Cutting Edge Research in Tourism – New Directions, Challenges and Applications
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'The real thing': tourists' attitudes towards tourism development on the Coral Coast, Australia.

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on part of a research project funded by the CRC for Sustainable Tourism [Australia] which investigated the political processes involved in the emergence of vocal and widespread public opposition to a proposal to develop a resort/marina complex at Mauds Landing, in the remote Coral Coast region of Western Australia and adjacent to the renowned Ningaloo Reef. This resort complex had been on the development agenda for more than fifteen years but in July 2003 was finally rejected by the Western Australian government. The final refusal of the resort/marina proposal was at least in part due to the vocal and tenacious opposition to the development. Most protest action occurred in Perth, more than 1000kms south of the site of the planned development, and home to many regular visitors to the Coral Coast region. The scope of opposition to the proposed resort complex suggested that the 'affected community' of a remote tourist destination such as Maud's Landing/Coral Bay is much broader than those that live in the area in question.

Given that this type of opposition to development in Australia appears to be strengthening and involves the relatively new concept of tourists against tourism development, an important component of this research project was a series of interviews with international and domestic visitors to the Coral Coast region. The interviews examined a range of issues regarding visitors' opinions about the Maud's Landing resort and marina development proposal in the context of their attitudes towards tourism

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development in Western Australia generally, and more specifically, in remote regions such as the Coral Coast region.

The interviews revealed that respondents were generally positive about the benefits of promoting and developing Western Australia as a tourist destination. The Coral Coast region offered the best of the state with its unique beauty, its isolation, and the Ningaloo Reef – seen as the 'jewel in the crown' for Western Australian tourism. However, this support for tourism development and promotion was tempered by cautious recognition that any future development needed to be appropriate to the area and sustainable in the long term. Respondents expressed concern regarding the potential for inappropriate tourism development to incur irreversible damage to the region's pristine environment and fragile ecosystem. For most respondents, the proposed resort/marina complex had represented an inappropriate form of tourism development. Furthermore, many respondents felt that such a development would damage the area's unsophisticated character, the visitors it attracted, and threaten the survival of a type of holiday no longer available in many tourist destinations. This paper explores these tourists' understanding and articulation of sustainable tourism development issues as it relates to the Coral Coast and discusses the implications of this for remote regions in general.

Keywords: sustainable development, peripheral regions, tourists' attitudes.

