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The Woodland and the Wheatbelt: Tourism Partners in Dryandra Country

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Editors Box

This case study illustrates some of the difficulties and potentials involved in tourism planning and development in rural areas lacking obviously major tourism assets. The dynamics of cooperation between local government, state agencies and businesses are all too obvious. Things are never simple in 'the bush' and here we see the difficulties of dealing with conflicting agendas along with limited human and financial resources. Some aspects of social capital are strong while others are not. Six of the elements of innovation are especially relevant. The material in this chapter developed from application of the innovation assessment models developed through the Sustainable Tourism CRC Prosper project.

Introduction

The key 'players' in this case study are seven rural local government areas, the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) of Western Australia, a significant area of remnant vegetation (Dryandra Woodland) and up to 18 endangered marsupial species. The marsupials are not directly involved in the political dynamics of Dryandra Country but the viewing enclosure within which they reside is. Barna Mia, constructed in 2002, is arguably the icon within an icon that forms the back drop to the seven shires and CALM cooperating to develop a sustainable tourism product and plan for the region. Put another way, CALM and the shires have identified the Dryandra Woodland and Barna Mia as the keystone to development of a wildlife tourism icon that itself can then be the centre of tourism planning and development in Dryandra Country.

Dryandra Country is the name adopted in 2004 to represent the area bounded by the Town of Narrogin and the Shires of Narrogin, Cuballing, Pingelly and Wickepin. This is the latest cooperative network of shires and, as will be discussed later, it has taken some time to develop this particular approach to tourism in the region.

It is, of course, not this straightforward but the process is instructive and encouraging. The following discussion is based on selected aspects of the history of this planning process and will illustrate a number of the indicators of innovation set out earlier in this book. In particular, it will illustrate six indicators.

1. *Institutional infrastructure*: three government agencies of relevance to tourism are active in this case study, CALM, the Wheatbelt Development Commission (WDC) and the West Australian Tourism Commission (WATC).
2. *Entrepreneurial activity*: One particular officer of CALM has been instrumental in this process, especially in the late 1990s.
3. *The role of local government*: Up to seven local government areas have been involved.
4. *Economic competence*: there has been successful and significant application for outside funds to support innovation but so far little ability to generate new investment, employment or new enterprises in tourism or tourism related areas.
5. *Critical mass of resources*: There is a lack here and this is thus one of the weaknesses in terms of innovation.

6. *Clustering of resources*: this region has few obvious tourism resources, including that it is not on a main tourist route out of Perth.

A word on how this chapter was developed is appropriate at this point. CALM initiated a three year study in cooperation with the STCRC and Murdoch University in 2000 with a primary purpose of linking the wildlife tourism product of the then proposed Barna Mia viewing enclosure with community tourism support for and development of tourism. The project was funded but delays to Barna Mia opening saw the project undertaken in 2003. Surveying of visitors was undertaken at Barna Mia but the results in this chapter arise primarily from work done with stakeholders (interviews) and documentary research.

It is important to point out that this case study illustrates some of the problems facing innovation as well as factors facilitating it. Of particular concern for this region is a combination of two factors. First, other than the Dryandra Woodland, the region does not possess an obvious tourism product upon which to base an industry – unless the open agricultural landscape itself is tapped as a basis for rural tourism. Second, the potential for tourism development is further stifled by lack of interest from existing businesses that see no need or potential for innovation in tourism.

Geographical and Political Location

The Central Southern Wheatbelt is a subregion of the Western Australian Wheatbelt, an elongated band of agricultural landscape that separates the temperate, relatively populous southwest corner of the state from the more isolated and arid southern central and south-eastern regions. The Central Southern Wheatbelt is comprised of a total of 15 local government areas south-east of Perth, the state's capital. It is an area of about 45,000 km² with a population of approximately 18,000 residents (2001 census) and is dominated by grain and sheep based agriculture. As with the rest of the wheatbelt, the Central Southern region is characterised by broad-acre landscapes, scattered blocks of remnant native vegetation and sparse population (average of 1 person per 2.5 km²). The climate is Mediterranean with long, hot and dry summers and mild winters. Annual rainfall is approximately 500 mm with most falling in the months of June and July. The hottest months are usually January and February. Consequently, any visitation to the region is highly seasonal with most tourists reportedly visiting between April and September to avoid the hot summer months.

This case study focuses on a cluster of seven local government areas in the Central Southern region of the wheatbelt (Table 9.1) that, in the late 1990s, agreed to form a co-ordinated approach to tourism development. This area lies in the central western portion of the Central Southern Wheatbelt, between 100 and 200 km southeast of Perth. The seven shires cover about 9,080 km² with a total residential population of 9,022 (2001 census; about one person per km²). The population living within the Central Southern Wheatbelt is relatively more densely clustered in the seven shires, which have about half the total number of residents and a fifth of the land area. This is most probably owing to the historic location of the region's main rail transport route through this area. The region has few immediately obvious tourism attractions, minimal tourism oriented infrastructure or services and virtually no tourism data specific to the area. The major travel routes connecting Perth with coastal centres to the south bypass the seven shires such that very little 'through' traffic is apparent. For these reasons, the project area is considered to be on the tourism periphery.

