

A photograph showing two women in the foreground on the left, looking towards the right. In the background, a white truck is driving away on a dusty road, kicking up a large cloud of dust. The scene is set in a savanna landscape with scattered trees under a bright, hazy sky, suggesting a sunset or sunrise.

## The impact of tourism on the Gibb River Road

### *A community perspective*

Prepared for the Cooperative Research Centre  
for Tropical Savanna Management and the  
Land + Sea Unit, Kimberley Land Council.

Consultants: Yuco Pty Ltd BROOME WA

March 2003

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all the people who made time to speak with us at a very busy time of year and trust that this report is a fair representation of their collective views.

Given that there have been many reports written during the last 20 years about tourism along the Gibb River Road, we anticipated some resistance to doing yet another interview about tourism. However, everyone was very willing to take the time to discuss the issues.

This willingness to participate in the project and the substance of those discussions suggest a few key issues to us.

1. The Gibb River Road (GRR) Community has a number of serious concerns regarding the development and planning for tourism in their region.
2. There is a strong community on the Gibb River Road that is willing to work together to address these concerns.
3. The community wants to have a role in future planning for tourism and land management in the region.
4. Whilst the GRR community supports the tourist industry many are conscious of the need to

achieve a balance between the interests of the community, the industry and the environmental and cultural heritage of the region. The GRR community wants to manage tourism better to ensure that it has a future.

**Peter and Sarah Yu**

**March 2003**

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<b>THE PEOPLE WE SPOKE TO</b>	<b>6</b>	CALM	Department of Conservation and Land Management
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<b>Country of the Ngarinyin and Bunuba people</b>	<b>8</b>	GRR	Gibb River Road
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## ABOUT THIS PROJECT

The project is funded by the Tropical Savanna CRC, as part of a wider set of studies on how to improve the benefits to savanna communities from tourism across the north of Australia<sup>1</sup>.

This project aims to:

- Develop a historical perspective of development of the tourism industry and its impact along the Gibb River Road (GRR).
- Assess the involvement of the community in the tourism industry and the benefits to the community.
- Express the resident community's view of the opportunities and impact created by the tourism industry.
- Enable the community to engage in the future planning, management and development of tourism along the GRR.

The principle focus was to gain insight into the impact of tourism on the GRR from the perspective of the community, that is, the people who live and work along the road and who are primarily responsible for delivering the tourist product. We discussed with the community what they considered to be the most important issues, rather than focus on point of view of the tourist or the tourism industry itself. As shown in the bibliography the later have been the focus of many other reports. Furthermore, our focus was to raise issues rather than present

detailed statistics about tourism.

Secondly, our aim was to consider how the GRR community was benefiting from tourism.

Whilst the report presents a new perspective of tourism on the GRR, most of the issues raised are not. There have been many reports produced over the last 20 years that raise issues such as planning, management and development of the tourist industry and adequate infrastructure requirements. Unfortunately, despite the recommendations in these reports, the development of a holistic, managed plan for the development of the tourist industry and its relationship to land management in the region has not occurred. Nor has there been an injection of much needed resources and infrastructure to support the ever-expanding tourist industry.

Our research highlights the overdue need for thorough community-based, regional planning if the community is to continue to develop a successful tourist industry whilst at the same time preserve the unique environmental, social and cultural values of the region.

We have gained community endorsement for this report and trust that the relevant agencies will address the report's recommendations.

<sup>1</sup> Karumba in North Qld, Borroloola in the NT and the Gibb River Road in the north Kimberley.



## BACKGROUND

Tourism is now one of the major Kimberley industries being third to beef and mining. Over the last 10–20 years the impact of tourism has radically changed the dynamic of the Gibb River Road (GRR), placing pressure on the community and agencies to deliver a tourist product that primarily satisfies the adventurer tourist. Tourism has raised the potential for enormous economic benefit to the community. However, as Barrington's research demonstrated in 1986<sup>2</sup> up to 40% of the tourist expenditure is immediately transferred out of the region.



In 1996 there were 27,589<sup>3</sup> campers recorded along the Gibb River Road. In 1999 records assessed indicated that the average annual traffic volumes show a 13% increase in traffic volumes on the Gibb River Road over the past 11 years prior to the study<sup>4</sup>. All reports indicate that this number will continue to increase, maybe dramatically so, as Australians turn to domestic rather than international travel in the wake of the Bali disaster and international tourists seek out relatively 'safe' destinations.

Our project has proven to be a timely as the Kimberley tourist industry was deeply affected by a series of national and global factors last year:

- The September 11 attack
- The collapse of ANSETT
- The collapse of Insurance companies and the increasing costs of public liability insurance; and more recently,
- The unforeseen events in Bali.
- And now the war in Iraq and the threat of SARS.

Recently a number of internal factors have affected relationships along the GRR. The closure of a number of popular tourist venues —Manning Gorge, Adcock Gorge, Jacks Waterhole, Theda and Doondoon and Ellenbrae —highlighted the fragility of the Gibb River Road tourist industry. These closures occurred for a variety of reasons and the consequent frustration for tourists and tour operators further highlights the dependence on the Gibb community to deliver the tourist product

The Federal Court proceedings for the Wanjina Wunggurr – Wilinggin Native Title Claim, brought the community together, even if they were on opposite sides of the fence. In particular, the indigenous community, which is fragmented by the administrative regimes of four separate communities, was united as a claimant group. This unity will have the opportunity to continue through the formation of a Ngarinyin<sup>5</sup> Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC).



Also timely was the galvanization of the community to rally the Gibb River Road service agencies to meet to discuss the ongoing issue of lack of coordinated and adequate emergency procedures. There will be results from this community action and it provides a vivid example of the strength, determination and possible cohesion of the Gibb River Road community, despite a severe lack of resources to function as a group.

2 Barrington Partners, 1986: Tourism Development Plan, Kimberley Region, Perth WA Tourist Commission.

3 Statistics from Main Road, see Jebb 2002, p309, f/note 10

4 'North Kimberley Road User Study – Final Report', Kimberley Development Commission, 1999:iii

5 Ngarinyin and Bunuba are the Aboriginal language groups whose traditional country the western section of the Gibb River Road passes through.