INTRODUCTION

It is increasingly recognised that an understanding of community values regarding tourism development is a prerequisite for tourism's sustainability in the future (Murphy, 1985; Pearce et al., 1996; Getz & Timur, 2005). Different values held by community stakeholders will be reflected in their priorities for development. This includes not only their values relating to the natural environment, but also social and cultural sustainability issues, which are often missing or underestimated in the sustainability debate (Butler, 1998; Twining-Ward, 1999; Jackson & Morpeth, 2000). Effective governance and planning for tourism development requires contribution from community stakeholders to ensure sustainable tourism development goals are achieved (Ryan, 2002; Getz & Timur, 2005).
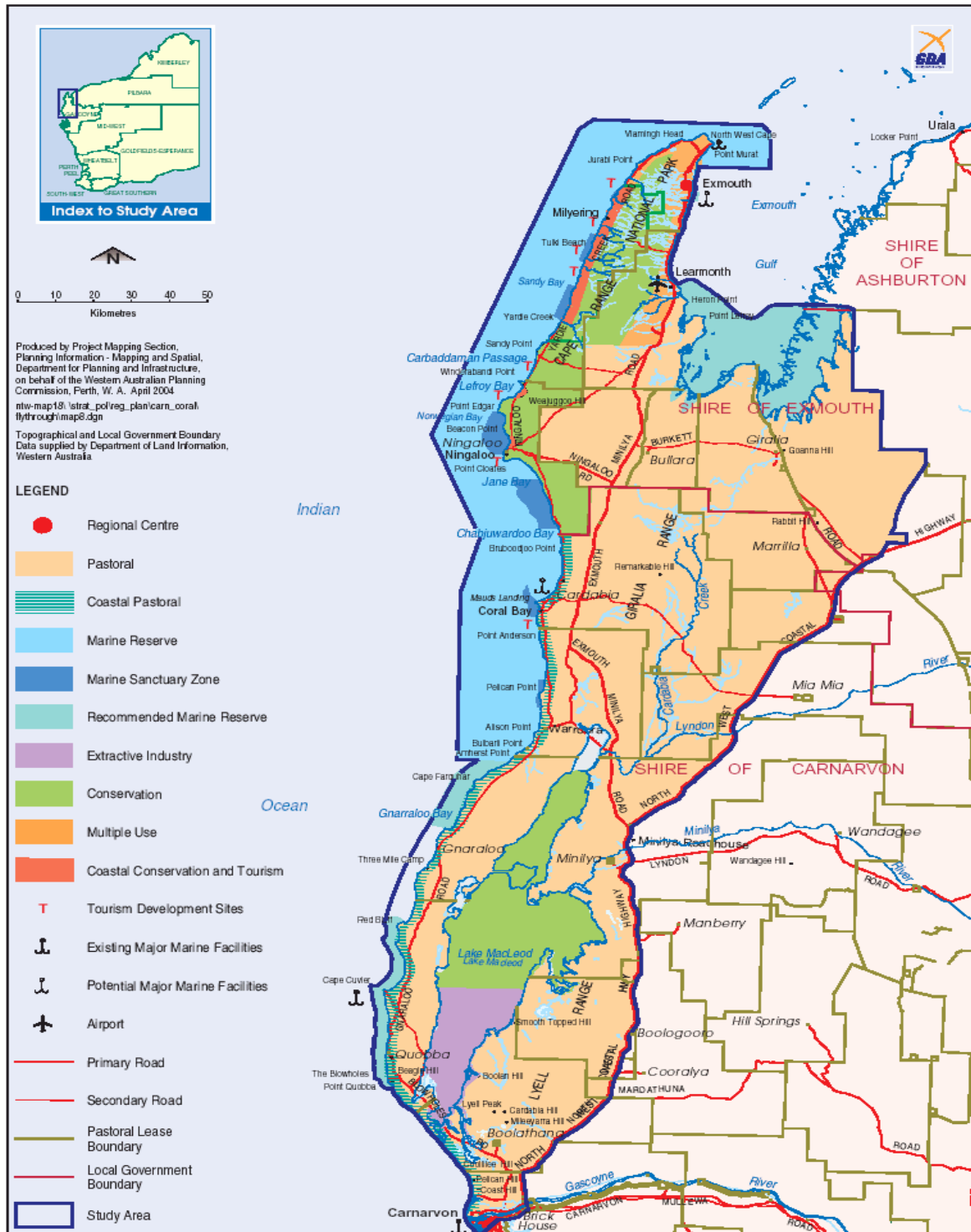
Many research projects have explored local resident and environmental activists' attitudes to tourism development in order to take greater account of these in policy and planning decisions. Less often studied has been the 'community of interest' of a particular tourism development, which may be far wider than the residents of a planned development site. This is particularly the case in remote regions, where resident populations are often very small or non-existent. In these situations, the 'community of interest' may include the general population of a state or even nation, as well as visitors to the region. The current paper reports on the attitudes and perceptions of sustainable tourism development amongst tourist stakeholders in the context of one proposed development, for the remote Coral Coast region in Western Australia.

The Coral Coast region is a peripheral destination at the edge of a vast landmass, more than 1000 km from the city of Perth – itself one of the most isolated cities in the world. The study region covers the coastal area between Carnarvon in the south and Exmouth in the north and is part of the Gascoyne Region, which also incorporates significant

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inland territory [see Map 1]. The boundaries of this study region are defined by the location of the Ningaloo Reef, a fringing reef of great natural significance, which spans the coastline between Carnarvon and Exmouth. The presence of the Ningaloo reef, and a supporting marine reserve, is a major reason why this isolated and remote region is of growing importance to the tourism industry in Western Australia (Tourism Western Australia [TWA]. 2004).