Table 9.1: Local government areas and relative population sizes originally included in the project area

Local Government Area	Population (2001 census)	% of Total Population
Cuballing	685	7.6%
Narrogin (shire and town)	5281	58.5%
Pingelly	1122	12.4%
Wandering	318	3.5%
Wickepin	716	7.9%
Williams	900	10.0%
Total Population	9022	100%

Narrogin, for our purposes, is two local councils, a town council surrounded by a shire council, known as a “donut shire”. The town has a residential population more than five times that of the shire within its 13 km². Although Narrogin Shire residents identify strongly with their farming identity, they still use the town as their facilities and services centre. Discussion with both the Shire and Town local government representatives indicated that the Town dominates the shire in terms of issues that may affect both areas, such as tourism development. Interestingly, while the Shire insisted that decisions regarding mutual issues with the Town were made jointly, the Town openly stated that they determined the outcomes of joint decision making that involved the Shire. The latter scenario seems more likely given the Town’s dominance in terms of population size and the reliance of Shire residents on Town facilities and services. Thus, for the purposes of this report, the town and shire of Narrogin will be combined and referred to simply as Narrogin. In addition, as the remaining five local government areas have relatively small populations and are experiencing similar issues in terms of sustainability and tourism development, they will be referred to collectively. Narrogin is the regional centre for the adjacent resource poor shires and is the dominant local government stakeholder with regards to tourism planning and development.

Historical Context

A brief summary of the Central Southern Wheatbelt region’s history may assist in understanding how the region came to be on the tourism periphery and provide a context for the current status of tourism development. The area was opened for agriculture in the 1880s with the building of a rail line through the western portion of the region connecting the state capital to the north, Perth, with the southern coastal centre of Albany. This line was built via the Central Southern Wheatbelt, then into the Great Southern region and onto the coast at Albany. Narrogin was established as the transport and agrarian centre for the Central Southern Wheatbelt region that includes the seven local government areas (LGAs) (Tonts and Black 2002). This was to the developmental detriment of other nearby shires, such as Cuballing. Because of the close proximity of Narrogin, Cuballing’s town facilities and services were minimal to start and have been whittled away to nothing except a roadhouse and petrol station. The residents must use the facilities of Narrogin approximately 15 km to the south. The dominance of Narrogin as a regional centre with more than half the population of the project area has meant that facilities and services in the surrounding shires have been reduced and centralised to Narrogin Town. Thus, while Narrogin appears relatively prosperous, the surrounding shires are suffering from the symptoms of rural decline.

While managing to recover from economic downturns during the 1930’s and Second World War, a steady decline in the fortunes of the region (as with other rural areas in Australia) has taken place since the 1970s. This is a combined symptom of falling agricultural returns, on which the region was almost solely reliant, coupled with downsizing of government services. Centralisation of government services such as the railway resulted in significant population

loss as well as loss of social identity. The result is a regional economic retraction in conjunction with out-migration of rural populations to larger coastal centres (such as Perth). These changes triggered a downward trend in population, in particular the youth population, in rural areas that has persisted until the present day. This has created the situation in which communities are seeking to expand their economic base in order to buffer against downturns in agricultural fortunes.

Narrogin's role as a regional government service and retail centre has already provided a buffer against the worst effects of the agricultural economic decline experienced in the neighbouring shires. This also resulted in Narrogin acting as a population sponge for its region with people in neighbouring shires moving into the regional centre for better access to facilities and services. The reduction of permanent employees living in the region has resulted in an increase in the number of contracted and itinerant workers living on a short term basis. Those permanent government workers remaining tend to live in the town of Narrogin for their two to three year position then move on to perceived better opportunities in larger centres. These changes have resulted in a new community dynamic that is still driven by the significant presence of government services but that has adapted to the change from permanence to the current itinerant nature of individuals and groups.

Narrogin Town has experienced at least a slower rate of decline than its neighbouring shires owing to its broader economic base and role as a government service centre while the remaining shires are still primarily reliant on agriculture (Tonts and Black 2002). This is evident in the population of the town of Narrogin slowing its decline to a near steady state between 1996 and 2003 while the remaining shires continue to lose residents (mostly youth) to the larger centres (Austats 2003). This history has shaped the relationship between the LGAs within the project area and their current fortunes, with most of the shires seeking a way out of their decline through tourism development while the town of Narrogin seems to have a lesser incentive owing to its regional centre status.

Tourism development is often viewed as panacea for rural decline, bringing in tourists' dollars to prop up regions during lean times or halt a long term slide into economic oblivion (Grette 1994). In order to successfully establish a region as a worthwhile tourism experience, a unique and attractive 'hook' needs to be identified and integrated into a regional strategy for tourism development. This may take the form of promoting existing attributes of the region to a specifically identified niche market and/or by adding something to the region to increase its tourism appeal (Seaton 1999; Hsu et al. 2004). Of course, this is more easily said than done as, by definition, areas in the tourism periphery often do not have the resources readily at hand for successful tourism development and promotion. The approach to tourism development in Dryandra Country sought to install a unique tourism "icon" to draw tourists to the region and also promote the shires neighbouring Dryandra Woodland as attractive destinations in an effort to increase domestic and international tourist numbers. Increasing numbers of tourists was perceived as a means toward bolstering the local economy by supplementing it with significant tourism revenue.

