we have a really busy life … and for us this provides a simplicity and safety [my children] don’t have at home … I can let them go and I don’t worry and they will experience things they never… do at home and they have time with us, so to me, there’s nothing to do and that’s the beauty of it.

A newcomer resident of Coral Bay felt similarly about the relaxed atmosphere:

> You feel really slowed down; it’s almost like you’ve gone back in time, twenty, thirty years…. Things don’t work like they do in the city … it’s like ‘Coral Bay time’.

**Heritage and Community**

There was evidence also from many intrastate visitors that this region represented an important part of their heritage and connected them with past memories and a sense of community. Many respondents had first visited the area as children with their families, particularly at the Station and in Coral Bay, and had fond memories of those times: ‘mum and dad have done it with us, so we’re doing it with our kids’. This was particularly the case with those staying at the caravan parks, as one woman explained:

> Most people who [caravan], do have a past history of, from a very young age, they’ve all been camping with mum and dad and caravanning, so this is a progressive thing they’ve got to the stage of their life where they’ve replaced their parents almost. [My husband’s idea of a perfect holiday] is that you get a shack with a mud floor…. He thinks that that’s the best because his memories are so strong and lovely memories that to him… why would you want anything else?… You’re either a camping person or you are not … you don’t just suddenly become one.

Others saw their annual visit as something of a reunion:

> We’ve just made so many friends, it’s like a great big family, we know nearly everyone in the caravan park after the last twenty years … it’s our once a year gathering.

As will be seen below, this sense of belonging, at times betraying a hint of ownership or territoriality played an important role in people’s attitudes towards future development of the area.

**Negative Qualities of the Coral Coast Region**

Respondents were asked also what they didn’t like about the Coral Coast region. Most respondents were positive, however, there were a number of negative comments also, particularly regarding the Coral Bay township. Some people felt that the Coral Bay area had been overdeveloped and ‘done to death’ with too little consideration of planning and infrastructural issues while others mentioned the lack of development as a problem for the area. One respondent stated that she would never stay in Coral Bay, describing it as a ‘filthy, stinking, little hole’. While most responses were not this vehement, many residents and visitors alike seemed to be aware that the township was suffering from infrastructural problems, particularly relating to sewerage and water supply. One couple who passed through the town observed:

> It was really under stress, you know … too many people for the size of the bay and I’m sure the sewerage and everything just can’t … cope…. We sort of ducked in to have a look and we couldn’t
get out quick enough. There was nowhere to park and it was just wall to wall people and the amenities weren’t very nice…they were so dirty, very smelly; not maintained at all.

A Coral Bay resident summed up the situation:
I think it’s got a lot of infrastructure problems right now and it’s in real infancy stages and it’s probably got 10-15 years before it’s all sorted out … obviously sewerage and water, and stuff like housing for people that live here, community infrastructure as well, things like a community hall or something where somebody could hold a yoga class if they wanted to … we need proper boating facilities and a jetty … proper access for people to load … and then probably monitoring of visitors as well and education.

Even those who had no complaints about Coral Bay acknowledged that something needed to be done to cope with the greater numbers of people visiting the township.

Attitudes to Tourism in Western Australia

Respondents were asked to describe their attitudes towards tourism in Western Australia. Generally, these responses were positive, with the most recurring explanation for this positive attitude being the value of tourism to the Western Australian economy. A number of respondents expressed the opinion that tourism provided a sustainable income, and a ‘potentially low impact’ alternative to extractive industries such as mining. Tourism was also seen as an opportunity to ‘showcase’ Western Australia to the rest of the world and a useful vehicle for engendering community pride. One respondent commented ‘It’s great for people to come and see what we’ve got.’

Some respondents felt that tourism could be an educational experience, particularly regarding environmental issues:

When you are in nature-based tourism, which WA basically is … you’ve got a chance to showcase stuff to the world and educate people at the same time.

Tour operators were seen to play an important role in this regard: ‘they do protect the region too so that’s nice that they’re out there policing … they sort of act as custodians if you like’.

A small minority questioned whether the state should attempt to attract international tourists at all. This was the attitude of the respondent who asked ‘Do we have to cater for international tourists? I mean this is our country’. Others felt that some areas, including parts of the Coral Coast, should not be promoted to tourists. One respondent felt that catering to the demand of overseas tourists changed the character of holiday places popular with Australian visitors:

The overseas people come in and take over and they start treating us like we’re nothing, but we’re the Aussies … our way of life is not the same anymore … where we used to go, like you do, to camp and be a little bit rough and tough … it is all too ‘resorty’ and touristy [now] and you’ve got to dress up … we like to be laid back and go barefooted if we want to…I don’t like trying to be who I’m not.

Similarly, a young female respondent at Gnaraloo Station expressed the opinion that tourism was good in the city, but she did not want to see more promotion of Gnaraloo: ‘there are special secret spots that you don’t want everyone to find out about because it just becomes touristy’. Interestingly, many of the intrastate visitors did not see themselves as tourists, seeing ‘tourism’ as being an activity reserved for people from overseas. This was particularly the case amongst those camping at the stations or in caravan parks. At Gnaraloo Station, not only did respondents not see themselves in the category of ‘tourist’, but they didn’t see the camping area in which they were staying as a ‘tourist development’. As another Gnaraloo respondent explained ‘my idea of heaven – a beach with no-one on it’; himself excluded, one presumes. Moreover, many of the international respondents commented on the fact that overseas visitors who visited Western Australia sought different experience to those who visited the East Coast:

A lot of friends of mine [said] ‘ah, go to Western Australia it’s not so crowded, it’s not so much tourism, it’s not so much party people and you really can enjoy all the nature’ … when you are on the East coast you think … you are not on a special place.

Another European backpacker expressed a similar view when he said ‘the East coast is too built up – WA is more like the real Australia’.

Among those who were generally in favour of tourism, there were some negative comments about tourism in Western Australia relating to the costs involved in travelling around the state, and the need for more infrastructure to support the long distance travel involved; as a couple from Victoria stated ‘it’s a bloody big state’. There were a number of respondents who expressed caution regarding the type of tourism and tourists that Western Australia attracted, believing that some forms of tourist development should be encouraged whilst maintaining the qualities, which made the state appealing:

You need more tourism in the state, so that means more people, it’s a matter of how you are going to accommodate them without ruining what we’ve got to offer.

Attitudes towards appropriate types of tourism development for Western Australia are discussed below.
Table 4 highlights respondent’s perceptions of good and bad forms of development.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good Development</th>
<th>Bad Development</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design sensitive</td>
<td>Over commercialisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low key and low rise</td>
<td>High rise hotels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate size and scope</td>
<td>Over crowded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecologically low impact facilities</td>
<td>Homogenous destination</td>
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<tr>
<td>Managed responsibly</td>
<td>Higher Prices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and encouragement of tourists</td>
<td>Damage to natural environment/terrain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Site-specific</td>
<td>Change of visual aesthetics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visitor-specific</td>
<td>Haphazard development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eco-resorts</td>
<td>Poor planning codes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eco-tourism</td>
<td>Inadequate infrastructure</td>
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<td>Inadequate tourist control mechanisms</td>
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<td>Mass tourism</td>
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Bad Development

In general, it had been expressed that bad tourism development did not complement the destination, neither in terms of the natural setting nor the culture and activities of the residents and current visitors. Respondents were surprisingly consistent in what they viewed as bad development with the Gold Coast repeatedly identified as an example of this. The most recurring negative feature of tourism development was the commercial aspects of mass tourism. The presence of too many souvenir shops, theme parks and chain stores such as Coles and McDonalds, were seen to be detrimental to the character of the region. Almost universally, the presence of high rise hotels was seen to typify the arrival of mass tourism, which was seen as ‘the thin edge of the wedge’. One respondent mentioned high rise buildings ‘wrecked it on the Gold Coast’.

