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**Minister for Planning and Infrastructure**  
**Hon. Alannah MacTiernan**

13th Floor, Dumas House  
2 Havelock Street  
West Perth 6005

Dear Minister

I am writing regarding changes proposed by the WA Government to the Pastoral Leasehold land along the Ningaloo Reef coral coast.

My understanding is that the Department wishes to transfer control of the 1km-2km wide coastal strip away from the current pastoral leaseholders and to the State Government instead.

I believe that the excise of the coastal strip by the Government is unnecessary and indeed likely to tarnish this amazing pearl of a coastline that it seeks to protect.

According to government reports, the excise is so that the Government can protect the land from **environmental degradation** and at the same time promote **development** of the land for tourism.

The Environment and Tourism are discussed below, and reference is made to the SOUL Ningaloo website developed recently. Starting with the Environment:

**1. THE ENVIRONMENT**

Protecting the Ningaloo Reef coastal environment is said to involve:

1. Protecting the **fish stocks** of the Ningaloo Reef waters (very important)
2. Protecting the **ocean** from polluted runoff
3. Keeping the **land** looking pristine and natural
4. Protecting the **native flora & fauna**

I have been lucky enough to have spent the past 6 months travelling and working all the way up the East Coast of Australia, right across the Top End and now down the NW coast of WA.

Compared with the thousands of kilometres of coastline I have seen, how well have the Pastoral Landholders along Ningaloo Reef done on the 4 key environmental measures listed above?

Amazingly well, better than anything I have seen anywhere else in Australia.

***This is why:***

### **1. Protecting the fish stocks of the Ningaloo Reef waters**

Similarly to the rest of this coastline, there are bag and size limits on recreational fishermen. There are also sanctuary zones, where no fishing of any kind is permitted.

But the most important factor of all, in my view, is the incredibly low density of people along the pastoral leasehold land.

Why are there so few people? Because there are no facilities of any kind. You have to bring in your own food, water, accommodation and toilet. There are no shops. There is no electricity. The roads are rough and unsealed. All of this discourages many people. Only the hardy few come back year after year.

Fewer people means less fishing. Less fishing means more protection for the fish.

### **2. Protecting the ocean from polluted runoff**

The low density of people and complete absence of man-made facilities means no polluted runoff into the oceans. I also understand that no chemicals at all are used by the pastoralists on the vegetation.

### **3. Keeping the land looking pristine and natural**

No cement pads.  
No toilet blocks.  
No showers.  
No pipes.  
No wires.  
No shops.  
No sealed roads.  
No buildings or structures.

Nothing man-made. Only pristine natural coastline as far as the eye can see.

This is truly unique.

The rest of Australia, particularly the East Coast, can only lie down and whimper in envy.

This pristine and natural look is what makes the coastal strip along the Ningaloo pastoral leasehold land so very precious.

It would be a tragic loss to the soul of our country to lose this, the very last remnant of wild untamed coral coast. Believe me, Minister, for I have seen just about all of the rest and it doesn't hold a candle compared to this.

### **4. Protecting the native flora and fauna**

The pastoralists already carry out regular 1080 baiting to control feral animals like foxes and cats.

The native flora and fauna seem to be in a very healthy state. A great profusion of different coloured wildflowers greets the springtime. There is a multitude of different native birds species including a great variety of shorebirds both along the sea edge and sifting through the estuaries and many kangaroos, emu's and lizards gaining sustenance from the land.

## **2. FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS**

Although the coastline is in excellent shape at the moment compared with what I have seen elsewhere, I would agree that it is work in progress. Further environmental improvements such as the following may be warranted.

### **(a) Stricter fishing limits**

Research may indicate stricter fishing limits and more sanctuary zones are needed along the entire Ningaloo Reef coastline, including the pastoral leasehold land.

This is even more critical now since the opening of the Coral Bay Boat Launching facilities. This facility will enable far larger boats access to this coastline with a much greater range.

More and more people will take to the water. Hence the desire of the pastoralists to make this stretch of coastline a "Wilderness Fishing Zone", with a limit of 1-2 fish per day per person.

### **(b) Better isolation of sheep from the coast**

Coastal grazing is kept to a bare minimum due to the lack of natural vegetation along this stretch of coastline, and because sand impregnation of the wool is highly undesirable. Grazing is primarily to keep the buffel grass from becoming rank and a potential severe fire hazard.

However, there is further room for improvement and I understand that you are the first Minister to seriously look into the pastoral industry with several "musters" in Carnarvon in recent years. I further understand that you have made a commitment to assist with permissible diversification under pastoral lease.

This should further improve sustainability of the rangelands and also provide additional income to bring fencing and other infrastructure into the new practices of "rotational grazing".

### **(c) Better control over feral animals and weeds**

With some assistance from the government, the pastoralists can further improve their eradication of feral animals and weeds. Nothing works as effectively as does a team effort and I am sure that the pastoralists would be happy to work hand in hand with government agencies to control these pest even more effectively.

### **(d) Better control over vehicles**

With financial assistance from the government, the pastoral leaseholders can erect better fences and signage to control vehicle tracks along the coast.