Like many peripheral regions, the Coral Coast region's remoteness lies in more than just its geographical location (Bottrill et al., 2000; Brown & Hall, 2000). Firstly, the area has a very small population base in a vast land area. The Gascoyne Region covers 137,938 square km (twice the size of Tasmania), but has a total resident population of approximately 10,240. The main coastal settlements in the region are Carnarvon, which is the administrative and service centre of the region (population approximately 7300), and Exmouth and Coral Bay, which are becoming increasingly important tourist destinations. Exmouth has a resident population of approximately 2500, which swells with visitors due to the presence of the Ningaloo Reef and Cape Range National Park approximately 40 km from the township. Coral Bay, with a minimal resident population (approximately 60), has significant infrastructural problems which are exacerbated by the influx of tourists. Other important recreational/tourist locations in the region are located at some of the pastoral stations – including Gnarloo, Quobba and Ningaloo – which offer informal campsites with very basic facilities. There are more formal campsites offered within the Cape Range National Park and around the Exmouth vicinity (TWA, 2004).

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MAP 1: Case Study Area

(Source: Gascoyne Coast Regional Strategy, 1996)

At a time when coastal areas in Australia and globally have been subject to significant increases in development, population and tourism, the very remoteness and isolation of

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this region remains a key element of its attractiveness, alongside the 'jewels' of the Ningaloo Reef and the Cape Range National Park. Like other remote regions, the Coral Coast region is also economically peripheral, and tourism and particularly nature based tourism, is considered an important development option for the region at a time when the traditional economic base of pastoral farming and fishing is in steady decline (see Pforr et al., forthcoming; Wood, 2003).

The attractiveness the region for tourism faces a number of threats. One of the major threats is the lack of infrastructure, particularly in the township of Coral Bay, however improvements in infrastructure and access may also threaten the remote and isolated qualities which makes it attractive (Hall & Boyd, 2005). Another source of threat is the potential for inappropriate development to jeopardise the region's attractions. Related to both these issues is the risk a region like this faces to become peripheral in the minds of decision makers. As acknowledged by Brown and Hall (2000: 1) "to be peripheral is to be marginalised, to lack power and influence". The Coral Coast region's small population, and distance from the political 'centre' of the state in Perth means that the region continually runs the risk of being overlooked by political processes.

In this context, the publicity received over a proposal to develop a tourist resort and marina complex at Maud's Landing, situated 3 km from the Coral Bay township, is significant. Despite the isolated location of the proposed development this proposed development received extensive, predominantly negative, publicity in Western Australia between 2001 and 2003. During this period, action groups were formed and numerous activities were well supported, including the display of bumper stickers, public forums, petitions and rallies (Pforr et al., forthcoming). This opposition involved local residents of the Coral Bay region as well as visitors to the area from interstate and overseas. Most vocal opposition, however, was based in the south-west of Western Australia, more than 1000 km from the proposed development site and included residents of the state who had never visited the region and many more for whom the region represented a holiday destination. In this way, those who were opposed to this development project included tourists themselves and involved the relatively new concept of tourists against tourism development.

The Maud's Landing development proposal was on the drawing board for fifteen years and incorporated a large tourist resort and apartments, a caravan park, an inland marina, and residential and commercial properties (see Pforr et al., forthcoming). When, in July 2003, the Western Australian government announced the decision to reject the proposed resort and marina complex, it was widely believed that an important reason for the rejection of the development proposal was the magnitude of opposition, and its vociferous nature, in the wider community. The following discussion does not report on the specific Maud's Landing development proposal, which has been reported elsewhere (see Pforr et al., forthcoming), but focuses on these tourists' more general understanding and articulation of sustainable tourism development issues as they relate specifically to the Coral Coast region. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of these attitudes for tourism development in this, and other, peripheral regions.

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METHODOLOGY

The research on which this paper is based utilised qualitative, semi-structured interviews of 60-90 minutes duration. Respondents were asked questions relating to tourism and tourism development in general and their attitudes towards tourism development in the Coral Coast region. Following this exploration, respondents were asked their opinions, and source of knowledge, of the proposed Maud's Landing development. These interviews were tape recorded and were later transcribed and analysed.