Furthermore, many respondents felt that the commercialisation of a destination and the presence of too many people changed the character, identity and ‘feel’ of a destination. Some respondents thought tourism development that did not complement the region created homogeneity among destinations with comments such as ‘tourism destroys the feeling of a country’ and ‘tourism … gives you an unreal picture of the country’ portraying this viewpoint. A young male from Western Australia expressed similar sentiments: ‘I like Australia the way it is – I’m not that old but it’s already started to change – it’s trying to be like other countries’. The view was expressed by some respondents that such commercialism prioritised economic gains at the expense of the environment - ‘making things that are purely for money… for the sake of making a buck’. Decision making with integrity and morality and compassion with the destination was suggested to be more appropriate.

We’ve seen things happen on the East coast time and time again, we’ve seen things 30, 40 years ago and then we’ve seen them now and they’ve virtually been destroyed just too much pollution, just too much of everything really. You lose your fishing, you lose everything, it’s such a shame. You have to go a long way in this country for peace and quiet and clean.

The advent of mass tourism has been seen to detract from the overall visitor experience. The feeling that developers were ‘placing suburbia in a holiday spot’ spoiled the relaxed atmosphere and experience of a destination: ‘you’ve got to dress up too much to go somewhere and your not allowed in if you are not dressed … it just takes the fun out of your time there’. It was felt that people went on holiday to get away from this pressure: ‘you’re going from the city to get away from people and then you end up basically coming to another city.’ For some respondents, there was a sense that this more ‘sophisticated’ holidaying experience came with a higher price tag, which would force them out. Amongst those who expressed this opinion, the assumption was made that the ‘people who’ve got money’ were the international tourists, while local holiday makers were excluded from these destinations.

Many respondents also commented that bad development interacted negatively with the natural environment at two levels. Firstly, development that was not sympathetic to the natural environment aesthetically was seen to be detrimental. The following quote illustrates a clash between the natural setting and the ‘concrete jungles’ of the Gold Coast:

The sole purpose why people went [to the Gold Coast] originally was not for the high rises but for the lifestyle that the land had, like the beautiful beach or the beautiful river … so by them building a high rise you’ve taken away half the reason. The reason people went there was to get away from the city …
to have fun in the natural environment and when you are in the natural environment you look back and there’s all these high rises – they clash.

Secondly, tourism was also viewed as negative when the development itself damaged or destroyed the natural terrain. This was seen to be a particularly important point in remote and fragile natural environments. Uncontrolled or unplanned development was given as another example of bad development. Coral Bay was given as a case in point by a local resident, where haphazard development, a lack of planning codes and inadequate infrastructure to cope with visitor numbers were given as examples of bad development. Many other respondents commented on the impact of development, which did not cater for the number or types of visitors arriving, or which didn’t have control mechanisms in place to limit visitor impacts. Examples of tourists walking on dunes, littering and disturbing wildlife were cited as situations, which needed to be controlled in tourist destinations.

**Good Development**

The qualities that reflect good development have been summarised in Table 4. Surprisingly, Rottenest Island and Smiths Beach were seen to be an example of both good and bad forms of development. Despite these discrepancies, the qualities signified good tourism developments were almost universal. Particularly, the development needs to be ‘design sensitive’; blending in with the natural environment and ‘fitting in with the landscape so it is not incongruous’. Maintaining the natural appeal of a place and being established in an environmentally sensitive fashion, which kept areas in pristine condition, were considered crucial qualities. When asked what made developments ‘fit in’ environmentally the choice of natural materials and colour tones, which blended in with the landscape was seen as important considerations.

Good developments were described as ‘low key’ and low rise (no higher than tree level a suggestion of an appropriate height given by more than one respondent), with limited and appropriate landscaping using native fauna. Limiting the extent of development and choosing appropriate locations for developments was also important, as was the overall size and scope of development, so that the natural area was not overwhelmed with built structures. Moreover, developments that employed ecologically low impact facilities such as solar power, recycled water and composting toilets were suggested as ways in which tourism development could be more sustainable. Also, many respondents felt strongly that good planning and proper management were an integral part of good tourism development. This included the need to have restrictions and/or control over the numbers of tourists and access to the area. Examples of such restrictions or control included the provision of interpretative signage, elevated walkway trails and steps down to the beach to keep people off the dunes. Some campers at Ningaloo Station felt steps were being taken to achieve this:

“They are doing everything here and the campers are looking after the place and seeing that it stays as natural as possible and doing what they can to regenerate and that is the sort of thing that I believe Australians should be striving for. Campers [are] putting seaweed into the sand dunes to regenerate vegetation, they recycle or take all the rubbish home with them. They virtually leave the place the way they find it.”

It was felt that increasing numbers of tourists should be accompanied by increased restrictions, with Monkey Mia cited as a place where this was being achieved through restrictions on viewing and touching the dolphins, thereby ensuring sustainable tourism development. Education and encouragement of tourists to learn about the environment was viewed as a key issue in good tourism development also, particularly regarding regulations, signage, littering and environmental issues:

“There’s a lot of people that aren’t actually aware of …what to do and what not to do and I think that’s something that’s very important that needs to be told to people when they go to an area, to learn about it and appreciate it. If you can understand something I think that you have a bit more respect for it.”

One requirement that emerged strongly in this discussion was the need for development to be site-specific: ‘You have to look at the whole environment. You can’t just put something in one place… it may not work in other’. There was a need also for developments to be visitor-specific. Many respondents felt that visitors to Western Australia were seeking specific types of holidays:

“When people come to WA they come for different holiday experiences … travelling around … they’re prepared to travel around more… to see the sights … see the country and look at the natural environment.”

In terms of how this could be achieved in Western Australia, ecotourism and eco-resorts were suggested as examples of suitable tourism development for the state. It was also suggested that the focus should be on attracting special interest tourists as opposed to mass tourists as they had less impact on the environment. While a proportion of respondents suggested small scale tourism developments were best, such as camping and safari camps, other respondents argued that good tourism development did not have to offer only ‘basic’ accommodation. Resorts in the Daintree region of Queensland were illustrated examples where sustainable
development had occurred in a spectacular natural setting:
They’ve managed to provide up-market facilities but … fitting in and looking part of their environment [through] colour tonings that fit in with nature and also not high structures and their building materials…. It all seems to blend … you can have something from the outside that fits in and inside it can be 4 or 5 star as well.

Attitudes to Tourism Development in the Coral Coast Region

The need for different types of development in different environments and places was very apparent during discussions with respondents regarding their attitude to tourism development in the Coral Coast region. Many people expressed quite ambivalent views about the need for further development of the region. While conceding the growing importance of tourism to the region, respondents were cautious about anything that would detract from their holiday experiences in the area or would threaten the natural environment.

For many people, the area was a ‘special place’ attracting a particular type of visitor because it is ‘isolated and fairly undeveloped’. These visitors are prepared ‘to travel, see the sights and experience the natural environment’. One local resident explained:
I know most overseas tourists … that do come here, come because it is isolated and it is fairly undeveloped and has a small population. So I think that it is probably its appeal and to try to compete with the East coast on its own terms I think would be quite dumb.

It was felt that anything that detracted from the natural experience available in the area would be an inappropriate development and would destroy what made this region different from other destinations. Respondents stressed that the area should not develop like a Gold Coast, but rather promote its existing strengths, which were seen as its natural setting and nature-based assets:
Go for the more eco-type tourism, getting the more adventurous, hard core tourist and travellers because they are the sort of people that come here and they come here for a reason. They don’t come here for a mini Gold Coast…. That’s not why people come to [the West Coast] they come to get away from it all.

International respondents felt that domestic visitors to the area were seeking the same types of experience as themselves:
I have the impression that all Australians are travelling with their campervans so I don’t know where they want to build a resort … they don’t really need it … except for tourists coming in from abroad.

Respondents recognised that this special, pristine atmosphere could easily be spoilt by inappropriate development. A Swiss visitor seemed to think it was just a matter of time, stating ‘I came to WA now because I heard that in five years time, it would be too spoilt and changed’. An Eastern states visitor explained that the development of large resorts and additional tourist activities would ‘[destroy] the area’ and change the character of visitors:
People like me who like this area as it is now, won’t be here – we’ll be moving to an area that is like this, untouched, and if we can’t find one in WA … we’ll go to Tasmania or New Zealand or wherever, but we’ll still seek it out.

