

WARROORA STATION

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8th July, 2007

Hon. Malcolm Turnbull
Minister for the Environment and Water Resources
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
malcolm.turnbull.mp@aph.gov.au

Dear Minister,

My name is Leonie McDiven, I am the lessee of Warroora Pastoral Station which is situated alongside the Ningaloo Marine Park along the northwest coast of Western Australia. Our western boundary has 51km of Ningaloo Reef coastline.

Our State Minister, David Templeman, MLA, has asked you, I understand, to progress a nomination for "World Heritage Listing" of this area.

I would like to invite you Minister, to visit this area of our wonderful nation to give yourself a "workshop floor" view of the area proposed by the government of this State. You would be more than welcome to stay with our family (we have two airstrips suitable even for a jet aircraft) and we would be happy to show you around.

I would like you to know that our state government forced us (Ningaloo coastal leaseholders) to sign to have the 2km strip excised from our leases when they expire on 30.6.2015. We could either sign or lose our entire lease come this date, even though we had a renewal of lease until 2065 offered to us [*subject to taking land for "public purposes"*]. I tested this in the State Supreme Court and discovered it to be the truth. I signed. The *general public* actually believe that this state government is going to "Save Ningaloo" for the ordinary man in the street; whereas the reality is, that they have developed plans to "*Lease portions off for development of so-called Eco Lodges, where tent beds are expected to be over \$200 per person*"

Your predecessor, Senator Campbell visited this area and met with many pastoral leaseholders and was acutely aware that "the process" had been seriously flawed. He spelled this out to the Western Australian government.

I am a staunch advocate for the "listing" of the Ningaloo Reef itself, but not the "land content" proposed by this State. There is just no "protection" provided by taking a strip of land and then carving it up for "development sites" on the pretext of protecting the reef itself. The best protection is that which Mother Nature provided herself: isolation, unsealed tracks, no water, no electricity. This is the reason it has remained so pristine for so long in a rapidly developing world. The land tenure of "pastoralism" has provided added protection because the land hasn't been able to be "sold off or leased out to the highest bidder". Pastoralism in this region is totally "green" – no super phosphates on the soil, no chemicals at all, just gentle grazing, and much of this not even on the coastal stretch {because sand gets in the wool and devalues the product}.

The Department of the Environment has said they are going to “poison” the buffel grass along this coast (which is all that holds the fragile landmass together) – imagine poisoning vast tracks adjacent to the Reef. The whole north of Australia is inundated with Buffel Grass, brought in the pack saddles of the camels by the Afghans, and now (due to the time factor) considered indigenous.

It intrigues me that the government of this State professes on the one hand to want to “Save Ningaloo” and yet on the other hand draws up elaborate plans to allow very large scale development along this coastline – development parcels which I understand will be tendered out under lease arrangements, and no doubt the ‘bottom line’ will be the revenue this can create and thus by default the tariffs of the “Eco-Lodges” will be set and thereby the market narrowed down to the more affluent in society.

Development along these stark and waterless rangelands, environmentally, could possibly be the *‘thin edge of the wedge’*. It is one of the last wilderness places that allows access for the low income Aussie to come and camp with his family and is highly favored by eastern states retirees who can’t find any spots on the eastern seaboard to spend an economic winter holiday. These people who visit are unpaid champions and protectors of this environment. Just as importantly, the young international adventure market seeks out this untamed natural product.

Already we have seen the environmental disasters of “development” at Coral Bay (just to our north), where (as we speak) the government are putting in a boat ramp to allow more and more access for fishing and recreating on this fragile reef system. To build the boat ramp they (the government) dug up the rubbish tip and dumped it on the reef. You may find this statement totally incomprehensible, but believe me Minister it is the truth. Department of Environment and Conservation staff have spent hours and hours walking the beaches picking up the rubbish washed ashore.

I have begged this State government to make a real commitment to “saving” the reef by creating a “wilderness fishing zone” along the whole length of Warroora Station where only one fish a day can be taken. This in itself would protect the resource for a long time; increase the pleasure of eating the product (not frozen) and allow future generations the privilege of catching a fish. The then state Fisheries Minister explained it to be thus: *“Leonie, there are 600,000 recreational fishes in this State and they all vote.”* (Kim Chance). I explained to the Minister that if accurate current surveys were done it would probably be discovered that most of these 600,000 would now share the view of conservation of the resource, but sadly to no avail, bag limits and possession limits are still dangerously high along this coastline that you are being asked to “protect” by world heritage status. Personally I believe that world heritage status will only increase the pressure on this area. Fundamentally I think the state believes it will bring with it huge funds for “management”.

The irony of this whole “Save Ningaloo” business is that it is because this remote strip of magic coastal country has been ‘PROTECTED’ by pastoral leases for over a hundred years, and thus OFF-LIMITS to developers that it offers what it does today, i.e. pure unadulterated “wilderness” which the denizens of our busy-busy world are seeking more and more.

We trust that you will take up our offer Minister to visit us. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you are able to visit this area and we will do all we can to help.

Yours faithfully,

LEONIE MCDIVEN