Dryandra Woodland Focus Group

The seven local government areas cooperating in developing tourism are located within close proximity to a unique and extensive cluster of remnant bush land and native tree plantations known as Dryandra Woodland. Most of the wheatbelt remnant vegetation pockets are no more than a few isolated hectares of severely degraded habitat (Hobbs 2003). For this reason, Dryandra Woodland stands out as an unusually large area of remnant bushland and native mallet plantations. The woodland is actually not a single area of bushland but a group of 17 closely clustered remnant blocks connected by "corridors" of native vegetation along fence lines and roads that collectively cover about 28,000 ha (~70,000 acres). The largest of the remnant blocks is 12000 ha (~30,000 acres), many times the size of the average for the

wheatbelt region. Its size and location within an agricultural landscape has established Dryandra Woodland as a refuge for native fauna and flora populations unable to live in the cleared agricultural areas. CALM, the State Government agency responsible for managing natural areas in Western Australia, identified the woodland as, "... the single most important area for conservation and recreation in the ... wheatbelt region of Western Australia" (Moncrieff 1998a/b). While Dryandra Woodland was identified as a potentially significant tourism asset by both CALM and the seven local governments, a study by Moncrieff (1998a/b) found the woodland was underutilised, with a narrow range and low number of tourists contributing very little to the local shires in terms of economic benefits.

As the state conservation agency, CALM has sole jurisdiction over Dryandra Woodland even though it occupies a significant area of land within the shires, particularly Cuballing Shire. CALM's mandate clearly states that is primarily responsible for the management of the "natural estate" in Western Australia in the context of conservation and responsible use (CALM 2000). This encompasses protection of ecologically important areas, sustainable use by the public and commercial interests and rehabilitation of degraded habitats. Involvement of other interests, including local governments, in planning and management of natural areas occurs entirely at CALM's discretion.

In the late 1990s a CALM officer initiated a cooperative arrangement between the conservation agency and stakeholders within the seven local government areas. The cooperative arrangement was part of an initiative by the CALM officer to develop a tourism planning framework for Dryandra Woodland based on the Tourism Optimisation Management Model (TOMM). The central plank of TOMM is community involvement through public forums and focus groups that include all stakeholders, government, non-government, commercial and residential. The intent is to ensure responsible tourism development while maximising positive benefits for stakeholders. Thus, as part of applying the TOMM framework to Dryandra, the *Dryandra Woodland Focus Group* (DWFG) was formed. The DWFG included representatives from CALM, the local governments, the chambers of commerce, Wheatbelt Development Commission and tourism development interest groups. All members were involved on a voluntary basis. The DWFG was conceived as a point of contact between CALM, as the sole manager of Dryandra Woodland and the representatives of stakeholders from the communities that hoped to benefit from tourism development centred on the woodland.

The fundamental aim of the DWFG was to increase tourism spending in the region surrounding Dryandra Woodland (Dryandra Woodland Focus Group 1999). This was in response to research conducted by Moncrieff (1998a/b) that identified a very low level of tourism spending within the neighbouring shires. The aim was to be achieved by first defining long term objectives relating to the identification of key tourism assets and opportunities and how best to co-ordinate the region in terms of creating a viable and sustainable tourism product (Moncrieff 1998a/b). The wildlife tourism opportunities within Dryandra Woodland was the primary focus of this process with the development of a captive wildlife "tourist facility" later to be named Barna Mia a central pillar. Barna Mia was a concept initially flagged in a 1996 CALM tourism marketing plan and further developed as a concept by the previously mentioned CALM officer that received backing from the agency. It was intended as a 'value adding' project that would enable tourists to see rare animals they would normally not easily see 'in the wild'. This facility was intended to be a wildlife tourism icon for the seven shires and establish Dryandra Woodland as an internationally significant wildlife tourism destination.

The development of Barna Mia was based on a dual purpose, it was to serve as a catalyst for increasing tourism numbers and associated economic benefits for the shires while also serving as a public education and promotion facility for CALM (CALM 2000). This reflected the two primary philosophies operating behind the DWFG. One strand consisted of CALM as an agency focused on nature conservation and public education as decreed by its legal

mandate. CALM had been operating a feral predator extermination programme in conjunction with a native animal reintroduction and breeding programme. The two programmes had successfully increased the size of certain rare marsupial populations in the woodland. CALM sought to capitalise on the potential afforded by these rare and charismatic animals (such as the Bilby) through the development of an attraction centred on the breeding programme itself. In this context, Barna Mia (the public relations interface) was constructed for the purpose of educating tourists, using close encounters with some of the rare species being bred for reintroduction. This was a means of raising public awareness about wildlife conservation and the profile of CALM as an agency successfully carrying out its conservation mission.