A common theme identified within was the ‘need to retain the reason why people go there’ and to maintain ‘the uniqueness of what the West Coast is about’ on the Coral Coast. There were mixed opinions, however, about whether further tourist development was warranted or appropriate for the region. Many of the attitudes expressed regarding future development were framed in terms of negotiation; development itself might not be a problem, but it needed to be done in a sustainable manner, in places that could cope, and with good management practices and regulations in place. Amongst those who felt that the region should cater for additional tourists there was a general agreement that this development had to be done in a way that did not impact negatively on the natural environment, as one man surmised ‘maybe we need to be a little more prepared to develop some areas but they have to be done sensitively’. Another respondent felt similarly:
You do have to allow some development because large numbers of people need more infrastructure. You have to have sewage works, you have to have reasonable road systems… but it has to be done in a way that is very managed and controlled.

In terms of the types of development that would be appropriate in the region, the majority of people expressed the opinion that any future development should be ‘more of the same’ – more camping grounds and caravan sites, or the development of eco-lodges, safari camps or other low impact developments that would not damage the fragile, pristine and rugged natural environment. These respondents felt that the environment had to come first; that if development had to proceed it should be minimal, even kept inland, and should use materials and colours that blended with the environment. This was the view of a visitor from the Eastern States:
I don’t think development on the West coast is a bad thing, I just think the type of structures would be different to what you’d build in town, so once you are getting on to the coast and you’re in amongst
the…sand dunes…you are probably having to go for…low level structures…and then picking your materials that are in keeping with the environment as well.

An interesting finding was that a number of people seemed to be willing to sacrifice the usual comforts of home, or even the usual luxuries sought in holiday accommodation, for the special experience in this region. For example, two women at Coral Bay both gave a preference of hotel or resort accommodation for their usual home, or even the usual luxuries sought in holiday accommodation, for the special experience in this region. For example, two women at Coral Bay both gave a preference of hotel or resort accommodation for their usual home, or even the usual luxuries sought in holiday accommodation, for the special experience in this region. However they expressed a real aversion to staying in a high rise hotel in Coral Bay:

We don’t want to see that in a million years in a place like this…I just think it would just spoil the whole…aesthetics; I think it would spoil the whole feel of the place…it’s not conducive to a place like this, at all. One of the beauties of coming here is the simplicity….so it’s a totally different holiday; I would hate to see any form of development of that density in this area….we do all the washing and cleaning and cooking on these holidays, but somehow it’s different from being at home.

Opinions about appropriate development differed depending on the location of the respondents. Amongst those camping at the stations, there was universal rejection of the idea of developing more sophisticated or substantial accommodation in these locations. A young male from Perth explained that there was no need to put extra facilities at Gnaraloo Station as the reason for visiting is for ‘the outdoor side of it, rather than the pools and the cocktails’. As another man explained ‘Hey my clothes stink of smoke and my beer is lukewarm. I can live with that.’ He argued that those who did not want to camp ‘can stay in a high rise on the Gold Coast’. A very similar opinion was expressed by a number of other campers at the stations:

You need the places where the people who’ve got money and want to live that way can go to them and I don’t believe that they should be going to the extent they are going and trying to ruin our wildernesses…cos you are just spoiling it.

They can go to the Gold Coast if they want that much civilisation….If you want to experience this then you just go with what’s offered and if you are really sophisticated, you don’t come here. There is too much sand, too much sun…you can’t order in your favourite wine.

A resident of Coral Bay felt also that people visiting should ‘be prepared to camp because that is what this place is all about; get in touch with nature.’

There were a number of people who felt that development of additional, and in some instances a greater variety of, tourist accommodation was warranted at Coral Bay and Exmouth. For example, someone argued for the need for more ‘upscale development’, such as self-catering accommodation in Coral Bay or something a little more ‘up market’:

You need a range of accommodation types…you need something that will cater to most different tastes. You need something that will be for people that want to be a little more pampered maybe, as long as it’s ecologically sound.

The majority of respondents were against any form of development of high rise buildings, large resorts, hotels, and marinas. They viewed high rises as particularly inappropriate for most parts of the region. The association between high rises and the Gold Coast was strong, with this type of development described as being ‘horrible’, ‘flashy’ and a ‘concrete jungle’. Another respondent summarised the view of many ‘it’s just not something for this area, it wouldn’t fit in, it’s not the style of the whole of the West Coast’.

There was some acceptance, however, that some type of larger development might be appropriate in the ‘gateway’ destinations of Carnarvon or Exmouth. These towns could then act as ‘entry points’ to the more remote and pristine areas of the coast:

I think Exmouth is alright to develop more [because] it’s already a bigger town…I’d like to leave the gorges and creeks and that between Coral Bay and Exmouth as it is but if anything just develop Exmouth more…and then if people want to come to Coral Bay they can travel down…so have one key centre where people can branch out.

The idea of Exmouth acting as a base for excursions into other more remote and pristine parts of the region seemed particularly popular with respondents:

People will then drive, if they want to, or hire caravans or something smaller, or daytrip overnight, or fly…you could do it from there, because then they could say ‘well we slummed it for a day or two’. They could, because that type of person will do that for a short space of time but they don’t want to do it for any length of time they want to go back and they want to have their casinos or they want to have…everything laid on and that’s fine.

The larger and more permanent populations in these towns were seen as another rationale for further development in these areas:

[These towns] would probably be glad of it, because then they’ve got people all year round and it would help their economy, so that’s fine. Build them in there, or close to the town, so the people from the town also can go and share those when they want a night out.

A minority of respondents went further, arguing that Exmouth and Carnarvon needed more tourist attractions
for visitors: ‘Exmouth itself is fine I suppose but there is nothing there…. I can’t imagine anyone saying ‘Oh this is interesting’; TAB, fish and chip shop, second hand book shop – it’s a nothing.’ Suggestions for additional attractions included a nightclub, theme park, aquarium and marina.

Most respondents felt that any future development should take place in existing tourist destinations and that only areas with tourist development already in place should be expanded. As one woman interviewed at Turquoise Bay, Cape Range National Park explained:

I mean I’m not a mad greenie as such but … places like this should be kept pristine, we’ve got too few of them and they get loved to death, virtually.

An international backpacker expressed a similar opinion of the natural appeal of Cape Range National Park: ‘when you come to WA or to an area like this, you are more [natural] … with camping … you have the sunrise, you have the sunset’. She was also completely opposed to the idea of any further development of accommodation facilities in the National Park. Another respondent felt that more accommodation in the National Park would be alright, as long as it was low key and ‘done well’.

Others felt that small, low impact developments spread along the coast would be less damaging to the natural environment, as the following quotations suggest:

Have little eco villages spread out, permanent tents, with a little shop spread along the coast that’s as far as you need to go, you’re there to rough it and have a good time.

Develop it with an emphasis on maintaining the uniqueness of … this place… if you have the land to expand, I don’t see any problem with that, as long as it didn’t disturb any of the basic structure of the land here … it all comes down to management.

As expressed above, it become well argued that further development would need to be matched with more regulations, control and monitoring of visitors. As one woman in Coral Bay stated: ‘I don’t actually have a problem with the people, I think we just need to manage it’. This view is reiterated by the following respondent:

You would hope that people that are visiting this place realise how precious it is and also are environmentally aware … but we’ve been up here for a number of years and you can just go out on the ocean and people are just going ‘clonk’ with an anchor down, I mean you can just see the damage… If you don’t tell them they are doing something naughty, how do they know? …. You need to have people enforcing things here. You are in a very unique environment that everybody wants to enjoy.