# THE PEOPLE WE SPOKE TO

Due to limited resources and time we restricted this initial study to cover the western end of the GRR and spoke to the following people:

## ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES:

- Imintji
- Kupungari
- Dodnun
- Ngallagunda



## STATIONS:

- Mt Hart - Taffey and Annabelle Abbotts
- Beverley Springs - Cheryl Camp
- Mt Elizabeth - Peter and Pat Lacy
- Drysdale River - Anne Koeyers, also LCDC president



- Mt House - Cait McAlary, Ashley
- Old Mornington - Michael Curr

## CONSERVATION AGENCIES:

- DCLM - Alan Grosse

## TOURIST VENTURES:

- Kimberley Wilderness Adventure - Imintji camp managers

## MINING:

- Kimberley Diamond Company

## INDIVIDUALS DELIVERING A SERVICE:

- Various nurses, store keepers

## SERVICE AGENCIES:

- Kimberley Tourist Association - Grant Smart
- Shire of West Kimberley - Johnathon Throssell, Kevin Pettingill
- Dept of Main Roads - Gary Bradshaw
- Derby Visitors Centre - Pam Masters
- Agriculture Department
- Kimberley Development Commission - Kelvin Barr

*LEFT: TOP Imintji. BASE Mt Hart, Ngallagunda  
RIGHT FROM TOP: Old Mornington, Mt House, Dodnun.*



# THE GIBB RIVER ROAD COMMUNITY

*The road, despite being a recent phenomenon cutting across old station cart tracks, walking tracks and dreaming tracks and linking language groups provides a contemporary regional identifier for people occupying the area north east of Derby.*

**Jebb, 2002**

Writing about the Gibb River Road, Mary Anne Jebb is in this instance referring to the Aboriginal residents living along the road. However, the statement applies to the whole community of people living along the road. The Gibb River Road 'community' comprises of two primary sectors:



**THE RESIDENTS:** the pastoralists, members of Aboriginal communities and organisations based along the Gibb River Road.

Most of this group has a long association with the region and to them the GRR is home.

**THE SERVICE AGENCIES:** people delivering services to the community, some of whom are also resident along the road (e.g. store managers, teachers, CALM officers etc.).

A third sector of people occupying the GRR for short periods of time are:

**THE VISITORS:** including tour operators, tourists and visitors from other parts of the Kimberley.

Most of the resident population have lived and worked in the region for many years, and consider the region home, with no plans to leave. For years they have struggled to develop the pastoral industry, and more recently, many have turned to tourism as a means of diversifying their businesses to withstand the fluctuations of that industry.

Recently, new players have arrived with plans to stay and develop their goals and/or industry:

- Australian Wildlife Conservancy
- Kimberley Diamond Company
- Rio Tinto Exploration
- Emergence of indigenous PBC's<sup>6</sup> taking role in land management issues – e.g. Mitchell Plateau.



This report focuses on the concerns and issues of the resident population and the service agencies. It presents their concerns and visions for the future of the Gibb River Road.

<sup>6</sup> Under the Native Title Act a Prescribed Body Corporate or PBC is the legal body established by the native title holders to hold their Native Title and represent their interests.

*LEFT: Windjana Gorge - well organised camping facilities. TOP: CALM's tag system at Bell Creek & Silent Grove. BASE: Building good relationships: Miles Kennedy, chairman of Kimberley Diamond Company with Ngarinyin TOs and WA State Premier Geoff Gallop*



## SOME HISTORY

### COUNTRY OF THE NGARINYIN AND BUNUBA PEOPLE

The western end of the Gibb River Road lies in the traditional country of the Bunuba and Ngarinyin people, who have powerful and deep spiritual connections to their homelands. Most of the Gibb River Road passes through Ngarinyin country. Bunuba lands are at the western end and south of the road including sections of Kimberley Downs, Fairfield, Leopold/Glenroy and Mornigton stations and Windjana Gorge National Park. Under their traditional Law, determined from *Ngarranggani* (loosely translated as the Dreamtime in English), a person is intimately connected to their clan's country referred to as



*Wanjina painting at the Wanalirri Catholic School at Ngallagunda Community.*

deep riverine pools and to the metaphysical snakes who inhabit and created these pools. More generally, *wunggurr* is the powerful, creative energy responsible for all forms of life.

The Ngarinyin also state that many of the permanent pools have Wanjina beings who reside in caves next to *wunggurr*. The renowned Wanjina paintings are also believed to have been made by each *Wanjina* to mark his home. Mowaljarlai explains that "there is never a cave, a painting site without *wunggurr* water"<sup>7</sup>.

Whilst the rugged beauty of the gorges, with their magnificent galleries of Gwion, Wanjina and other beings<sup>8</sup>, are major tourist attractions, they are places of great cultural and spiritual significance to the Ngarinyin.

Caring for and protecting this diverse cultural landscape is critical to the indigenous community's sense of their continuing cultural identity and on-going attachment to the country of their ancestors.

Most Ngarinyin grew up on station leases along the Gibb River Road and even after the introduction of

award wages in the 1970s many chose to stay "out bush" rather than migrate to town. As their role in the pastoral industry was declining, a number of Ngarinyin elders turned their attention to establishing their own communities on land excised from the stations they grew up on, or by purchasing their own stations with Federal government funding the Ngarinyin people and Bunuba reside in numerous Aboriginal communities along the Gibb River Road - Windjingayr, Imintji, Kupungarri, Dodnun and Ngallagunda. Other communities such as Mejerrin, Munja, Maranbabidi, Pantijan and Kalumburu also use the Gibb River Road as their major access route. However, many residents return to the larger settlements or to Mowanjum<sup>9</sup> and Derby during the wet season as the road is closed once the wet season begins.

<sup>7</sup> Mowaljarlai and Malnic, 1993:81.

<sup>8</sup> Wanjina and Gwion are beings from Ngarranggani, (the Dreamtime) often depicted in the magnificent galleries found in caves and rocks throughout Ngarinyin country. They are the creative beings of the Ngarinyin cosmology and are considered protectors of Ngarinyin country.

<sup>9</sup> Mowanjum is a community on the outskirts of Derby where many of the Ngarinyin, Wunambal and families live when they are in town.

*Warrguli - Bell's Gorge. Anunggua, cultural site and main camping and meeting place.*



*Ngarinyin dancers. Pansy Nulgit, right, is also one of the teachers at the Ngarinyin Bush University.*

*dambun* (Ngarinyin) or *muay* (Bunuba). Connection between each person and their *dambun* is the essence of a person's life and carries many cultural responsibilities and traditions.

People are also connected to country through their *wunggurr*, the conception spirits of human beings who arise from the permanent pools of rivers and gorges which dissect the country. Literally, *wunggurr* is the source of life. However, it is a complex term with many meanings. *Wunggurr* also refers to the

## STATION HISTORY

Although explorers ventured into these remote parts of the Kimberley in the late 1800s, settlement of these northern ranges did not occur until the beginning of the twentieth century. The early contact history was marked by violence, but by the 1930s most Aboriginal people had settled onto station communities or the missions at Kunmunya, Wotjulum, Munja and Kalumburu. Establishing economically viable stations in this rugged country, distant from ports and markets, was a tough life. However, many pioneering families have owned or managed stations in this region for decades. Frank Lacy's family first occupied Mount Elizabeth station in the 1940s and his family is still in residence. Fred Russ occupied Gibb River station from the early 1920s until his family sold up in the 1980s. Mount House was also owned and managed by the Blythe family until the late 1960s.

These pioneering families ran their cattle enterprises with a pool of Aboriginal labour from the small communities that permanently resided on the stations. Stock was herded to Derby by horse until the introduction of the Glenroy Beef Scheme in 1949 which continued until the 1960s. Under this scheme, beef was air freighted to markets from the tablelands and, although marginally successful, it was soon to be replaced by the advent of trucks to drive the cattle to the meatworks in Wyndham and Broome. Later the introduction of helicopter



mustering and fluctuating markets further reduced the dependence of lease holders on Aboriginal labour and with it the social dynamic of the GRR community changed.