The second strand on which the DWFG was functioning related to the perceived benefits of increasing tourist numbers visiting Dryandra Woodland and the surrounding region. In this sense, Barna Mia (the tourism icon) was viewed as a means for attracting more tourists to the region through the opportunity to view rare nocturnal marsupials close at hand in an “uncontrived” setting. The requirement for night time tours to view the strictly nocturnal marsupials would at least require an over night stay in the region, encouraging visitors to use the accommodation and other facilities in the surrounding shires (Moncrieff 1998a/b; CALM 2000). The charismatic nature of the rare marsupials coupled with the unique design of the experience was seen as a catalyst for increasing tourist numbers in the region and increasing the associated “spin offs” for nearby businesses (Moncrieff 1998a/b). It may be reasoned that increasing numbers of visitors to the woodland potentially compromises CALM’s function as a nature conservation and preservation agency in charge of the most significant ecological remnant in the wheatbelt. The two fundamental philosophies upon which Barna Mia was conceived would arguably lead to the issues regarding its management and operation discussed later in this chapter.

While Barna Mia was the primary concern of the DWFG, efforts were made to create a regional tourism plan for the seven local government areas that included other potential tourism attractions outside Dryandra Woodland. The idea was to incorporate Dryandra Woodland as an integrated part of a regional product. The woodland itself and in particular Barna Mia, would act as a tourism beacon to draw tourists in. The tourists would then ideally move beyond the woodland to other tourism experiences in the region. A tourism and marketing strategy was commissioned, prepared by a private consultant using a grant won (with significant assistance from the Wheatbelt Development Commission) from the Department of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. The tourism and marketing strategy was completed in 1999. Similar to the past CALM reports, the marketing strategy identified Dryandra Woodland and its fauna as well as indigenous heritage as key tourism draw cards, together with the colonial heritage and agricultural landscape of the surrounding areas. Significant problems identified by the report related to the lack of effective promotion and the lack of co-ordination of attractions in the region along with a lack of tourism data specific to the region. The report recommended the DWFG establish itself as the driver of tourism development in the region and employ a tourism development officer to facilitate this process. Meanwhile, as mentioned earlier, Moncrieff in 2000 initiated moves to obtain funding to support a research project that set out to further the aims of community based regional tourism development in conjunction with Barna Mia.

Tourism Development Officer

Interviews with representatives of the DWFG during 2003 indicated that the organisation considered it had reached the limits of its capabilities in relation to development of a regional tourism product at the time the tourism and marketing strategy was written. This was both in terms of expertise as well as available time, given the DWFG was an entirely voluntary organisation. The employment of a professional tourism development officer by the DWFG

was considered advantageous as it would inject knowledge and expertise as well as more focus and time commitment into the development of a regional tourism product.

Before the employment of the tourism development officer, the Wheatbelt Development Commission (WDC) had played a significant role in writing funding applications for concepts devised by the DWFG. However, tourism development was considered a minor aspect in the context of the WDC's role. For this reason the board had indicated that WDC staff should allocate more time to priority areas such as electricity and communication infrastructure, leaving tourism development to agencies such as the WATC and other local tourism groups. The combination of the DWFG reaching its perceived limits in expertise and the WDC wishing to scale down its involvement in tourism development provided the motivation for employment of a full time tourism development officer. With the assistance of the Wheatbelt Development Commission the DWFG successfully applied to the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWRSP) in 2000 for the funding of a tourism development officer position. A tourism development officer, Dale Sanders, was subsequently employed in 2001 on a fifteen month contract as a means of furthering the development of tourism in the region on a professional basis.

The primary role of the development officer was the administration of tourism related development activities, media liaison and marketing and promotion of the region around Dryandra as a tourism destination (Sanders 2003). The officer co-ordinated community based workshops on tourism development, promoted Dryandra Woodland and the shires at regional tourism conferences and liaised between the numerous tourism related voluntary organisations, government agencies, local government and commercial operators in an effort to create a coherent and distinctive product for the region. During this time, some representatives considered the DWFG's role became largely redundant as a development body and more a forum for progress reports relating to the development officer's activities. This was rather ironic, given that the DWFG employed the tourism development officer in order to further their capabilities as a tourism development organisation in the region. The perceived lack of purpose in the group coincided with the withdrawal of the Chamber of Commerce and Narrogin Business Enterprise Centre representatives. Other community representatives also withdrew their voluntary involvement apparently along the same premise of having little to offer. The DWFG morphed into a forum for the tourism development officer to report to the shires and Narrogin on the progress made toward establishing a tourism product in the region.

Shire Politics and Breakaways

During the tenure of the tourism development officer, the Shire of Williams decided to withdraw from the tourism development co-operative. While it is not clear exactly why Williams decided to break away, the information gleaned from representatives of the shires remaining in the tourism group considered Williams had in a sense betrayed them in an attempt to "go it alone". Representatives of the DWFG suggested that Williams had always 'looked' westward rather than eastward. This was an allusion to the perception of the other members of the DWFG that Williams was trying to link in with the areas toward the west coast that were already established as tourism destinations rather than toughing it out with the Central Southern Wheatbelt shires in the tourism periphery. In a sense, the break away of Williams from the DWFG appeared inevitable as the shire lies across the main tourist and commercial travel route between Perth and Albany. The Town of Williams is also the halfway point between Perth and Albany, meaning many travellers and tourists stop to refuel or rest. The high level of through traffic has enabled the successful establishment of the "Woolshed", a tourist oriented facility in the town that draws large numbers of visitors.