## **IMPORTANT NOTE:**

**The important point I am trying to make, is that the Government does not need to take over direct control over the coastal strip in order for the above improvements to be carried out.**

Instead, the Government can draw up appropriate guidelines in collaboration with the pastoralists and provide the funding to support these.

This is likely to be **more effective**, due to the deep knowledge and care that the pastoralists have for the land.

This will also be at a **lower cost** to the voting public. The pastoralists have their knowledge of the land, their vehicles, their fuel, food, water, power, communications, maintenance facilities and housing already in place onsite - at no cost to the government.

### 3. TOURISM

Exmouth and Coral Bay continue to expand as the natural tourist hubs for the Ningaloo Coast. They have all the necessary infrastructure such as airports, sealed roads, shops, caravan parks and tour operators.

Whereas formal tourism has been kept very low on the pastoral land. This is why the pastoral coastline remains so pristine and so natural.

Any attempt to develop the remaining stretches of undeveloped coastline, will kill the very thing that we seek to protect.

Even eco-tourists will demand shelter, water, power, provisions, cooking facilities, ablution facilities and toilets. They will not come unless these facilities are in place.

Hence in order to attract the eco-tourists, man-made infrastructure will need to be built. The construction of which will disturb the environment due to the need to bring in heavy vehicles and support infrastructure plus the levelling, foundations and runoff due to the altered contours of the land.

Once construction is complete, the buildings and facilities will destroy forever the natural look of this pristine coastline. It will forever be scarred with these permanent manmade structures. Plus the shelters, plumbing, wiring and other facilities have to be maintained in good order, which means additional space is taken up by a caretaker, consumables, tools and spares.

#### **Day Trips to the “Wild Coast” !**

Instead, may I suggest we encourage tourists to make *day trips* to the “Wild Coast” via boat. They can land on a suitable deserted beach for the day. They can swim, snorkel, enjoy a picnic lunch and take photos of the coral coast in its wild and natural state. At the end of the day, they can return to the comfort of their resort accommodation in Coral Bay.

The tour operator is held responsible for making sure no rubbish is left behind, nothing except footprints in the sand.

I understand that a 4WD operator currently operates a low-key, low-impact camping experience on one of the beaches. Again, this could be advertised as experiencing the “wild” side of the Ningaloo coast. Again, the 4WD operator would be held responsible for making sure that they left behind only footprints in the sand.

**In this way, we could capitalise on the point of difference of the undeveloped coast for visiting tourists, without destroying it through development.**

Of course those ordinary Australians that don't mind the lack of facilities and have been camping on a “take-in, take-out” basis for decades can continue to do so as before. Their style of primitive camping has next to no impact on the land. They demand no infrastructure at all and leave only footprints in the sand when they go.

### 4. CONCLUSION

Western Australia have something very special and to be treasured here on the Ningaloo Coast. In all my thousands of kilometres of travel around Australia, I have seen nothing as pristine and beautiful as the coastline that the pastoralists have guarded and protected so well over the decades.

Note that I *have* stayed in the Cape Range National Park near Exmouth. It feels very tame by comparison - with sealed roads, DEC offices, gates, shelters, picnic tables and campsites every few kilometres. Our impact on the land is visible everywhere.

The sense of wild nature and isolation that you get from visiting the pastoral leaseholds is incomparable. It would be a tragic loss to Western Australia, indeed the whole nation, if the pastoral lands degenerate into a mere extension of the Cape Range National Park.

I agree that the WA Government has a definite role to play in protecting the environment and controlling tourism along the pastoral leasehold land. **But** they should do this *through* the pastoral leasehold system.

The pastoralists can help with all of the major environmental issues:

1. Protecting the **fish stocks** of the Ningaloo Reef waters
2. Protecting the **ocean** from polluted runoff
3. Keeping the **land** looking pristine and natural
4. Protecting the **native flora & fauna**

It would be cheaper and more effective to work through the pastoralists, since they already have the infrastructure and knowledge of the land.

The pastoral leasehold system has been a complete deterrent to developers in the past and is the best insurance going forward against turning this coast from a pristine pearl into yet another collection of soulless caravan parks and eco-lodges, such as already dot the entire circumference of Australia in their thousands.

I urge you to reconsider the excise of the coastal strip from the pastoralists. If the Government proceeds with this shortsighted act - even with the best intentions - the Ningaloo Reef coastline will quickly degenerate into blandness and sameness and something enormously valuable will have been taken away from the Australian people.

## **5. PROPOSED MEETING**

I have put together a website called SOUL Ningaloo, at [www.soulningaloo.org.au](http://www.soulningaloo.org.au). I am aware, however, that this website only reflects one point of view and that I am unaware of your side of this debate.

Realising that you are a very busy person and not knowing your schedule, this may be presumptuous of me, but I will be in Perth from near the **end of November to mid December** this year.

If there is any chance of meeting with you to hear your views and understand better the Government's position, I would genuinely look forward to meeting with you at any time from around the end of November to mid December that is convenient with yourself.

Someone told me that you are one of the best Ministers that Western Australia has at present, and I look forward to it! My mobile phone number is **0438 947 628** and my email address is **derek@webascend.com.au**.

Yours sincerely,

Derek Recsei