The respondents were chosen using convenience sampling, however an attempt was made to approach people from a range of backgrounds, accommodation types, and places of origin. Most interviews took place either on the beach or around respondents' accommodation sites. Interviews were carried out with individuals, couples and families however most interviews were conducted in pairs. This approach enabled interaction between the respondents. In total 32 interviews were conducted, involving 64 respondents in all. The location and place of origin of these respondents are presented in Table 1 below.

The research was conducted during July, 2003 – a period which coincided with the Western Australian government's announcement of the final rejection of the Maud's Landing development proposal.   The specific locations at which the interviewers were based during this research period were Coral Bay township, Cape Range National Park, and Gnarloo Station. A couple of interviews were conducted also at other station camping sites. As Table 1 demonstrates, the majority of respondents were from Western Australia (67.2%), particularly at the station camping grounds and at Coral Bay township. The high proportion of interviews conducted with intrastate visitors at Coral Bay was due to the interview period coinciding with Western Australian school holidays, when the majority of visitors to the township are from intrastate. The vast majority of respondents at the stations were from intrastate also (84.6%), due to the isolated and less publicised nature of these sites. By comparison, a greater proportion of those interviewed at Coral Bay and Cape Range National Park were from interstate and overseas. In fact, the majority of interviews conducted in the Cape Range National Park were with international visitors (55.6%), which is a destination featured in international guidebooks, while the nearby town of Exmouth is a stopover on the routes of the backpacker buses that service the region.

Table 1: Place of origin and location of respondents, July 2003

Origin	Stations	Coral Bay	Cape Range National Park	*Total*
International	3.8% (1)	5% (1)	55.6% (10)	*18.8% (12)*
Interstate	11.5% (3)	15% (3)	16.7% (3)	*14.1% (9)*
Intrastate	84.6% (22)	80% (16)	27.8% (5)	*67.2% (43)*
Total	*40.6% (26)*	*31.3% (20)*	*28.1% (18)*	*100% (64)*

FINDINGS

Respondents' attitudes towards tourism and tourism development in the Coral Coast region must be set in the context of their attitudes towards tourism in Western Australia

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in general. In this regard, most respondents were positive about tourism and tourism development in the state, citing the value of tourism to the West Australian economy. Tourism was seen to provide a sustainable income, and a 'potentially low impact' alternative to extractive industries such as mining, which has a long and important history in the state. Tourism was seen also as an opportunity to 'showcase' Western Australia to the rest of the world and a useful vehicle for engendering community pride.

A small minority questioned whether the state should attempt to attract international tourists, preferring to see the state reserved for domestic holidaymakers. Others felt that some areas should not be promoted to tourists, with the following comment typifying this view point: "there are special secret spots that you don't want everyone to find out about because it just becomes touristy" – parts of the Coral Coast region included. Interestingly, many of the intrastate visitors did not see themselves as tourists, with 'tourism' being an activity reserved for people from overseas.

One requirement frequently discussed was the need for development to be site and region specific. This opinion related as much to ensuring that a development was appropriate to the environmental conditions of the region as to the cultural and social identity of the destination. In the case of Western Australia, there were firm opinions regarding the *type* of tourism and tourists that the state should pursue, with a strong preference for encouraging development which maintained the natural qualities for which the state was known, and strongly promoted.[1] It was felt that the state should attempt to attract visitors such as eco tourists and "the more adventurous, hard core tourist and travelers". Many of the international respondents supported this approach, commenting that the overseas visitors to Western Australia were different from those who visited the East coast:

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

The need for different types of development in different environments and places was very apparent during discussions regarding tourism development in the Coral Coast region. If Western Australia was seen as a destination renowned for its natural setting and nature-based assets, the Coral Coast region and the Ningaloo Reef were seen as the 'jewel in the crown' for the state's nature-based tourism. At the most fundamental level, anything that took away from the natural experience available in the area would be an inappropriate development and would destroy what made the region different from other destinations. In discussing respondents' attitude to tourism development in the Coral Coast region, it was clear during interviews that many respondents had the Maud's Landing development proposal, and its very recent rejection by the state government, at the forefront of their minds and many raised the proposed development without prompting.[2] For many people, their attitude regarding future development in the Coral

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[1] Western Australia has long been marketed on the basis of its natural attractions, including a 2002 WATC campaign which described the state as 'Touched by Nature'.
[2] The issue was highly relevant at the time; the Western Australian government rejected the proposal after the interviews had been conducted at Gnarloo Station, but before they were conducted at Coral Bay and the Cape Range National Park.