Williams further riled the remaining shires in the DWFG by successfully applying in 2003 to be a Western Australian Tourism Commission (WATC) Network Visitor Centre. Network visitor centres involved the use of "advanced technology" that complements traditional

booking and information systems. According to the WATC website (http://www.tourism.wa.gov.au/watn2/watn_home.asp, accessed 29 March 2004)

“As well as creating new distribution and marketing opportunities for operators, ... Tourism Network [Centres] also include leading-edge information and booking facilities such as Booking Centres, a Virtual Call Centre that directs Australia wide 1300 calls to local experts at metropolitan and regional visitor centres and through an on-line booking gateway.”

The Network Centres enable tourists to access information on destinations and tourism operators and make bookings directly from the region they are interested in visiting. Operators may also display their promotional material at the centres within their region. Network centres raise the profile of the location in which they are placed and are considered to bring economic benefits also, although this is as yet untested.

The installation of a visitor network centre requires the town in which it is to be installed to meet certain criteria within a tourism development context. This includes the establishment of a visitor centre and visitor centre manager, something the DWFG shires did not have at the time. The establishment of the network centre in Williams also resulted in the WATC refusing Narrogin's initial application to establish one for the Dryandra Woodland shires. The main reason given was Narrogin's close proximity to Williams (30km east) obviated the need for it to be a network centre. Williams was therefore perceived not only as a trouble maker for withdrawing from the DWFG but was also considered, by representatives, to have undermined the development of tourism in Narrogin and the shires through “going it alone” with a visitor network centre. The establishment of a centre in Narrogin was viewed as a vital step in furthering tourism development in the Dryandra area as highlighted in the final report of the tourism development officer.

At the end of her tenure, the tourism development officer produced a state of the industry report that summarised the status of tourism in the GDA. Key recommendations of this document included the following points (Sanders 2003):

- Narrogin and Districts Tourist Bureau restructures and becomes the Dryandra Visitor Centre (DVC) with committee representation endorsed from each of the participating local governments if required. The DVC should be opened seven days and employ a full time administrator as a pre-requisite for becoming a WATC network centre
- Remaining shires replace staffed visitor information centres with unstaffed satellite tourist information points be set up at telecentres or other suitable locations in each of the main towns. The DVC is to liaise with and assist coordinating activities in the satellite visitor information centres.
- That the DWFG is dissolved and all its assets, equipment and tourism knowledge are transferred to the new Dryandra Visitor Centre. The DCVC should maintain strong network linkages with neighbouring local governments, regions and relevant tourism associations.

This report essentially reinforced the recommendations made in the earlier tourism and marketing strategy for the region. Central to the recommendations was a simplification of the complex tourism development bureaucratic structure in the region by establishing a single entity, the Dryandra Visitor Centre, in Narrogin, the regional centre. The shires commenced implementation of the recommendations in mid-2003, in co-operation with the WDC, with some compromises. The DWFG was dissolved with all assets transferred to the newly established tourist centre, located in what was the Narrogin Tourist Bureau. As indicated, the new entity adopted the name Dryandra Country, a significant indication of cooperation between Narrogin and the other shires.

Recommendations regarding the centralisation of visitor information management to Narrogin were not carried through as the shires preferred to retain their visitor centres and the control they have over the content and dissemination of tourism information. This was perhaps a stand by the shires against the already dominant role Narrogin played in regional affairs.

Deborah Hughes-Owen (Narrogin Tourism Bureau President) described the situation as follows: (pers. comm. 15/5/03)

“The idea would be for the shires outside Narrogin to nominate their preferred location for visitor information and the Dryandra Visitor Centre would then service and work with those satellite [tourist information nodes]. It is [currently] not the intention to provide unmanned information nodes [in the shires], unless of course grants can be obtained over time to provide these in addition to the manned information sources, such as the Wickiepin Telecentre”

Although the reason for this compromise is partly financial, there is a suggestion that the shires adjoining Narrogin are somewhat reluctant to surrender total control of tourism information provision and management to the then proposed Dryandra Visitor Centre. This may be related to concerns for ensuring the less resourced shires gain some benefit from the development of a regional tourism product.

While tension relating to this issue was not overtly expressed, the concern was evident during discussions with shire representatives. Discussion with Pingelly representatives highlighted concerns that the dominating presence of Narrogin in the tourism development process may result in most tourism related benefits bypassing the smaller, less resourced shires. This was also based on the geographic location of Pingelly some distance away from Dryandra Woodland and any potential tourist access routes by road. Pingelly viewed tourism development in Dryandra to be more beneficial to Narrogin and Cuballing, the areas immediately adjacent to the woodland, as tourists were required to pass through these areas as a means of access.