While many respondents did see scope for further development of accommodation options to cater for greater tourist numbers, others expressed the view that numbers of visitors should be capped, and no further development should take place, even if it meant that they couldn’t visit in the future. A ballot system like that used for Rottenest Island was suggested by a couple of people. Others suggested that keeping roads unsealed, charging for entry, and not building more airports would be other ways to keep numbers down in the more remote areas. These people felt that no matter what form development took, any more people to the area would ruin the experience:

There should only be a limited amount of people allowed in here at one time … too many people, too many things get destroyed; it doesn’t get a chance to grow back.

A resident in Coral Bay expressed similar views:

There are a lot of places in the world that you can’t get in for ten years…. We can’t go around and build multiple amounts of accommodation to suit, because the more accommodation there is the more people are going to say ‘let’s go’. They can only really get on the waiting list like everyone else everywhere else…. The Gold Coast was built on the same principle, wasn’t it? They needed more room to get more tourists in and look at it - it’s shocking.

Another respondent expressed the complexity and ambivalence of the issue:

I think everyone really should be allowed to come … but it’s just like in these little tiny areas [like Coral Bay] … the impact of so many people [the area] really can’t tolerate it…. Maybe they’re just going to make it so that only what can be available in the caravan parks and what they’ve got that’s it, I don’t know.

Some respondents, particularly those camping at one of the stations, were completely opposed to the idea of any further development:

Who wants to come up here? There’s nothing here …if people want to go down south and … see the big trees and all this sort of thing well then yes, there’s something for them to see, alright you put there hotels and motels in if that’s what the people want … but up here I reckon is an entirely different story all together. There are areas that should be developed for tourism and everything else, but there are areas that should be left alone.

There was a sense for many of those respondents opposed to further development that this opposition was due largely to the effect it would have on their own experience – ‘It just won’t be the same place to come to’ being a view expressed repeatedly. For those respondents on limited incomes in particular it was felt that the development of more services and facilities in the region would result in them being unable to afford to visit, as a woman camping at Coral Bay explained:
The shires need to do something about getting proper sewerage in … and then the costs will go up, the costs will go skyrocketing and then this place will be just like one of those resorts that … the rich people can afford, and then we won’t be coming, unfortunately, because that’s just the way it goes.

A similar view was expressed by a man camping at Ningaloo Station:

We don’t want the wilderness chalets up here along the North west coast …. If they build those wilderness chalets and everything elsewhere will people like us go? That’s what they want to do, squeeze the little person out.

For a woman camping at Lefroy Bay, this has already occurred at Coral Bay:

I’d love for us to go on the glass bottom boat and have a look … but $30 a head, for an hour’s tour….They just put everything out of the price of a normal family with [kids]…. That’s why we like coming up here, you know, we can go out squidding and we can just go out and cruise around in the boat and just do things that don’t cost a lot of money…. The international people that can afford it, [but] our people can’t afford to pay that amount … $60 is $60; that’s two weeks here.

For these people, then, any suggestion of future development would reduce their opportunity to come to ‘their’ place.

Maud’s Landing Development

Once respondents had been interviewed at length about their views of tourism and tourism development in the Coral Coast region and Western Australia, the researchers asked a series of questions to explore their knowledge and attitudes towards the Maud’s Landing development proposal. At the time of the interviews at Gnaraloo Station, the future of this proposal was still undecided. By the time the interviewers arrived in Coral Bay, the announcement had been made by Dr Geoff Gallop that the proposal had been rejected. With only a couple of exceptions, the respondents interviewed at Coral Bay, Cape Range National Park and Ningaloo Station were aware that the Maud’s Landing development would not proceed.

The following section provides a summary of respondents’ knowledge and attitudes towards the Maud’s Landing proposal and explores the sources of knowledge that formed their opinions and attitudes towards the development.

Knowledge of the Maud’s Landing Development Proposal

Awareness of the proposed Maud’s Landing development was very high. Only four people interviewed had not heard about the development proposal. Two of those with no knowledge of the proposal were international tourists. Despite most people having heard about the proposal, and many having quite strong attitudes towards the development, few had detailed or accurate knowledge about what the development would involve. This was confirmed by a Coral Bay resident. When asked about the level of most people’s knowledge, her response was ‘really bad’:

I think there are a lot of misinformed people out there, a lot of people driving around with ‘Save Ningaloo Reef’ stickers that actually didn’t understand what the resort entailed and had never even visited the area and cos I’m one that will go ‘so have you been to Ningaloo?’ ‘Oh no, no, no’; ‘went there once about 20 years ago’ …. Yeah, so I think there’s a lot of misinformed people there but I don’t think the developers did a very good PR job, as in letting people know what it was … I think everybody [thought it would be] a huge Port Douglas style resort, that was it … [I don’t think they knew] it was made up of a whole cross section of …styles of accommodation rather than just being for a five star resort with a certain type of clientele.

This observation was confirmed in the interviews conducted in all sites on the Coral Coast, although it appeared that those who were interviewed in Coral Bay, or who had spent time in Coral Bay, were more knowledgeable about what the proposal had involved. Most people knew that the development proposal involved a four to five star resort, however there was little knowledge of specific details about the size of the proposed development (most people substantially underestimated its size), or the scope of the development. There were also a number of respondents who believed the development would be a high rise hotel, rather than the two-storeyed structure actually planned. A number of other people described their image of the proposed development as being similar to the Cable Beach Resort in Broome, with a mix of bars and restaurants, as well as accommodation. Whilst most respondents knew about plans for a marina, details about the location and nature of this, or its size, were again vague. For example, a couple of respondents believed that the marina would involve blasting a hole through the reef itself, unaware of the natural break in the reef which exists off Maud’s Landing.

The location of the planned resort was also a little unclear, with a number of respondents believing that the development was planned for Coral Bay township itself. Generally, those staying in Coral Bay were better informed about the location of the proposed development. One woman on her first visit to Coral Bay explained
that before she had been to the area, she had also been confused about its location: ‘I think the average Joe Blow would think they are talking about a development [in Coral Bay]…not Maud’s Landing’:

I think the problem is as well that it is quite confusing for a lot of people in the sense that they keep promoting it as ‘Ningaloo Reef’ and then Ningaloo Reef/Coral Bay and then people automatically think of Coral Bay… that’s what I thought …. It’s quite confusing, because Maud’s Landing is quite a separate entity.

As indicated above, the association of the Maud’s Landing development proposal with the Ningaloo Reef was very strong. A number of people were more aware of the ‘Ningaloo Reef Resort’ than any association with Maud’s Landing, and their attitudes towards the development was framed in terms of the reef, suggesting the influence of the ‘Save Ningaloo Campaign’ (see below).

When asked if they would consider staying at the proposed development the majority of respondents stated that it would be too expensive for many people, including families: ‘it wasn’t for you or I … you would be able to drive past and say ‘well I’ve seen the hotel at Maud’s Landing and that’s probably all … you probably couldn’t even afford a drink in the place.’ It was also felt that the resort would not attract the people who enjoyed experiencing the natural attractions of the area. As one respondent suggested, ‘[It would be for] people who would like to look at a painting on the wall rather than the ocean floor with all the coral’.

Many respondents felt that the resort would appeal to international tourists rather than West Australians, mainly due to the perceived expense of the accommodation and the perception of their different holiday requirements and activities:

They love [Coral Bay], but they wouldn’t want to stay here for long… they’re used to a different type of holiday … it’s a bit like the old thing, ‘well I’ve done Europe … I’ve done Ningaloo Reef’… They come here and go on tours … just another thing to strike off ‘I’ve done that’. Domestic tourists come here for something different; they come to do what we are doing right now [relaxing on the beach].

**Sources of Information about the Maud’s Landing Development Proposal**

The majority of respondents had become aware of the proposed development within the past six months to two years, which corresponds with the advent of the ‘Save Ningaloo Campaign’ in 2000. Only one respondent, a local resident, had been aware of the proposed development since 1987, although a number of respondents were aware that the development had been planned for more than a decade. Most respondents stated that they had first heard about the development through the news media, although many others had first heard about it while visiting the Coral Coast region through displays, petitions or conversations with other visitors. One respondent stated that he had read about the proposal in a surfing magazine. Visiting the region also increased some respondents’ interest in the Maud’s Landing development issue.