Recently, many pastoralists have turned to tourism to diversify and subsidise their incomes and to

provide managed access to popular and spectacular locations along the Gibb River Road.

## HISTORY OF THE ROAD

The Gibb River road was surveyed in 1954 and constructed for beef trucks in the 1960s after the closure of the Glenroy Beef Scheme, which airlifted meat from the region. It is a mostly gravel road with a myriad of creek and river crossings which cut the road in the wet.

It is one of the main routes that links the east and west Kimberley and is the main service route for the communities along the road. In recent years the GRR has become a major tourist route, with peak use in the tourist season between April and August, depending on when the wet starts and finishes. Evidence suggests that the numbers of tourists are ever-increasing. Future proposals, such as that of the KTA to include the Gibb River Road as part of the Savannah Way - a route which leads self-drive tourists across the north of Australia from Queensland - will further increase the usage of the road by self-drive tourists.



## HISTORY OF TOURISM

In the early 80's the region of the Gibb River Road was still quite remote. The upgrading of the Gibb River Road to an all-weather road has had an enormous impact on the GRR community. It enhanced mobility and thus the range of influences, services and activities open to people in the northern and central ranges, and it allowed tourism to flourish in the dry season. As the road closes for the wet, access dictates the length of the tourist season, which is only fully operational for about 4 months of the year. This reduced timeframe affects the ability to earn a sustainable annual income from tourism by the local community.

The participation of the GRR community in the tourism industry has primarily evolved as a response to the needs of visitors who had been coming to the area for a number of years, expecting and demanding services. Some properties have embraced this whole heartily and see it as an opportunity to diversify away from their cattle business, (particularly with the price of cattle being so low for quite a number of years). However, most pastoralists indicated that their income from servicing tourists was limited and was providing minimal subsidy to their main income from cattle sales. Few businesses depend solely on tourism for their income.

The capital start-up costs; the seasonality of the

industry; the unpredictability of visitor numbers; insurance costs; overhead costs associated with transport and associated service costs and the difficulty in attracting and retaining staff were cited as reasons for not totally depending on tourism for a livelihood. Some of the properties have indicated they would prefer to be providing only basic services such as fuel, repair and store services, rather than cater for all the whims of tourists.

While most leaseholders, if not all, have seen some need for participation in the tourist industry, many have joined reluctantly, favoring more the situation they originally came to the area for: working cattle and enjoying the bush lifestyle.

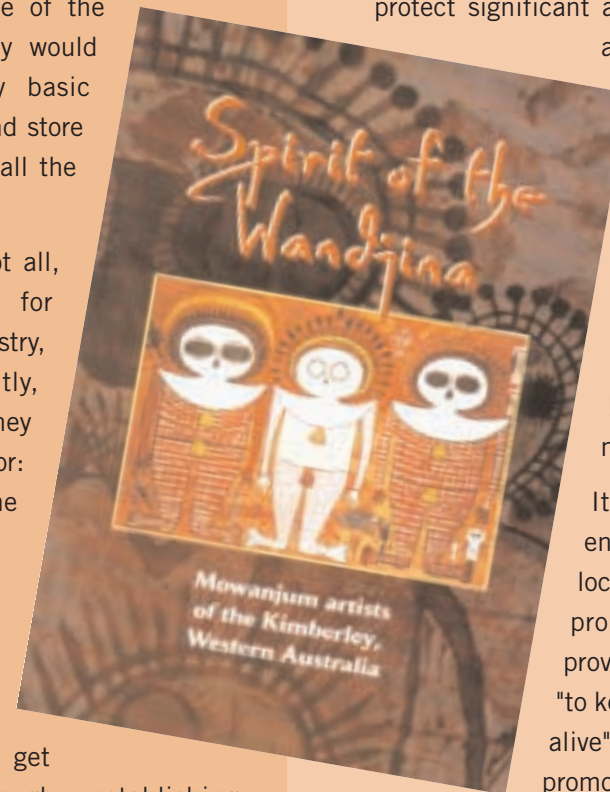
Furthermore, indigenous engagement in the GRR tourist industry remains very limited. There were early aspirations of the Ngarinyin people to get involved in tourism through establishing roadhouses, leading cultural tours, developing an arts industry and becoming rangers to assist in the management of popular tourist destinations. Although economic benefit was an obvious motive

for engagement in the tourist industry, a prime concern for the elders was the intrusion of tourists into areas of great cultural significance. It was thought that by running excursions to selected areas, the Ngarinyin could educate the public and protect significant areas. The Bush University,

although intensive and small-scale, is one example of successfully achieving both economic and cultural benefit from tourism for the Ngarinyin people. It is also an example of developing partnerships between the Ngarinyin and mainstream organisations.

It was thought that by encouraging interest in the local indigenous culture the promotion of tourism could provide an opportunity to help "to keep the spirit of the Wanjina alive", to encourage people to promote their culture through art, site visits and interpretive centres.

However, the current reality is that very few Ngarinyin or Bunuba people are actively engaged in the development of the tourist industry.



## PREVIOUS REPORTS

*My concern is not that the people are not going to come or that we don't have the product, but more that we're not ready for them. The very things that produce this environment and make it so unique are the very same things that are so fragile and vulnerable.*

**Dr Shea, March 27, 1985**

Dr Syd Shea, CALM's ex-Executive Director made this comment 17 years ago in his address to a tour operator's forum held in Derby. Since then many reports have been produced which discuss the development of a tourist industry in the Kimberley, and along the Gibb River Road in particular. Most informative are the following:

The North Kimberley Road User Study,  
KDC/MR 1999

The Kimberley Our Place Our Future  
Conference Report 1998

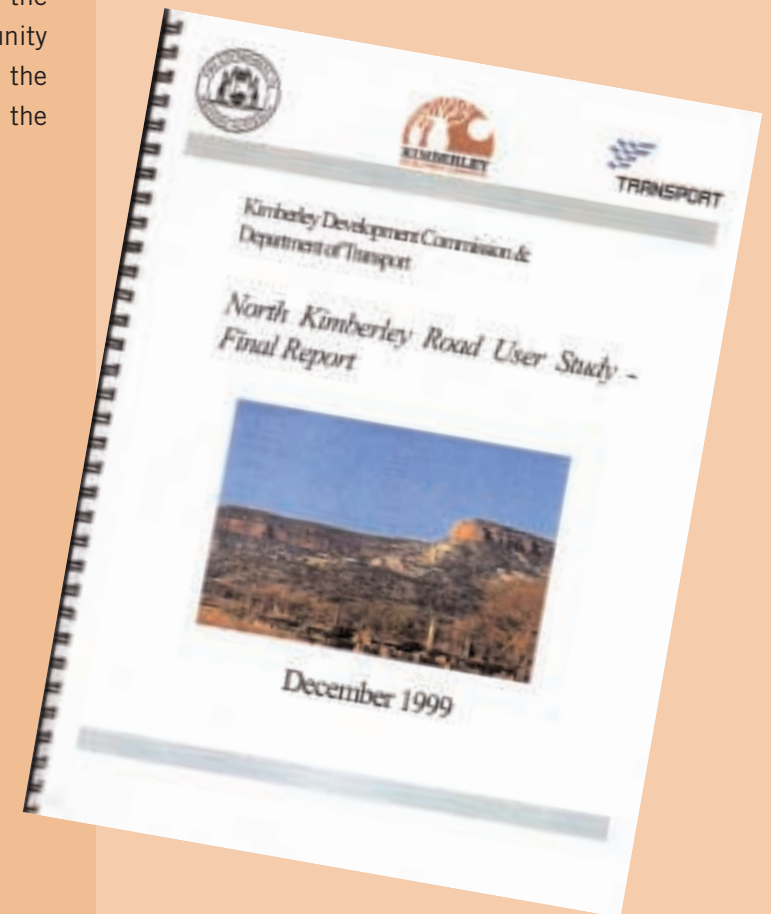
Managing CALM Estates, Kimberley Tour  
Operators Workshop, 1997