At about the time the above report was tabled, another shire member, Wandering, decided to withdraw from the tourism development group. Wandering was the northern most shire in the group and has the smallest population. Discussion with a Shire officer did not reveal any particular reason for withdrawing from the DWFG apart from simply a lack of interest in tourism development. There may be a number of factors contributing to this. For example, Wandering town is located in an out of the way place, even in comparison to the remaining shires and Narrogin. The Shire officer commented that they had about two tourists making enquiries at the information desk (located in the shire office on the main road through town) during 2002. The town has no facilities except a small pub so there is no opportunity for tourists to stop to refuel or buy basic supplies. The Shire officer also had knowledge of the Shark Bay area, a popular tourism destination over many years and had little interest in being involved in tourism development issues after that experience. Whatever the reasons, the remaining shires and Narrogin appeared not to view Wandering's departure with the same ire as that of Williams probably because Wandering was not viewed as being a rival for attracting tourists.

The adoption of the core of the report's recommendations came at a time when the WATC had reversed its decision and allowed the establishment of a network visitor centre in Narrogin, subject to meeting the requirements. The installation of a WATC network visitor centre in Narrogin is considered to be a significant move toward greatly improving tourism business and development for the region. The primary pre-requisite for becoming a network centre is the employment of a full time tourist visitor centre manager.

Concurrent with the progress toward streamlining management of tourism development, the WDC is in the process of appointing an Indigenous Economic Development Officer (IEDO) and an Officer that will “basically replace [the tourism development officer]” (Evans, pers. comm. 30/4/03). That is, a position specifically for assisting business enterprises in accessing funding through bureaucratic channels and directing inquiries to appropriate information sources. While these positions are not solely or specifically focused on tourism development, businesses or individuals seeking to develop tourism related operations fall under the economic development umbrella and will receive assistance. The amount of time spent specifically on tourism initiatives by the new WDC employees may be tempered, as in the past,

by the relative proportion tourism contributes to regional economic and social development. At this point in time, the WDC considers tourism development to be a minor aspect of their overall responsibilities in the region. However, the combination of the WDC appointments and the restructuring of the Narrogin Tourism Bureau and employment of a Dryandra Country Visitor Centre manager will potentially create a strong leadership base over a long time period and more effective co-ordination of tourism development and activities.

The previous points, primarily about infrastructure and the institutional arrangements within which tourism is entwined, illustrate the complex systems relationship in which tourism is located in regional areas. The next few points focus on more specifically tourism related issues.

Lack of Community Interest and Motivation

An analysis of tourism strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis) conducted as part of community based workshops in Narrogin and Pingelly identified what was termed 'community apathy' as a weakness and a threat to tourism development. In this instance, the 'community' appeared to refer to the residents living within the shires. Rather than apathy, which suggests a state of depression or hopelessness, the SWOT analysis and interviews with representatives suggested the community was just not interested in tourism development – manifesting as a lack of motivation for involvement in tourism initiatives. The lack of interest regarding tourism development in the community may be a significant factor contributing to the currently low status of the area as a tourism destination.

According to Hall (1995), the attitudes the community has toward tourism development is a primary factor determining how successful it will be. He observed that successful tourism development occurred when the general community was supportive of tourism related ventures. Community support was more likely to manifest if the benefits of tourism development were plainly evident. Howell (1987) and Blank (1989) had earlier stressed the importance of fostering positive community attitudes toward tourism development to ensure success. Howell (1987) commented that one of the most important factors in developing tourism in small towns was the active and positive involvement of the general community. This was primarily based on the concept of the "intangible host-guest" role played by community members that influence tourists' perceptions of the place. In the absence of active community support, successful tourism development is difficult to achieve.

The link between active interest and obvious benefits rising from tourism development may be the key to the lack of community interest in the region. A survey of local businesses carried out in 1997 indicated that perceived tourist contribution to the local economy was less than 10% (Moncrieff 1998a/b). While this figure is subjective, a subsequent survey of business representatives in 2003 also resulted in estimates of tourism contribution being minor in relation to other sectors. The minor contribution of tourism was also suggested by the presence of large numbers of contracted workers and sales representatives in town leading to a frequent lack of vacant accommodation throughout the week (motels, hotels and guest house) on an ongoing basis during 2003. Thus, if the majority of the local economy is driven by non-tourism factors, there is perhaps little benefit to be gained from development of a tourism industry.

The Wheatbelt Development Commission pointed out that businesses in the region do not perceive the required voluntary effort justified the benefits gained. While business not specifically involved in tourism may hold this view owing to a primarily non-tourism support base, this attitude was also evident in some businesses directly involved in tourism such as accommodation providers. As an illustration of this, the farmstays in the region belong to the farmstay association, a nation wide promotional body for tourism centred on farm based accommodation. Through this they receive the benefits of specific advertising and promotion of farmstay based rural tourism. The farmstays are less inclined to volunteer time toward the development of a regional tourism product for the Dryandra Country region as they do not

consider the return will justify the effort given the benefits gained from being paid members of the farmstay association. Given the significant cost and effort required to create a successful farmstay, operators may have little time to donate to development of a general regional tourism concept when a tailored tourism association may be viewed as the most direct path toward maximising business success.