**Media Coverage**

The media in Western Australia (television coverage and newspapers) was considered the most influential source of information for many respondents in terms of shaping their opinions of the Maud’s Landing development. Most respondents felt that the coverage had been fair, representing both sides of the argument:

It’s almost like they’re running two stories, like the West [Australian newspaper] runs two … one week it’s not a good idea the next week it’s a good idea…. I think it was presented in a reasonable way … you were left … to really look at it very closely, sit down and read everything you could and make an informed decision about what your position was…. It got a lot of media coverage but I don’t think it was all negative… I think they were reasonably unbiased… and I think the West [Australian newspaper] was the only one that ran with it.

However, there was disagreement amongst some other respondents as to whether the media coverage was predominantly for or against the Maud’s Landing development. Many respondents were less sure about how much detail was gleaned from these media reports, which seems to be confirmed by the generally low level of specific knowledge about the development proposal amongst respondents.

**Friends and Family**

Another very important source of knowledge was conversations with friends, family members and work colleagues, particularly those who were actively opposed to the development:

A friend of mine … is very much a greenie. She would be absolutely against Maud’s Landing because … she’s against anything that is going to damage the environment I suppose…. You don’t play with these sorts of things ‘you don’t get a second chance, you can’t put it back together, it’s gone’… Like the coral here, once that’s gone, it doesn’t just grow back overnight. In a sense I do agree with things like that … we are doing enough damage as it is to the planet, I just don’t think we have to help it along … I just don’t think we can take too many chances.
Save Ningaloo Action Group

Respondents were explicitly asked about their awareness and attitudes towards the activities of the Save Ningaloo action group. The activities analysed were bumper stickers, demonstrations including petitions, rallies and protests and celebrity involvement. The majority of respondents were aware of the bumper stickers and rallies organised by the action group, while some others were not aware that these were the activities of one action group. While most people felt that they had learnt most about the development from the media or from word of mouth, the ‘Save Ningaloo Reef’ bumper stickers distributed by the action group were the most frequently mentioned source of awareness about the proposed development. Most people interviewed had seen the bumper stickers ‘everywhere’, with most parts of the state between Albany and Exmouth mentioned as places where the stickers had been seen. One respondent reported seeing them as far away as the Northern Territory and Noosa, Queensland. A number of respondents stated that the stickers were more frequently seen in certain suburbs in Perth, such as beach suburbs, surfing spots and ‘well to do’ areas such as Claremont, Dalkeith and Subiaco. A Mt Lawley resident explained the prevalence of stickers in her suburb: ‘every other car has just about got [one] they’re all baby boomers like us … supporting all sorts of causes.’

A few respondents acknowledged that they were not sure exactly what the bumper stickers were protesting about. For example, one young Perth woman believed that the stickers were simply referring to environmental issues surrounding the reef. In a couple of cases, seeing the bumper stickers provided the impetus to find out more about the development proposal. For example, two international backpackers mentioned that their hostel in Exmouth had a sticker on the fridge, and this had initiated their first conversation with other backpackers about the proposed development. A recent resident of Coral Bay similarly used a general awareness of the development as a starting point for his own investigation of the issue:

I’d heard about it in Perth, obviously the ‘Save Ningaloo’ stickers were all around. I didn’t really know a great deal about it so when I came up here I thought ‘I want to find out about it, I don’t want to just jump on a bandwagon, I want to see what people think’, and I asked people about it… Obviously my instincts said that it wasn’t a good idea. I’m not really into that sort of thing but I thought there’s no point just jumping on a bandwagon.

An important tactic of the ‘Save Ningaloo Campaign’ was to recruit well known celebrities to promote their cause. On 15 occasions respondents were able to name celebrities who were involved in the campaign over the Maud’s Landing proposal. The most frequently mentioned celebrity was author Tim Winton. Generally respondents felt that Tim Winton was an appropriate spokesman for the campaign, based on his long history of visiting and writing about places like the Coral Coast region:

I think he’s a very environmentally aware person. I think he uses his position quite well, in the sense… I think he’s incredibly passionate; just read Dirt Music….I mean Dirt Music was written all about a place like this.

Actors Toni Collette and Tammin Thurstall, musician John Butler, and basketball player, Luc Longley were also mentioned as celebrity spokespeople for the ‘Save Ningaloo Campaign’, although one respondent was confused about Luc Longley’s involvement, believing him to be a spokesperson for the development. This respondent told his wife ‘he’s got a financial interest in it … he’s got money in the consortium that … wanted to build it’.

Respondents had mixed feelings about the involvement of celebrities in a campaign like this. A number of people acknowledged that celebrities in the campaign gave it ‘clout’ and ‘a public face’ and would ensure that the public were more likely to believe what they said because they were held in high regard and had nothing to gain from their involvement. On the contrary, some respondents felt that celebrities’ involvement was unwarranted, as they did not really represent the people and were removed from everyday folk’s experiences – ‘they don’t have to save all year to have a holiday’ and ‘They are not your average person … I couldn’t see them coming north for two weeks of the year for a camping holiday’ being two of the comments received of this nature.

The ‘Save Ningaloo’ action group arranged a number of rallies, information booths and petitions in protest of the Maud’s Landing development proposal over more than two years in Perth and Coral Bay. A small number of respondents felt that these activities had been the most influential medium for disseminating information about the proposed development. Other people commented that if it had not been for these rallies, there would not have been as much media coverage. Therefore, indirectly these actions were very influential: ‘if they really want to gain from their involvement. On the contrary, some respondents felt that celebrities’ involvement was unwarranted, as they did not really represent the people and were removed from everyday folk’s experiences – ‘they don’t have to save all year to have a holiday’ and ‘They are not your average person … I couldn’t see them coming north for two weeks of the year for a camping holiday’ being two of the comments received of this nature.

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Two bus loads of protesters, they stripped off … completely naked, lay down and wrote on their bums ‘Save Our Ningaloo Reef … we all just laughed … and then they all ran into the water and ran straight over the Ningaloo Reef … stubbed their toes and everything, so we thought that was a bit of joke.

Other respondents mentioned seeing a booth set up by the action group at the Big Day Out Concert.

Respondents were asked their opinions of the influence and actions of the ‘Save Ningaloo’ group. The majority of people agreed that the actions of this organisation had been influential in the rejection of the
proposal, and some even felt that their actions had been critical. Some respondents expressed surprise that the development had been rejected:

We just thought it was going to go ahead regardless of what anyone thought anyway and then they said … it wasn’t … we said … oh that’s a surprise … because usually the [developers] get what they want.

The action group was seen as ‘[giving] people a voice’ and demonstrating that people who voice their opinions passionately can stop development. A number of respondents expressed the opinion that the issue was an emotive one, particularly the connection between the Maud’s Landing development and the Ningaloo Reef, and that it was ‘their issue that worked for them’:

It’s a really emotive issue, the reef; it’s like say the forest or nuclear weapons…. Everyone wants the forest to be saved, everyone wants nuclear weapons not to destroy the world; ‘I want to save the reef, I don’t want the reef to be destroyed’. So it’s a funny thing, where that’s where all the support is coming from, because people immediately don’t want to see anything bad happening to the environment these days and I think they’ve just sort of played upon that.

A couple of respondents felt that the development proposal had been rejected purely for political reasons rather than for environmental reasons, as environmental requirements had been met. These people viewed the action group as critical in rousing public opposition to the development. As one man in favour of the development begrudgingly acknowledged:

You’ve got to give the knockers their due – they have done a very good job of getting their brochures out. The people who didn’t want it have done a fabulous job of getting the publicity out.

In light of the above comments, it is interesting that few of the respondents in this research felt that the action group had influenced their own opinions directly.

While the majority of respondents who were aware of the action group could see the role they had in the rejection of the Maud’s Landing development proposal, there were a number of people with quite negative views about the organisation and its members. Interestingly, these critical opinions were not restricted to those in favour of the development proposal. A number of people described the members of the action group as ‘mung beans’, and felt that they were ‘extreme environmentalists’ who ‘have no facts to back up their ideas’. One man whose sister was a member of the organisation described her and her friends as ‘very idealistic and romantic about environmental issues but [haven’t] really been in the real world’. As he explained ‘when you leave uni and you have got a real job, there is less time on your hands and you become a little more cynical and a realist about things.’