Kimberley Tour Operators Forum 1987

Broome and the West Kimberley Practical  
Tourism Issues 1987

Kimberley Region Tourism Development Plan  
1986

Despite the 17 year time span all reports listed raise similar issues and make comparable recommendations. It is an indictment on government agencies that many of the recommendations still need addressing. However, what many of the reports failed to ask is: How is the community, as defined above, affected by the development of tourism? How does the community benefit from the tourist trade and how is the community involved in the management of the industry?



## WHAT WE ASKED

Our interviews with residents and services agencies addressed the following issues. Whilst the focus was on the tourism industry the issue of who makes decisions about the GRR was central to every interview.

### (I) BENEFITS AND BENEFICIARIES:

- Who are the stakeholders?
- Who is benefiting from tourism?
- How is the GRR community benefiting from tourism?

### (II) COORDINATION AND COMMUNICATION:

- How does the GRR community communicate with each other?
- How does the GRR community communicate and coordinate with planners, service agencies and tourist networks?



### (III) CULTURAL:

- What are the Aboriginal interests in the industry?
- Are their interests being adequately aired and considered?
- What is the attitude of the Aboriginal community towards tourism?
- What does Native Title and the communities claim over the land mean for tourism and other stakeholders?
- What is happening in regards to management of sites and other places important to the community where tourists currently visit and stumble on in the bush?

### (IV) ENVIRONMENTAL:

- Who is responsible for the management and collection of rubbish from visitors?
- What regulations are in place to monitor introduction of weeds and other foreign species into the environment?
- Are there other environmental issues to be considered?

### (V) STRATEGIC PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT:

- What planning is occurring?
- Does the GRR community have a say?
- Are their interests incorporated into planning?
- How is the industry being managed?



- Who is responsible for the overall management of the industry and the region?
- How can management of the industry improve?
- What should be the future direction for tourism and tourist enterprises?

*LEFT: Interviewing Anne Koeyers at Drysdale River Station.*

*RIGHT: A meeting at Dodnun Community*

## WHAT THE PEOPLE SAID

The following outline presents a summary of issues raised by the community and service agencies that we interviewed. Note that this is only a preliminary assessment of the issues confronting the GRR community and that the issues are not listed in any particular order. Most have been raised in previous reports and remain as pressing issues crucial to the development and sustainability of the tourist industry.

An over-riding concern of the majority of the GRR residents that we spoke with was the issue of coordination of the various infrastructure and services. Who makes decisions about the management and development needs of the GRR? Who is responsible of overall planning of the Gibb River Road region?

Is it the:

- Shires
- Department of Main Roads
- CALM
- Private operators
- The GRR community
- LCDCs
- KTA
- KDC
- ATSIC

In the GRR community's experience it was all and none of the above. Each of the agencies has power to make decisions for their respective areas and do so in accordance with their specific responsibilities. Rarely are planning and management decisions made jointly. No one department or group assumed the right to manage the Gibb River Road in its social, economic, environmental and cultural entirety. Rather, each agency or sector focus and plan for their area of jurisdiction or interest.

This issue was highlighted at the recent meeting<sup>10</sup> called by Taffey and Annabelle Abbotts at Mt Hart to address the need to develop a coordinated approach to establishing emergency procedures along the Road. The meeting was notable in that it brought many of the agencies together with the local community. The meeting endorsed the need for a coordinated approach and welcomed the opportunity to meet together and develop strategies, and to take immediate action.

10 Mt Hart Wilderness Lodge, 30 July, 2002

# ISSUES

## 1. LACK OF INFRASTRUCTURE FOR VISITORS

*I call them brown and white butterflies. We had to close it (Addock Gorge) because they were everywhere and we didn't have the money or the time to clean up everything. The station was getting run down because we were always distracted by the tourists – breakdowns, rubbish, demands.... We didn't have the money to spend \$40,000 on ablutions and then look after the area ... I wrote a submission to apply for funds to jointly manage the gorge with the mob from Imintji and the Shire. I would still like to do this in some form of joint management arrangement.*

**Cait McAlary, Mt House**

Along the road there are:

- Not enough ablution facilities – leading to human waste and toilet paper ruining areas and creating possible health risks.
- Not enough rubbish outlets.
- Not enough managed camping/rest areas

which encourages free camping at many roadside areas.<sup>11</sup>

- No plans evident for the management of waste
- No back-up plan if services, such as maintaining camping grounds, can't be provided by the pastoralists.

The burden is thus placed on the leaseholders to provide many of these services – rubbish collection, assistance with breakdowns, assistance in emergencies, providing provisions etc. The community is usually not adequately reimbursed for these services.

Many pastoralists are not willing to provide these services because they have no security, no support, liability concerns, and sustain high costs for little guarantee of return each year.

Also, it is difficult for tourists to gain information about the indigenous perspective of the land and their culture. There are no interpretive or arts centre along road to educate the public about indigenous perspective and culture.

<sup>11</sup> See Kimberley Development Commission & Department of Transport, North Kimberley Road User Study, Broome, December, 1999: 14 for list of informal camping areas in 1999.

*Left: March Fly Glenn: a good rest area, managed by the Dept of Roads, but the toilets are questionable and there is supposed to be no overnight camping*



*ABOVE: Toilet paper near camp sites at Barnett Gorge. Tourists were forced to camp here when the Manning Gorge camping ground closed during the season. BELOW: Barnett Gorge impromptu camping area.*



## 2. POOR MANAGEMENT OF THE REGION AND THE INDUSTRY

*Things are going downhill environmentally and it is difficult to provide a consistent product.*

**Pam Masters  
Derby Visitors Centre**

*The more people I bring in, the more they tell, the more are going to come. I worry about the whether I was doing the right thing by bringing them in because the whole of the road is so poorly managed.*

**Ex-tour operator**

*Cowboy operators from Darwin and over east. They cut costs wherever possible and don't contribute to the community.*

**Michael Curr, Old Mornington**

**Once a tourist is on the road, there is:**

- Free and uncontrolled camping at many places along the rivers and creeks. Most of the places were identified in previous reports and still are operational. The lack of organised camping areas encourages visitors to camp anywhere.
- No limit on the numbers of tour operators, and no controls on what they do once they have a permit. Many of the smaller operators seek the cheapest options, camping in free places and therefore provide minimal financial input into

the Gibb River economy. Benefit to the community is minimal.