Similar issues are apparent with other key bureaucratic organisations within the community. The Narrogin Business Enterprise Centre (BEC) offers business management advice and training for those who approach the organisation with a specific idea. The BEC does not see its role as generating new ideas for the community to adopt but rather acts in a role of advisor. While the BEC representative was enthusiastic about tourism development in the Dryandra region, he did not consider that the centre's role was to act as a catalyst for innovation. For example, while recognising the Dryandra region required more tourism oriented accommodation, the need for more accommodation required community or other interest groups to approach the BEC rather than being driven by this organisation. This presents somewhat of a catch-22 situation as the general community is also not interested (apparently) in putting forward motel development proposals. Local government in Narrogin took a similar stance in terms of recognising the high demand for accommodation in Narrogin Town owing to insufficient beds but being reluctant to act as a driver for new accommodation developments, saying that this must come from the community or commercial interest.

Interestingly, when approached with the issue of insufficient accommodation, the WDC manager responded enthusiastically and was ready to set in motion various bureaucratic processes that would facilitate the building of another motel in the region. Given the WDC considered the Dryandra Country tourism development agenda was a low priority, it may be safe to assume that its interest in establishing a new motel in the region was based on the contribution of a new motel to the regional economy rather than promotion of tourism. These differing mandates of the various bureaucratic organisations active in the region have meant that tourism development has either taken a back seat or only has the potential to progress if it happens to fall under the umbrella of an agency's agenda.

Lack of Regional Co-Ordination of Tourism Development

Tourism development in the region had been hampered by the existing complex tourism development structure. There were a number of groups functioning at four levels of responsibility. These included local level tourism and special interest groups; tourism development associations at the sub-regional and regional level and government tourism development and natural area management organisations at the state level. The complex structure created problems in terms of incompatible or poorly communicated agendas, duplication of activities and funds being spread across numerous groups working to develop tourism in the same region (Sanders 2003). Aside from low level community interest, the bureaucratic complexities appeared to have been another major factor contributing to the lack of progress in tourism development in the Dryandra Country region. This was somewhat improved with the employment of a tourism development officer to act as a focus for ideas and administration. The establishment of the Dryandra Country Visitor Centre and professional manager seems to be another step toward simplification of the tourism development structure potentially enabling further progress to be made.

Dryandra Woodland is a Protected Area

While the Woodland is the key tourism icon, if not attraction, for Dryandra Country, it is managed by a government agency whose core business is conservation and land management. Of course, partly due to budget constraints and partly due to changes in ideology, agencies such as CALM increasingly perceive themselves to be in the tourism business. In this case, CALM's reintroduction program of rare wildlife to Dryandra Woodland has led it to view this

protected area as an important tourism and community development opportunity. However, the duty statements and resourcing of CALM staff in regional offices means very little time is spent on tourism oriented matters. This time restriction plays out in relation to wider issues of tourism policy and planning as well as in the relationships to other stakeholders.

Entwined in the complex organisational structure of tourism development in the region were difficulties relating to a lack of time spent on tourism development issues as a result of primary organisational responsibilities taking priority. An interview with a local government Shire officer in 2003 highlighted the significance of this issue. The Shire officer had decided that the Barna Mia viewing enclosure would benefit from additional promotion to tourists and local residents. He contacted CALM with a proposal to sell merchandise from the shire visitor information desk (in the Shire Offices) and have his staff wear T-shirts with the Barna Mia logo. The CALM responded with mild interest but did not follow-up the issue. This discouraged the Shire officer who thought that the CALM was not interested in his idea. It also created confusion in his mind as to the agenda of CALM in managing what was supposedly a tourism icon, designed to benefit neighbouring shires in the region that was seemingly being under utilised through a lack of promotion. The Shire officer perceived that the CALM was not interested in co-operation with local governments in terms of tourism development and was mildly annoyed with this seemingly aloof stance.

Discussion with staff at the CALM district office subsequently revealed that they were very interested in co-operating with shire officers to promote Barna Mia. The ideas from the Shire officer had been taken on board but staff simply had not had the time to follow-up with the officer. This was largely due to the primary responsibilities of staff as part of a natural area conservation agency taking precedence over tourism development issues. Liaison with local governments in relation to tourism development issues falls outside the job description of CALM Narrogin district staff. Thus, such activities must be carried out once all other tasks have been completed. Given that CALM staff have considerable workloads, tasks secondary to the core role often take a time to be addressed. The misunderstanding that occurred between the shire officer and the CALM was primarily a result of the mandate of the organisation responsible for the tourism icon, Barna Mia, is as a natural area conservation and management agency, not a tourism development agency (these issues are being addressed in a STCRC PhD project in 2003).

Rustic or Resort?

There is what is undoubtedly an unwarranted assumption that the Dryandra Woodland could be turned into a resort so that the region would lose its rustic charm to the influence of resort-based tourism. The Narrogin Caravan Park and the Dryandra Village in particular express a strong concern about this while indicating a clear preference to remain 'rustic'. This may be partly related to the preference of community leaders and stakeholders to maintain a low key approach to tourism in the region which in turn is linked with preserving the lifestyle many people move to the area for (Anon 1999). For example, the Narrogin Caravan Park is owned by the Town of Narrogin and is fairly limited in its capacity and facilities. The caravan park is currently a relatively small bituminised area with an ablution block and some powered sites on the main road between Williams and Narrogin. It is restricted in terms of the number and type of tourists able to use it. Stakeholders do not wish to create a 'resort style' caravan park meaning there are no onsite cabins for rental and the facility will not be expanded or modified in the near future, limiting this form of tourism expansion.