A woman who had experienced the nude protest in Coral Bay in July 2002 and was generally opposed to the Maud’s Landing development was even more opposed to the protestors:

I wouldn’t even listen to those ones with their display in the nude. I just thought that was a joke … I didn’t like it because … they had to spend so much money on coppers coming up here to get people off the beach so that the young children wouldn’t see it and I thought that that was really encroaching on our own holiday…. we were all having a lovely time, it was a beautiful day, and then it was ‘oh, there are going to be nudists here, would you like to get off the beach if you’ve got children’… it was a waste of taxpayers money as far as I’m concerned.

Other Sources

Many university students interviewed said that they had heard a lot about the proposal through environmentally active university students. A number of backpackers had learnt about the development by talking with fellow backpackers in hostels along the West Coast or from tour bus drivers. Generally it was felt that these conversations were quite important in shaping their own opinions. Other places, which were cited as sources of information included displays in shopping centres and at concerts (such as the Big Day Out), and through visits to the Coral Coast region. A couple of backpackers mentioned a write-up in the most recent edition of the Lonely Planet Guide for Western Australia as their source of knowledge about the proposal.

Attitudes to the Maud’s Landing Development Proposal

Respondents were asked their opinion of the proposed Maud’s Landing development. Responses fell into four broad categories and generally reflected the respondents’ previously mentioned attitudes towards development in the area. Firstly, there were many respondents who were strongly opposing the development. Secondly, there were those with more ambivalent views, who could see some value in the development proposal but also had many reservations about its impact. Thirdly, a number of respondents held generally positive views about the proposal, with important provisos. Finally, there were some respondents who felt they did not have enough knowledge about the proposal, or limited interest in the issue to formulate an opinion about the development.
**Strong Opposition**

Some respondents were completely opposed to the Maud’s Landing development proposal. Strong passionate opposition was expressed: ‘we hate it’, ‘it’s shocking’ and ‘dead against it’ and these respondents experienced real relief when the announcement was made that the development was rejected: ‘when we heard it was squashed it was like ‘Yay!’’. Specifically, one respondent camping at Gnaraloo Station ‘horror, absolute horror’ when the proposal was announced:

> It just horrified us to see where it was, how much it would take of the environment itself that is absolutely pristine. We knew what would happen to the reef and we don’t want it, we want it left as it is, so put it somewhere where it’s not going to harm

The majority of respondents were against the development on environmental grounds. Most of these people did not believe the developers’ assurance that the environment wouldn’t be harmed: ‘they reckoned it wasn’t going to affect the environment but I don’t believe that at all. Every time they’ve done these things, something goes wrong.’ This group was very concerned about the development’s impact on the pristine environment and the reef particularly during the construction of the marina. Many felt that the dredging and pollution during construction would cause erosion, damage fragile coral and sea grasses and would affect the ocean currents. It was firmly believed by many respondents that the development would cause destruction to the natural habitat and marine life including nesting turtles, manta rays, reef sharks and whale sharks. Many quoted the Great Barrier Reef experience as an example of what would happen to the Ningaloo Reef and felt that a lesson should be learned from the Great Barrier Reef as Ningaloo Reef was a very important part of not only the West Australian, but Australian coastline.

Moreover, the additional people and boats were seen to be detrimental to reef and surrounding region. As a Coral Bay resident explained:

> The thing is, cos there are Tiger Sharks around there, people won’t be able to swim around there very safely so you are going to get a thousand or so extra people in the holiday season coming around here and squeezing into these beaches, pissing and shitting in the water.

Furthermore, the location of the development was a cause for concern and some respondents suggested Exmouth or Carnarvon as a more appropriate location. Others suggested a smaller resort without a marina would be more acceptable.

The current infrastructural difficulties facing Coral Bay were also seen as a reason to oppose any future development: ‘they can’t handle the sewerage problem at Coral Bay [now] so how are they going to handle it there’. Others were opposed because they saw this as the ‘beginning of the end’ for the area, as the following quotations make clear:

> They do it in one area they start wanting to do it elsewhere, they just want to expand … ‘ah yes, this one is working well and we’re reaping x numbers of dollars out of it, the government is getting so much money back’.

> My only worry is that it is not going to stop where they say it will. Traditionally governments have always had a …history of … loopholes - ‘well yes, but we didn’t quite mean that’ and then before you know it something hideous arrives… well I become suspicious about things like that, so in a sense that would influence my answer to say ‘No, don’t touch it, let it go’ even though I … would be quite happy with this low key, small development.

Others felt that the economic gain would be short term and that the resort would not be economically beneficial to the wider community at Coral Bay as it would be self contained with any profits going out of the town; the only people benefiting being the developers and resort owners. A few respondents felt that the development was only for international tourists and questioned the need for a marina in a place where the visitors did not have boats. Others thought it would be a remote place for ‘yuppies’ to go without getting their feet dirty.

**Supportive**

The respondents that were in favour of the development all supported it with the proviso that it must not harm the environment:

> If they are going to destroy the reef, then fine, get rid of it, but if there was a way of keeping the reef the same, then let them have it up there, it doesn’t bother me, cos [Coral Bay] would be quieter … as long as it doesn’t harm the environment that’s fine.

> Yes, I am in favour of it as long as the Government is seen managing it. They can call the shots as to whether it is sustainable. … I always thought it should go ahead as long as they meet the requirements and it’s not going to affect the environment. I can’t see why it can’t be done.

Those in favour of a resort at Maud’s Landing cited many reasons why it would be beneficial. Firstly, it was viewed as appropriate in light of the existing damage at Coral Bay. Some respondents felt that the development might solve the current overcrowding problems of Coral Bay of both people and traffic by spreading the visitor numbers. A number of respondents with an ambivalent attitude towards the proposal felt it would have been a
good thing if it had stopped large boats coming into the beach at Coral Bay. The marina was seen as a good solution to current problems:

It would have been for people that are here for holidays like now. They’re still all here, they’re still all doing their stuff, my perception is that they would have had a place to get out from. That area out the front of Maud’s Landing had no coral at all, it’s just sand… so they could go out Maud’s passage and all go fishing and completely avoid [the coral going out and in]… and also the charter boats… they could have been in an area, which takes them out of the bay as well.

In this way, a development at Maud’s Landing was seen as in some way preserving the holiday experience in Coral Bay township that currently existed:

If it was a separate development to this area, and this area was allowed to develop in a different way, in a less sophisticated, less expensive way, then I could possibly see myself supporting it.

Another reason for support of the proposal was that it would have attracted overseas visitors and would have been beneficial for the local economy and would provide much needed facilities, services and infrastructure for both the visitors and local community. Respondents with this opinion expressed the view that there was plenty of scope for further development. A Perth resident travelling with his family argued ‘We need more development not less… I think you can do lovely things without ruining [the environment]’.

Many of those in favour of the development felt that it would not have been a threat to the environment and that the action groups had overemphasised the impact the development would have on flora, fauna and the reef itself:

Well the turtles, the marina itself was going to be an inland port thing, so it is actually where all the salt marsh and stuff is now…the entrance to it was going to be … 50 meters wide… so only that section of beach was going to be used when the rest of it was going to remain the same … turtles would still come up on those beaches and do all those things, it’s just one section that they wouldn’t come to, and that one section where they are not a huge percentage of the nests [although] there are nests there. … A turtle would just come up to the area and go ‘oh I can’t do this now’ and would just go and move up the beach a bit more.

A strong reason given for support of the proposal was the view that the development would have ensured greater environmental regulations were in place than currently exists where ad hoc regulation is seen to be prevalent:

At Maud’s Landing at the moment … well even if you had 500 people camping there at once … you still have to deal with ‘what do they do with their rubbish? Where do they get their water from?… what happens to their sewerage?… so in a sense even though it’s left in its native form, it’s still having a bad impact on the environment just from those three things.