- No ranger program operating outside of the National Parks at Windjana and Bells Gorge/Silent Grove. There has been limited attempt to engage the Gibb River community in ranger training programs or programs such as the Savanna Guides which operates in other states across the north.



- No coordination of tourist services, although this occurs in an ad hoc way as community providers refer customers on to each other and provide complimentary services.
- No clear emergency plans.



*Left: Prime area for free campers – Gibb River Crossing. Above: Barnett Gorge sign on the GRR. However, there is no organised camping facilities at the site and people camp wherever they like. In 2002 the area was inundated with tourists unable to camp at Manning Gorge. Barnett Gorge is on the Gibb River pastoral lease, and so the Ngallagunda community would be liable for any mishap. Currently they do not have the resources to maintain the road and a camping ground. However, if the tourists don't camp here, where do they go?*

**How many tourists are too many?**

- There has been no formal assessment of the sustainable limits for tourists in the region, given current services, nor projections for the future.

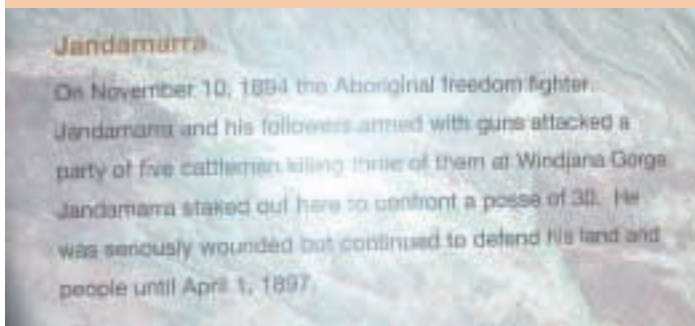
The consultants met a Canadian couple at Windjana Gorge, and inquired as to their presence on the GRR. They indicated that they had heard from word

of mouth in Canada about the isolation, "We wanted to see the landscape. We don't want to meet people." The challenge is to provide such experiences whilst developing the tourist industry.

The view of the GRR community is that they want improved management of tourists and the industry as a whole. At this stage they do not want to put limits on numbers because of the seasonal and fluctuating nature of the industry.

#### Sealing and improving the road?

- There has been little formal discussion with community about their concerns. Although main roads have a 10 year plan their appears to be little community consultation about their plans and the ultimate impact on the industry and services along the road.



*This sign gives no information about the Bunuba people, nor does it explain why Jandamarra was a resistance fighter. This is the ONLY sign with information about indigenous culture along the western section of the GRR.*

#### Who manages the region and the industry?

- It is difficult to provide a consistent tourist product when the industry is often dependent on the provision of services by a leaseholders who have other demands and commitments.
- There is inadequate land management strategies to preserve the environmental and cultural values of the region. It is also uncertain as to who is responsible for this.
- Service delivery by agencies is compartmentalised. e.g. the Shire will grade the station road but not airstrip.
- Management of off-road traffic by government authorities is minimal and residents are concerned about legal responsibility in the case of accidents etc.
- There is no coordinating agency that is adequately funded to provide planning and management services for the region.
- Regulation Vs non-regulation of the tourist industry is an issue that needs to be addressed.
- The GRR community generally feel that the KTA does adequately support and communicate with them or engage them in strategic planning.
- No integrated planning for social, economic and infrastructure development.

All representatives of the GRR community aspired to some involvement in a developing tourist industry and were keen to be involved in the planning for that development. However, there appears to be little coordination of and involvement of the community in planning processes for the region, even though the tourist industry is dependent on the community to deliver the tourist product. Also, there appears to be a degree of dysfunction and unwillingness of the agencies to extend beyond their immediate responsibilities.

#### 3. LACK OF INDIGENOUS INVOLVEMENT IN THE TOURIST INDUSTRY

*People want to see the people who make the art.*

**Pam Masters  
Derby Visitors Centre**

Sam Lovell relates the following story:

*...when we got to a waterhole [this bloke would get out] and say 'Wait here a little while' and he'd go and talk to the Rainbow Serpent, telling him 'These blokes are going for a swim, don't drown them'*

*I knew what he was doing but the people didn't, so I'd have to explain about that, too. People used to respect that; they couldn't thank you enough for showing them that sort of thing... We used to explain about early Aboriginal life, early station days, all sorts of things.<sup>12</sup>*

<sup>12</sup> Lovell, 1993,p:43

Sam's story provides insight for tourists about the relationship of Aboriginal people to their country and creates the sense of the Aboriginal connection to the landscape as a living reality. Tourists should be able to access such information in their Gibb River Road experience.

**From the point of view of the indigenous community there is:**

- Limited, if any, engagement with the tourists.
- Few benefits from tourism to the indigenous community.
- No training, in particular ranger training, or employment in the conservation parks.
- No vision, planning or direction for involvement in the industry.
- Little information accessible to the public regarding an indigenous perspective of the region.
- No outlets for living cultural exchange and economic enterprise such as a culture or art center.
- No management of cultural sites.

The GRR is a culturally rich region with many public areas of deep cultural significance, such as the rock art galleries. However, the average tourist can drive the length of the road and learn nothing of

indigenous culture, language or worldview. Tourists may see art sites but there is no avenue to connect the images with the people to whose culture they belong. Rather, most tourists arrive and depart the Kimberley with the denigrating images of Aboriginal people sitting under trees in parks and on the fringes of towns. Such apparent dysfunction reinforces racial stereotypes that visitors may already hold.

Although the indigenous people make up over 50% of the population of the Gibb River Road there are only a few actively involved in sustained tourist ventures or programs. A number of prominent Aboriginal residents strongly expressed their concern about the failure of the bureaucracy to respond to their inquiries over the years for information and assistance to become involved in the developing tourist industry along the GRR.

The majority of the Aboriginal people met and interviewed indicated some concern about the impact of tourism on their land, law and culture, while at the same time expressing a desire to understand and be more

informed to become commercially involved in the industry, as individuals and communities.

In particular, there are a number of recognized Aboriginal artists residing in the GRR communities. There are also many fledgling artists, young and old, producing works. They all lack support in the production, development, management and marketing of their art, and many have to deal through agencies in the East Kimberley or through Mowanjum in Derby.

There is no doubt that the development of art and craft production in the GRR region would significantly enhance Aboriginal participation in the tourist industry and create further incentive for others to become involved. It would also provide an authentic experience for tourists viewing the artist in their home environment.

Overall, it appears there is no strategy or plan to promote eco-cultural tourism, inviting the participation or facilitation of the Aboriginal community in tourism along the GRR.

*Wandjinas near Manning Gorge*



#### 4. UNCERTAINTY, INEQUITY AND LACK OF REPRESENTATION

*We need continuity in the industry. We don't want the numbers to be limited at the moment because we don't know how secure the industry is from year to year. We don't want to set limits till we know it's secure, but we do want to manage it better.*

**Anne Koeyers, Drysdale River, 2002**

##### 4.1 Pastoralism and/or tourism

*We need diversification to support the pastoral lease.*



*Above: Rondel hut at Beverley Springs to complement the station-stay style of tourism  
Top centre: Drysdale River Station sign outlining the services they provide for tourists and visitors on the central section of the Gibb River Road and Kalumburu Roads.*



**Michael Curr, Old Mornington**

While some station owners and communities may at times prefer to stick to their core business of producing cattle and living the lifestyle they enjoy, most are unable to avoid contact with tourists and the tourist industry as it impacts on their daily lives during the tourist season.