Similarly, the Dryandra Lions Village offers "rustic" accommodation in the form of weatherboard, self catered cabins that also require tourists to supply bed linen and blankets. There are currently no powered sites for caravans in the village though approval for five such sites was given by the CALM in 2003. In essence, the village caters for tourists specifically equipped for staying in self catered accommodation and excludes those who are not carrying

their own bedding or food. This essentially means that the village is catering mainly to domestic self drive tourists. Fly/drive tourists and those arriving as part of a coach tour would not be adequately equipped to stay in the village. The care takers (Lions Club) and the landlord (CALM) are extremely reluctant to further develop the village as they perceive that it may destroy the current experience offered and result in additional impacts on the surrounding protected area.

The irony and futility of this perspective is manifest. First, there is no reason in tourism planning to see these two scenarios as polar extremes on even the most simplistic continuum. The 'rustic vs resort' extremes are simply two oversimplified scenarios that, in the context of the region, are not worth arguing over. This is the second point: the region could not support a resort of the nature envisaged in this sort of rhetoric. Put another way, both Narrogin and Dryandra Village could be developed considerably without losing their rustic charm and without becoming 'resorts'.

Lack of Obvious Tourism Products

While the Dryandra Country representatives identify the Dryandra Woodland as the region's major icon, the presence of other obvious attractions in the region is somewhat sparse. A report by Complete Marketing Solutions (1999) pointed to the lack of obvious attractions outside Dryandra Woodland and suggested the development of a niche market product focusing on Dryandra Woodland and ecotourism.

Several people pointed out that the majority of potential lies in the history and culture of the Dryandra Country region. Interestingly, a discussion of tourism development focusing on a peripheral area in the USA put forward this idea as a potential means of tourism development. Hsu et al. (2004) discussed the issue of tourism development in Kansas, an area that parallels the Western Australian wheatbelt in terms of being dominated by agriculture and having little in the way of obvious attractions. The authors suggested that the landscape and rural environment itself could be the attraction given an appropriate market segment was targeted by promotional material. Interestingly, they found that in order to be successful, the residential community must play an active role in tourism development of the region, primarily through promoting a positive image of the region by word of mouth.

As intangible assets, heritage, culture and social history may not be immediately apparent to visitors unfamiliar with the area. For example, a particular location of historical significance but with no physical evidence remaining (such as ruins) would most probably not be given a second glance by those ignorant of the history of that place. Consequently, the potential attractions identified by the Dryandra Country shires are perceived by those interviewed to require "good knowledge" to fully communicate their significance. The battle fields of the American war of independence and civil war are prime examples. Many of these are popular tourist destinations and are basically paddocks or large areas of landscape since put to other uses. In the absence of tour guides, booklets and signs, such places may not be recognised as historically significant. In other words, guided tours or other forms of intensive interpretation are required to maximise the tourism potential of the Dryandra Country region. Given the current lack of financial and material resources, these ideas are at best a long term vision.

Tourism Activity

As is common for much of regional Australia, there is simply no reliable visitation data. Limited data is available for Barna Mia (approximately 1,000 visits in 2003), Dryandra Village (about 4,000 in 2003) and Narrogin accommodation (132 beds available). The bulk of those using the accommodation in Narrogin are business travellers related to Narrogin's role as a regional centre.

Conclusions

The 2001 SWOT analysis of Narrogin and Pingelly (the two shires with the largest populations) listed about twenty four distinct aspects considered to be strengths but about half of these were lifestyle related, such as sports and leisure activities, medical facilities, educational facilities, spiritual communities, safety and a movie theatre among others. Similarly, community representatives interviewed in 2003 pointed to the major asset of the region being its lifestyle, rather than any specific attractions, something not easily marketed as a tourism product to tourists.

Dryandra Country does have a tourism product in its wheatbelt and rural ambience along with the significant Dryandra Woodland. Decisions made in late 2003 to agree on the name *Dryandra Country* are significant, if for no other reason than they reflect the willingness of the remaining key stakeholders to work together. With the leadership of local government and key state agencies, there is a clustering of resources with a focus and a mission.

In reviewing the outcomes in relation to systems of innovation we can see at least four issues worth returning to. First, the entrepreneurial role of Daryl Moncrieff as a CALM officer has to be acknowledged as a key catalyst to early efforts, including this project. Second, the networks developed and undeveloped are important. The original group of seven shires came together to form the *Dryandra Woodland Focus Group* that worked successfully with the WDC and CALM to obtain funds to undertake planning and development work. Despite the defection of two shires and withdrawal of some local business representatives, the DWFG then successfully evolved into *Dryandra Country*. This is an organisation whose membership is more focused and committed and who have already hired long-term staff and obtained a WATC network centre designation.

The third aspect worth reinforcing is the advantage taken of institutional infrastructures. This includes not only the Shires working together but also the inclusion of the three core government agencies, CALM, WDC and WATC. Last, but not least, it is time for a realistic vision that can build on the capacity for innovation existing in the region. The visioning done in the 1990s needs updating and core products need to be identified and investment sourced.