This development proposal was seen also as a way to provide funding and resources to deal with existing sewage problems:

I was dead against it because it was great as it was but now you see they need new sewerage and to make sure the boats go safely and you think ‘yeah stuff has to happen, you can’t keep it the same forever but you have to keep it good.

Respondents in favour of the proposal felt that the developers had displayed a commitment to the environment and education and that the Western Australian DEC and the Western Australian government would have played a central role in environmental management of the ongoing development of the area:

I don’t think the resort was going to have an impact on the environment. It’s like people have the impact on the environment and my view of their commitment to that issue was that they were going to have a huge educational process going on over there with people. …they were going to commit half a million dollars a year towards helping officers of DEC… and that was going to cover … the rangers. … As it is now, CB can expand … to the same number as what it was … but without having to put any money for environmental management.

One of the things that I thought I would be pro that… with a development with that there would also be a lot of responsibility from the developer environmentally … I think that would be a positive thing, but it has to be enforced … maybe they could enforce some sort of ruling or law that ‘this is it’ you know, that you just get one shot at this… ‘do your development now, because you don’t get a chance to expand on this.

Ambivalent Attitudes

A number of those in support of the Maud’s Landing development, and some with more ambivalent attitudes, expressed frustration that emotional arguments regarding the reef had clouded the facts of the matter:

The big thing that they associate with this area are the whale sharks and things like that and… anything to do with dolphins, whales whatever, I mean it sounds silly but people think ‘we have to protect all of this’. 
I think people think ‘if we have a reef like that we should protect it’ but how many actually have been here? I’d just like to have some facts about it before you ban everything. It’s like we are not going to take a chance on anything in case it damages the reef.

These emotional issues regarding the reef had got in the way of the real issues also, which was how to deal with the problems facing the area already:

We need balance. Sure we want to preserve the eco system, but do you want industry? Do you want to have any money in the country? Stop making coal and we would have no pollution but then we would have no money. It’s a kind of naïve view. You can ban everything; stop all the cars and no pollution, but you have to have a quality of life. You are either an economic country or you are not.

This frustration was articulated best by a resident of Coral Bay:

My biggest thing is the whole campaign is ‘save the reef, stop the resort’ … that’s not going to save the reef. There are issues here right now that need addressing; my thing is that if anybody really cared about saving the reef they would be addressing all those issues and would have been doing it for years, rather than just trying to stop one thing from happening.

**Ill-informed Attitudes**

Some respondents surveyed expressed they were neither in favour nor opposed to the development which may have been influenced by their lack of knowledge, interest or personal association with the issues and area concerned. In fact, one young girl camping at Gnaraloo acknowledged that the development proposal did not have a direct impact upon her, so she was less inclined to formulate any opinions: ‘When it’s out of sight, it’s out of mind really…. I suppose I only care about what is affecting me’. It should be stressed, based on earlier discussion that many people had vague, inaccurate or incomplete knowledge about the development and this clearly shaped their opinions. One woman acknowledging ‘I don’t know enough about it … from an environmental point of view to say ‘yes, I think it’s a great idea’ or ‘no, I don’t think it’s a great idea’ …. I feel quite ignorant’. A resident of Coral Bay similarly expressed her concern at the lack of knowledge to formulate a valid opinion:

‘I don’t think a lot of them have any information.…Most of the people I spoke to had a picture in their head that it was going to be a huge Queensland-style high rise building and all the rest of it … I don’t think it’s actually been informed decisions’.

**Involvement in the Maud’s Landing Development Proposal**

Respondents were asked the level of personal involvement they had in campaigns for or against the Maud’s Landing development. Table 5 illustrates the scope of involvement of the Western Australian community. Interestingly, despite the prevalence of strong and passionate views, only a few had been personally involved in opposing the development proposal. This reluctance to get involved was acknowledged by one young respondent:

I guess that’s what makes it hard because I have actually formed an opinion on it and yet I haven’t done any of that [protesting]. That’s the problem they have, the ‘Stop the Resort’ [campaign], there are a lot of people that care but do they care enough to do anything about it?

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Of the respondents interviewed, five had signed a petition opposing the proposal, two respondents had attended anti-development rallies, two had written letters to politicians and/or the newspaper and one respondent had put in a submission to the Environmental Protection Agency with his parents. Four respondents displayed ‘Save Ningaloo Reef’ stickers on their cars with a couple of others having the sticker, but not displaying it. One couple camping at Ningaloo Station, who had written two letters to politicians, described themselves as ‘very much … get up and go, do something about it’:

We have marched when we’ve been able to, we’ve written letters to politicians when we’ve been able to and we don’t just sit down and be counted…. We believe strongly that they’re going too far.

This couple had been involved in a number of demonstrations and rallies opposing other developments in
Western Australia. Interestingly, given their involvement, this couple said they had no knowledge of the ‘Save Ningaloo Campaign’ and while they had seen the bumper stickers, they did not have a sticker displayed.

Two of the residents of Coral Bay had been involved in the rallies held in the town. For one of these respondents, this had been ‘the first … save the something-a-rather I’ve ever been involved in’. The other resident had also written an unpublished letter to The West Australian newspaper, and explained her reason for involvement:

People have to stand up and do something instead of just sitting back and hoping it fixes itself. I’m cautious to jump in head first into something like this because I think you do need to have a look at both sides …. But I just thought that if more people come and more people are there then it does make a difference, and that support, obviously your looking at a governmental process and elections and politics and things, and if there is big enough support shown then it won’t go through … and I enjoyed being involved in it.

In a number of cases, the presence or absence of a bumper sticker on one’s car opposing the development was not necessarily a good indication of attitudes towards the development proposal. The two Coral Bay residents discussed above who were actively opposed to the Maud’s Landing had both opted to not put a bumper sticker on their car. One said ‘I hate people looking at the back of my car’ while the other explained ‘I don’t like advertising my thoughts to people who I’m not directly talking to. I’ll tell you what I think if you ask me’. This was the attitude of another respondent who had signed a petition, but had declined to advertise his views through a bumper sticker. Two other respondents with bumper stickers had ambivalent views about the ‘Save Ningaloo Campaign’. One young male stated that he didn’t want to get involved with the action group because he felt they tended to ‘rant and rave’, while the second woman had ‘modified’ her ‘Stop the Resort’ sticker to read ‘OK if regulated’. While this woman had also signed a petition opposing the development, the opinions she expressed about the development during the interview were generally positive.

A couple of respondents stated that if the proposal was relaunched, they would be more active in protesting than they had been to date:

If the business people regrouped and presented another proposal then I would [get involved] because to me this is very special and should be left alone so all generations can enjoy it. Instead of going ‘oh, it’s dying’, if we maintain it so it’s living and breathing for future generations it will mean something.

None of the respondents in favour of the resort proposal had been actively involved in publicising their opinions. One man acknowledged that it was ‘sexy’ to oppose development, while it was not easy to express support for a development proposal of this nature: ‘I can envisage though, all your neighbours [asking] ‘would you come on the rally?’. Would you really say ‘no I actually believe it would be good’? No, you would just shut up.’ Others also expressed the opinion that it was easier to oppose a development proposal of this sort than to actively support it:

I don’t think there is going to be anyone jumping up and down for the development to go ahead…. People that are anti development – it’s the very sort of core of their existence … and if those things are being challenged then they are prepared to… graze their knuckles and get a broken nose out of it.

You don’t get people protesting because they are wanting something, you get people protesting because they don’t want something. Even thought they might even be in a minority but because they go out and jump up and down in the streets it gets canned.