At issue is the need to develop a management regime that understands the competing and at times common interests between both activities. However, at the moment this occurs in an uncertain legal climate where the legal rights and responsibilities of pastoralist and/or tourist operator are unclear.

The State Government's proposed new land initiatives as stated by the Minister for Lands, Hon Alana MacTeirnan at the Carnarvon Muster<sup>13</sup> in conjunction with the impending pastoral lease expiry date in 2015 creates further uncertainty for the GRR community. (See page 29 for copy of MacTeirnan's press release). However, her statement provides a crucial opportunity for government agencies to develop adequate planning mechanisms

and processes in collaboration with the GRR community to consider how these competing interests might proceed and be better managed in the future.

##### 4.2 Land tenure

*We want to manage Dili Gorge ourselves. That was one of the reasons why we purchased the lease. We don't want CALM to manage it and we don't want any other roads in. We control how people go there .. they can't camp overnight because we don't trust them.. one day we caught a guy dragging a net for barramundi.*

**Cheryl Camp, Beverley Springs**

*MacTeirnan wants to excise areas from the pastoral lease for tourism – the gorge, the campsite, the access road and provide free public access. This will affect our livelihood. The roadhouse is supposed to be a part of the Aboriginal Reserve, but it is still part of the pastoral lease. If it is excised as a special tourist lease it will go to the highest bidder. If they take it away it will kill the community.*

**Tony McCormack, Mt Barnett Roadhouse**

With the upcoming expiry for all pastoral leases in 2015, the Western Australian government has conducted a round of consultations with pastoralists and their respective organisations over the last twelve months to seek a response to a number of proposals that will affect the future tenure in the renewal of leases process.

<sup>13</sup>, 4th – 5th May, 2002

## PROPOSED PASTORAL LEASE EXCISIONS ALONG GIBBRIVER AND KALUMBURU ROADS



*DMR roadside parking area at 3 ways provides parking and dining tables but no facilities such as toilets, rubbish collection or water. Not long before this photo was taken rubbish had been piled up for days before it was cleared up.*

A primary issue that has raised concerns among pastoralists of the GRR is the proposal to excise parcels of land from leases for public, environmental and other purposes. Associated concerns with this proposal relate to issues of ownership, access and management of the areas excised. The competing interests of pastoralists, tourists and other agencies need to be addressed with community input to government.

For example, most of the unique rock gorges which lie in close proximity to the GRR and are central to the tourist experience of the GRR are located on private pastoral leases. As numbers of tourists have increased pastoralists/tourism operators find the areas increasingly difficult to manage. Some gorges have been left in such a disgusting state by uncaring and reckless visitors that the lessees have closed the area off from the public to enable a

LGA / STATION	EXCLUSION		EXCLUSION AREA	REASON FOR EXCLUSION
NAME	PROPONENT		(HECTARES)	
<b>DERBY-WEST KIMBERLEY</b>				
Beverley Springs	DCLM	791		Reservation for "Conservation of Flora and Fauna"
Glenroy	Derby/West Kimberley	1,826		Recreation & Tourism (Diamond Gorge)
Kimberley Downs	Derby/West Kimberley	2,058		Recreation & Camping
Mornington	Derby/West Kimberley	535		Recreation & Tourism (St John Gorge)
Mt Barnett	Derby/West Kimberley	6,856		Recreation & Tourism (2 sites Manning & Galvans Gorges)
Mt House	Derby/West Kimberley	2,767		Recreation & Tourism (2 sites Adcock & Moll Gorges)
Napier Downs	Derby/West Kimberley	2,198		Recreation & Camping
Yeeda	Derby/West Kimberley	14,695		Recreation & Tourism
<b>WYNDHAM-EAST KIMBERLEY</b>				
Carson River	DIA	115		PA 47
		315; 360		PA 48; 49
Doongan	DIA	115		PA 47
Drysdale River	DCLM	552		Reservation for "Conservation of Flora and Fauna"
El Questro	DCLM	97,361		Reservation for "Conservation of Flora and Fauna"
Gibb River	DCLM	93		Reservation for "Conservation of Flora and Fauna"
	Derby/West Kimberley	2,253		Recreation & Tourism (Barnett Gorge)
Mt Elizabeth	DCLM	500 (4 sites; 100;		Reservation for "Conservation of Flora and Fauna"
		100; 144; 156)		
Theda	DCLM	600		Reservation for "Conservation of Flora and Fauna"

period of rehabilitation. (Addcock Gorge for example).

The ownership, access and management of the gorges is becoming a contentious issue area between lessees of properties and government. Whilst regulation of the numbers of visitors is considered undesirable by some GRR residents, they

acknowledge the need to maintain the environment at a level to not jeopardize the balance between the eco-system and the numbers of visitors.

Current leaseholders are also concerned about who will lease and control the proposed excisions. If it is not the current leaseholder then:

- Who will provide adequate fenced areas?
- Who will control access off the excision?
- Will the new leasee be in competition with the current leasee?
- Who will resource the management of the excised area?
- How will the new leasee manage the area if they are not resident?

These, and many other issues, need to be resolved.

#### 4.3 Uncertain future development of the industry

All those interviewed want to see more tourists come to the area and they want further development of the industry along the GGR. Whilst appreciating the seasonal nature of the industry and the effect of external national and global events, there is concern that the industry is not being managed in a coordinated sustainable and supportive manner.

For example, many view that benefits they receive from membership of industry agencies responsible

for advertising and promoting their enterprises are limited.

There is also a concern that if other GRR residents or outside companies decide to enter the industry at this particular time of uncertainty, it would cause further hardship to those still trying to come to terms with their current limitations of a short season, fluctuating numbers and inconsistent seasons.

Again, the need for strategic planning is considered essential by the residents.

#### 4.4 Public Liability Insurance

*... to run our business we have to have a minimum of \$10 million public liability insurance, plus workers comp... we have tour operators coming and asking to see our public liability insurance. We have to cover the insurance for their business...but we are liable for unregulated campers on our properties...*

**Anne Koeys, Drysdale River**

The rise of public liability and professional indemnity insurance in the wake of the HIH Insurance collapse and the September 11th terrorist attacks has had an immediate and critical affect on those people involved in the tourism business along



*The Ngullagunda Community are keen to start a tourist venture*

the GRR. The subsequent hike in costs has given rise to a number of smaller businesses seriously considering their options.

There were a number of anecdotal stories reflecting the growing pedantic nature of some visitors, reflecting a general move towards a more cautious and perhaps litigious society.

#### 4.5 Tour operators

There is, mostly, a tolerant relationship between pastoralists and tour operators. However, at times the relationship is volatile, partly

because their relationship is not yet well-defined.

As leaseholders the GRR community expect and demand the respect any owner would of visitors to their property. In the bush there has always been the unwritten protocol of respect shown to whoever occupies the land irrespective of the tenure.

However, some tour operators view the property tenants as leaseholders not owners and assert rights of access and use without reference, negotiation or fee. On the other hand, they also expect the lessee to provide insurance cover for their clients.



The property owners view this as being taken for a ride. In their opinion, such tour operators are doing things on the cheap while they have to consider maintenance costs (associated with continual use of a particular area), land and stock management and public liability concerns.

There is little regulation over tour operators in the region, nor are there formal protocols to govern their relationship of tour operators to GRR leaseholders and communities.

#### **4.6 Native Title**

If one was to believe the media portrayal of the native title claims, one would presume that there was polarization of views amongst the GRR community surrounding the issue of native title. However, on the ground, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interests in the GRR community are adopting a more cooperative approach.

A significant strength within the GRR community is that despite differences there is a commonality that comes from living in this very distinct social and cultural environment.

***The residents share the common concern that comes with living in a remote location: they are all isolated from policy makers, legislators and program decision-makers. Individually each person or group reiterated the same issues of concerns — from inadequate infrastructure to a lack of coordination of services and***

***a representative forum to channel serious matters for policy consideration and debate.***

***All agreed that there is a need to develop a more inclusive approach to the opportunities that are presenting themselves as a result of continuing exposure of the area through tourism.***

As a legal requirement under the Native Title Act and subject to a native title determination, the Ngarinyin people will be forming a Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC) to deal with land management and development issues. For the first time, this new body will create a united structure for the various communities along the road. If adequately resourced this will provide a forum for the indigenous community to address their social, cultural, environmental and economic aspirations.

#### **4.7 Limited representation of community interests**

One of the only areas of formal engagement between GRR resident interests and other external interests and government agencies is through the Land Conservation District Committee (LCDC) which are governed by the Soil and Land Conservation Act and administered by the Agriculture Department.

The committee has the potential to bring together stakeholders from pastoral and other land interest groups in the district to discuss land management matters. This committee is housed under the state Agriculture Department who assist to facilitate these discussions.



***Community sign at entrance to Dodnun Community. The green frog is an important Ngarranggani Being significant to the Dodnun community area. Few tourists would understand the cultural significance of the symbol.***

The fundamental problem is that this structure and process is extremely under-resourced and the members made up from the community do not have time to attend to the business of the organization due to their own personal and business commitments.

Due to its charter the committee is somewhat limited in its capacity to engage holistically in development issues that effect the community along the GRR, such as strategic planning for the entire GRR region and its future infrastructure needs.

While most GRR agencies are aware of the need for consultation in regards to their responsibilities and jurisdiction, more often than not most appear to plan and work in isolation from each other and the GRR community.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is as obvious now as it was 17 years ago that there needs to be some holistic regional planning for the management of the tourist industry in the GRR region to ensure that future development preserves the environment and is a benefit to the community. What is urgently needed is planning that involves the community and adequate support to the community to sustain a healthy tourist industry.

Having outlined many of the problems it nevertheless needs to be said that the Gibb community and its agencies manage to keep things going and provide a unique and quality experience for tourists. They also continue to maintain their cattle enterprises, manage their communities and other diverse interests and enterprises.

Whilst the community gets blamed for shutting down services, it must be emphasized that the community is not adequately resourced to deal with all the responsibilities required to deliver a satisfactory and safe tourist product. For example, who assists the community to develop a venue/experience that meets public health and safety standards? Who provides loans or grants to develop necessary infrastructure such as ablution facilities, safe roads etc? Who provides advice on public liability issues? Who provides assistance to improve station access roads to popular spots? Who trains guides? Who provides adequate and

informative signage? Who will pick up the rubbish or provide a tip?

The internal strength of the Gibb River Road community was aptly demonstrated this year when, in response to the lack of coordination and resources for emergency services and procedures, the community galvanized service agencies and began their own planning to develop and instigate emergency procedures for along the road.

This critique is therefore not aimed at the community. The problem of management of the industry along the GRR is beyond the resources that the individuals within the community possess. Any future management plans for the development and maintenance of the tourist industry must involve and resource the Gibb River Road community to achieve this.

With the changing global environment in which domestic tourism will increase and overseas tourists will be seeking "safe" destinations, the pressure on the Gibb River Road and Kimberley Region must increase profoundly. However, the community, the environment and the facilities of the Gibb River Road are not ready for such an onslaught. It is therefore potentially a matter of grave urgency if we are going to achieve what Syd Shea urged 17 years ago.



*New facilities being built at Old Mornington Camp. The Australian Wildlife Conservancy is keen to develop eco-cultural tourism and has a number of innovative ideas to engage scientists and traditional owners in education programs*

The most outstanding need is for the community and service agencies to plan and coordinate services for the future. To plan so that fluctuations in the industry can be accommodated. Plan the management of the environmental and cultural resource. Plan for training and the distribution of services. This will guarantee the tourist product for the future.

# FUTURE DIRECTIONS

*There is a huge need for us to get together to talk about pastoral and tourist development. Other people are making the decisions for us but we're here doing the hard work.*

**Cheryl Camp, Beverley Springs**

## 1. BUILD ON EXISTING STRENGTHS

*We are not totally unmanaged. We help each other.*

**Anne Koeyers, Drysdale River**

*Mostly people are cooperative and send referrals to one another.*

**Michael Curr, Old Mornington**

There is an urgent need to develop suitable planning processes for the region to cater for both the tourists and the residents. Whatever the limitations of the current LCDC and the future PBC, it would be important to investigate how these representative bodies could be adequately resourced to bring the community together and liaise with government agencies.

There is a need to build further on the good relationships that exist in the community, which have been established through a long association and connection in the pastoral industry.

The GRR community already offers a variety of experiences that complement one another rather than create unprofitable competition.

For example, a variety of services are offered at communities along the road:

Mt Hart: homestead accommodation  
 Beverley Springs: station experience, home-stay, safari huts and camping.



*Sign on Kalumburu Rd near Drysdale River Station An LCDC initiative in partnership with conservationists to educate tourists about managing the environment.*

Mt Elizabeth: homestead accommodation and camping.

KWA: safari pass - self-drive tourist to bush camps.

Old Mornington: Australian Wildlife Conservancy Environmental education, adventure, camping at a range of standards.

Drysdale River: services and camping

As the GRR tourist industry depends on a relatively small market it would be unfortunate if new competition was to create tensions with existing enterprises.



*Road closure sign at Galvan's Gorge is an example of controlling tourist access to gorges. There is a need for strategic planning along the road to control access to other sensitive and culturally significant areas.*

## 2. MANAGING THE REGION AND THE TOURISTS

All of the people spoken to accept the reality that tourists and other visitors will continue to come to the GRR, and there is no dispute in terms of attempting to restrict or regulate numbers at this stage.

The greatest concern is how to manage the tourists when they arrive, whilst maintaining the ecological and cultural sustainability of the region.

The GRR community raised the following options to consider:

### Establish a licensing regime to regulate numbers:

- Tourist permits or passports, purchased by the tourist prior to traveling the GRR.
- Registration and regulation of tour operators operating in the region.