Section Summary and Recommendations

The previous discussion has raised a number of issues regarding the attitudes of visitors to the Coral Coast region towards tourism development and specifically, the proposal for a tourist development to occur at Maud’s Landing. The discussion has demonstrated that while respondents were generally positive about the promotion and development of the Coral Coast area as a tourist destination, they voiced many concerns about the nature, scope and size of any future development. The issue of greatest concern was the need to preserve and protect the natural environment in any future development, particularly in such a remote area where the main appeal for visitors was the unspoiled natural environment. A common theme became evident among respondents. Any future development would need to occur in a way that was sustainable in the long term in relation to the scope, scale and appearance of the development and in doing so will sensitive to the fragile and remote nature of the destination. The need to regulate and control any future development, and to ensure that regulations put in place were observed, was clearly expressed. Education of visitors about the special and fragile environment of the Coral Coast was seen also to be paramount to ensure a sustainable future for the region.

While the natural environment was clearly the major issue, respondents also felt the need to maintain the character, identity and experience available to visitors such as themselves was equally important. A number of respondents felt that greater numbers of visitors or a changing type of visitor would negatively affect the experience of current visitors, and the simplicity and natural experiences available would be lost. Some people were prepared to sacrifice their own holiday in the area to keep numbers of visitors to a level that was manageable. However, respondents were not prepared to sacrifice ‘their place’ to any future development, which
would lead to a more ‘sophisticated’ and expensive holiday destination and potentially exclude them from the type of holiday they had experienced for years, and in some cases, for generations.

Respondents’ attitudes to tourism development in the region in general were mirrored in their attitudes to the proposed Maud’s Landing development. However, while many people had very strong views opposing the development, the level of knowledge regarding the development was generally low and in a number of cases misinformed. This lack of detailed knowledge of something that was seen to threaten their holiday experiences personally was due to a number of factors. Firstly, the association made by the ‘Save Ningaloo Campaign’ between the Ningaloo Reef and the Maud’s Landing proposal was seen to cloud the issue by some of those in favour of the development. Secondly, it appeared that most of respondents’ knowledge was gleaned from fairly superficial reading of newspaper coverage or from ‘sound bite’ news stories, rather than detailed accounts of the proposal itself. Whether these people would have wanted greater knowledge, however, is open to debate and few people expressed a desire to have had access to more information regarding the proposed development.

Based on the findings of this research, a number of recommendations can be made for future tourist development in the Coral Coast region. Firstly, it is apparent that visitors to the region are attracted primarily by the unique natural environment of the area, and the activities in which they participate are driven by this natural environment. Any future development must be mindful of the current market for the area and be sensitive to the potential to undermine the experience of existing visitors to these remote destinations in their planning, either through the scale or nature of the development proposal. The Coral Coast region is recognised by current visitors as a unique and ‘unsophisticated’ destination, which is the essence of its appeal. The experience of the rejected Maud’s Landing development proposal has demonstrated that any proposal that is perceived as not in line with the setting, either in terms of scale or market base, will not get widespread approval from current visitors to the region. It is important that future development seeks to reinforce the distinctiveness of the region, as different from many parts of Australia, and not undermine this quality in the quest to appeal to new tourist markets. As many respondents stressed, the Coral Coast region offers something unique; altering this appeal may be counterproductive in the long term. This approach would reinforce the recently released marketing strategy of Tourism Western Australia which is promoting the state as ‘The Real Thing’; a place where the visitor can still find the ‘real Australia’ (Tourism WA 2004).

Furthermore, in light of the sensitive and fragile environment, it is recommended that any future development in the majority of the Coral Coast region remain small scale, which reflects the current appeal of the region. Outside the main centres of the region, accommodation options should be limited to forms of camping (from tenting and caravanning to more permanent ‘safari’ tents), or eco-lodge accommodation. While there may be the possibility of additional family-style self-contained accommodation, this should remain small scale so as not to detract from the existing experiences on offer. Moreover, any development must be ‘site specific’ and sensitive to the environment in which it exists. This will require the use of appropriate building materials and colour tonings, with the developments being low-rise, preferably single storey buildings, with limited gardens. The use of environmentally sustainable practices, such as composting toilets, solar heating and recycled water should also be mandatory in such developments.

There is fairly widespread acceptance amongst visitors to the region for the addition of more substantial tourist development in the larger centres of the region, particularly Carnarvon and Exmouth, which are currently seen as underdeveloped as tourist destinations. There is a general view that these two towns should act as ‘gateways’ for the more remote parts of the region, and have the infrastructure and population base to support the development of larger and more ‘upmarket’ accommodation options and other development such as marinas, shopping precincts and restaurants, which would appeal to the tourists these types of resorts seek to attract. It also appears that the current low level of development in the region has resulted in a haphazard and poorly regulated tourist environment, particularly in the township of Coral Bay. With some exceptions, the camping sites at the stations are also largely unregulated. It is critical that before any further development is allowed to proceed, infrastructural issues, such as water supply and sewage disposal, must be addressed at these locations. Rather than the current ad hoc approach to tourism development, it is crucial that any future development in the Coral Coast region must be supported by a substantial management plan, which is enforced through strict and well policed regulations.

The continual monitoring of the effects of visitors on the natural environment, supported by greater resources to educate visitors about their impacts on the sensitive environment, is a crucial component of any future development in the region. No matter how ‘environmentally friendly’ tourist development may be, insensitive or uneducated visitor conduct can have a devastating affect on the environmental sustainability of a region. Visitors, residents and tourism providers need educating about acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in such a fragile environment. The suggestion of one respondent of the provision of a free cinema in Coral Bay to educate tourists about the natural environment may be a relatively low cost and effective medium for such information. Additional ranger patrols enforcing regulations and providing education is also critical. Our operators have a role also in this regard through practising and promoting acceptable environmental management as they are often the public spokespeople for the environment in such destinations.
Chapter 4

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study set out to describe, analyse and explain the political processes, which led to the WA government’s decision to reject the proposed resort and marina complex at Maud’s Landing after 17 years on the drawing board, a decision certainly strongly influenced by the magnitude of opposition, and its vociferous nature, in the wider community. The various interests in the Maud’s Landing development proposal were analysed in this project in exploring the attitudes and perceptions of the ‘community of interest’ to tourism development in general in the region and specifically to the marina development itself.

The study on the ‘community of interest’ has demonstrated that while respondents were generally positive about the promotion and development of the case study area as a tourist destination, they voiced many concerns about the nature, scope and size of any future development. The issue of greatest concern was the need to preserve and protect the natural environment in any future development, particularly in a remote area such as the Coral Coast where the main appeal for visitors was the unspoilt natural environment. The view was repeatedly expressed that future development would need to occur in a way that was sustainable in the long term and would emphasise sensitivity to the fragile and remote nature of the destination, in relation to the scope, scale and appearance of the development. The need to regulate and control any future development and to ensure regulations are implemented was key recommendations expressed. Education of visitors about the special and fragile environment of the Coral Coast was seen also to be paramount to ensure a sustainable future for the region.

While the natural environment was clearly the major issue respondents felt needed to be addressed in any future tourism development in the area, equally important was the need to maintain the character, identity and experience available to visitors. A number of people felt that greater numbers of visitors or a changing type of visitor would negatively affect the experience of current visitors and the simplicity and natural experiences available would be undermined. In fact, some people were prepared to sacrifice their own holiday in the area to keep numbers of visitors to a level that was manageable. However, respondents were not prepared to sacrifice ‘their place’ to any future development, which would lead to a more ‘sophisticated’ and expensive holiday destination and potentially excluding them from the type of holiday they had experienced for years, and in some families, for generations.

Respondents’ attitudes to tourism development in the region in general were mirrored in their attitudes to the proposed Maud’s Landing development. However, while many people had very strong views opposing the development, the level of knowledge regarding the development was generally low and in a number of cases, misinformed. This lack of detailed knowledge of something that was seen to threaten their holiday experiences personally was due to a number of factors. Firstly, the association made by the ‘Save Ningaloo Campaign’ between the Ningaloo Reef and the Maud’s Landing proposal was seen to cloud the issue by some of those in favour of the development. Secondly, it appears that most of respondents’ knowledge was gleaned from fairly superficial reading of newspaper coverage or from ‘sound bite’ news stories, rather than detailed accounts of the proposal itself. Whether these people would have wanted greater knowledge, however, is open to debate.
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