### Set benchmarks for tourism development in the region:

- Accreditation for tour operators.
- Ensure engagement of indigenous people in the industry.
- Develop and resource partnerships between indigenous and non-indigenous:
  - E.g. Establish a culture centre<sup>14</sup>
  - Information pamphlet
  - Ranger training
  - Develop signage/trails etc to educate the tourist.



### Develop a partial user-pay system in order to resource better management:

Options to consider include:

- Setting levies per head/per bed to extract a % for the industry.
- Market a Kimberley pass/passport for travelling in the GRR region.
- Establish tolls at the ends of the GR road (not considered popular).

### Develop and resource administrative and planning bodies:

- Resource and develop an integrated community plan for the GRR
- Engage all relevant agencies in this process
- Investigate the option of establishing a Gibb River Road Authority that is responsible for the planning and administration of the region through which the Gibb River and Kalumburu roads pass through.

### Allow diversification and provide legal security for the GRR community in their commercial interests.

- Clarify roles and responsibilities of those involved in the tourism industry.
- Plan for global and regional fluctuations in the tourist industry.
- Develop a legal framework and security for pastoralists and others engaged in tourist ventures.

## 3. COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS

As with all surveys, the GRR community has a wish list. Below are listed some of their aspirations.

- Build an all-weather road with adequate creek crossings in the wet.
- Develop and resource a range of emergency procedures as part of a regional plan.
- Develop, initiate and resource a plan for the region which incorporates cultural, social economic and environmental planning with best practice.
- Support indigenous engagement in the industry, so as to educate visitors and operators, and to enrich the tourist experience of the region.

<sup>14</sup> Note that Rio Tinto has already considered this option: Part of the agreement of traditional owners and Rio Tinto Exploration Pty Ltd is to "provide assistance with the supply and transport of materials for a cultural information center to attract and inform the public of the culture of the Traditional Owners at a location to be selected by the Traditional Owners" Native Title and Heritage Protection Agreement, between the Kimberley Land Council, the Kamali Land Council and Rio Tinto Exploration Pty Ltd, Draft, 2002, Schedule 6: Conditions Additional to this Agreement pp26

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

As we approach the 2003 tourist season there are already predictions for a massive tourist boom. As Evan Boys of the Kimberley Tourist Association recently stated "the biggest impact will be from the drive through market". He also admitted, "we have no control over numbers". He then called upon tourist providers to "be prepared to do the right thing and make a sound foundation for the future".<sup>15</sup>

The current tourist providers and other residents along the Gibb River Road are keen to provide for the Kimberley tourist industry, but they need support, certainty and security to be able to deliver a secure and sound product for the future.

In order to achieve this shared goal, we recommend that a regional planning process be immediately implemented to address the many critical issues raised in this and previous reports. Such a process should include the following actions.

### 1. Community representation and consultation

Relevant departments to organise and resource an initial meeting of Gibb River Road community members and service agencies to:

- 1a Commence a process of community consultation and regional planning.
- 1b Establish a community representative group and process for future negotiations. Existing representative structures such as the LCDC and



*Adcock Gorge. Closed to the public by Mt House because they did not have the resources to manage it properly.*

Native Title working groups (to be replaced by an incorporated PBC) could be combined and resourced to achieve a representative group.

### 2. Planning and management.

2a Relevant government agencies to commence and resource a thorough regional planning process for the Gibb River road region.

2b Involve the Gibb River Road community, or

their representatives, in planning processes and proposed developments. For example, support from the GRR community should be sought before implementing a proposed extension of the Savannah Way into the Kimberley region.

- 2c** Facilitation of a community or collective response to the proposed pastoral lease excisions and their management.
- 2d** Relevant agencies to plan and develop a ranger training program for the management of public access areas in the Gibb River Road region.
- 3. Indigenous exposure**
  - 3a** Seek funding from relevant agencies to develop signage and/or other mechanisms to inform visitors to the region about the indigenous perspective and their cultural background.
  - 3b** Commence negotiations with relevant departments and agencies (ATSIC/Arts Council/Rio Tinto etc) to develop a regional arts/culture centre to promote indigenous arts, culture and training and employment.
  - 3c** Seek funding to develop processes whereby tourist providers and operators can be in-serviced and regularly informed about indigenous issues and culture.

Since preparing this report the Department of Planning and Infrastructure has commenced a scoping project for the northern Kimberley region. Amanda Stainthorpe from the DPI in Broome outlined the project as follows:

*“The Department for Planning and Infrastructure in collaboration with the Kimberley Development Commission, has taken steps to develop a scoping study as a precursor for the development of a strategic plan for future land use and management of the North Kimberley. This area is roughly defined as the area between Derby and Wyndham, to the limit of State waters and incorporating the Gibb River Road to the south.*

*The need for a regional strategic plan for this area was identified in the State Planning Strategy (1997). The scoping study will be developed during 2003 and will identify and assess land use, development opportunities and resource management implications. This will permit the creation of a common focus and provide the potential to coordinate the range of relevant initiatives for the area.”*

With full community involvement this is potentially a great start to developing appropriate regional planning processes.



*Range country of the Gibb River Road.*

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Government of Western Australia  
Media Statement

The Hon. Alannah MacTiernan MLA  
Minister for Planning and Infrastructure

Statement Released: 25-Nov-2002  
Portfolio: Infrastructure, Planning

## Pastoral land restructure under way

25/11/02

The first major reorganisation of Western Australia's pastoral leases for more than 70 years has begun in earnest.

Planning and Infrastructure Minister Alannah MacTiernan said that letters advising individual leaseholders of the proposed exclusions from 97 of the State's 527 pastoral leases would be mailed out over the next two weeks.

Ms MacTiernan said the land would be required by Government agencies and local governments for a range of purposes including conservation, recreation, tourism, protection of Aboriginal sites and provision for the expansion of existing towns.

She said the proposed exclusions had been carefully assessed against the need to ensure the future viability and sustainability of the State's pastoral industry.

The exclusions would not come into effect until 2015 when many leases were due for renewal, but the Government was required to give notice of its intentions by the end of this year.

"This timeline has given us a good opportunity to review the way we share the 91 million hectares or 36 per cent of the State's surface covered by pastoral leases," the Minister said.

"Since the current structure of pastoral leases was put in place by the Lands Act of 1933, resources development, the growth of tourism and increased recognition of indigenous and conservation interests, have all placed new demands.

"We appreciate that for some pastoralists the process will be difficult and the Government would be open to discussions in some areas."

Ms MacTiernan said leaseholders would have two years to negotiate the exclusions with the State Government.

"The exclusions which were proposed after extensive discussions with pastoral organisations, Government agencies and other interest groups affect about two per cent - or two million hectares - of the State's pastoral land," she said.

"They may range from a few hectares to protect a heritage site to much larger areas required to consolidate national parks and conservation areas."

The Minister said that three working groups established at the Gascoyne Muster in May this year: Pastoralism for Sustainability; Aboriginal Access and Living Areas; and Access to Pastoral Lands had all had input in to the decision-making.

Details of individual exclusion would be made available once all leaseholders had been informed.

Minister's office: 9213 6400

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