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Coast region was framed in terms of negotiation; development itself might not be a problem, but it needed to be done in a sustainable manner, in places that could cope, and with good regulations in place. Furthermore, any development would need to have clear benefits for the region, environmentally and economically, through the provision of jobs, infrastructure, and better planning or management practices.

Many respondents' views regarding future tourist development in the region were quite ambivalent. While conceding the growing importance of tourism to the region, respondents were wary about anything that would damage or detract from the natural environment or their holiday experiences in the area. This was reflected in their own personal reasons for visiting the region. All respondents interviewed had visited the region primarily due to the access it provided to activities based on the natural marine environment (e.g.. fishing, snorkeling, swimming, diving) or to marine fauna (e.g. turtles, whales, tropical fish, manta rays), however the respondents stated that the unspoilt, pristine state of this environment also was an important attraction. For many respondents, the lack of development added to the appeal of the place, however, this lack of development, particularly relating to infrastructure, was seen as a negative factor for some (see below). Many respondents revealed that the region had a liminal quality for them; with a slow paced, laidback atmosphere, accompanied by the sense of being liberated from the norms, expectations and pressures of everyday life (cf. Goss, 1993). The lack of development and laidback atmosphere allowed visitors to enjoy a relaxing holiday while 'getting away from it all'. A first time visitor to Coral Bay explained that the place allowed her family to enjoy simple pleasures and not "worry about the things that bother you at home":

> It maybe brings a bit of simplicity back into our lives, because we're city people … and we have a really busy life … and for us this provides a simplicity and safety [my children] don't have at home … I can let them go and I don't worry and they will experience things they never… do at home.

Respondents felt that other visitors came to the region for the same reasons as them, and any tourist development that changed the nature of the place would be ultimately unsuccessful:

> I know most overseas tourists … that do come here, come because it is isolated and it fairly undeveloped and has a small population. So I think that is probably its appeal and to try to compete with the East Coast on its own terms I think would be quite dumb.

An Eastern states visitor explained that the development of large resorts and additional tourist activities would "[destroy] the area" and change the character of visitors:

> People like me who like this area as it is now, won't be here – we'll be moving to an area that is like this, untouched, and if we can't find one in WA … we'll go to Tasmania or New Zealand or wherever, but we'll still seek it out.

In discussing the types of tourism development most suited to the Coral Coast region, care and regard for the fragile natural environment was central. Respondents were particularly concerned about the potential negative impacts which any future

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development could have on the isolated, relatively pristine and rugged coastline of the region. This included not only tourism development which physically damaged or destroyed the natural terrain, but also development that didn't 'fit' with the natural environment aesthetically. The clash between the natural setting and the 'concrete jungles' of a place like the Gold Coast was cited frequently as an example of inappropriate development in a coastal location. While most people discussed land use development issues, they were concerned about the affect that any development might have on the Ningaloo Reef itself and the region's marine life and turtles in particular. This issue had been central to the opposition to the Mauds Landing development, with prominent bumper stickers proclaiming 'Save the Reef: Stop the resort', thereby explicitly associating development of the area with the marine environment of the reef (Save Ningaloo, 2003).

In terms of the types of development that would be appropriate in the region, most of those in favour of some development stated it should be 'more of the same' – more camping grounds and caravan sites, or the development of eco-lodges, safari camps or other low impact developments. These respondents felt that the environment had to come first. Some respondents even suggested keeping development inland to avoid coastal and marine damage. Maintaining the natural appeal of a place and designing in an environmentally sensitive fashion were crucial conditions for good tourism development. Potential appropriate developments were those described as 'low key' and low rise, 'fitting in' environmentally through the choice of colour tones and building materials, and with limited and appropriate landscaping using native fauna. Limiting the extent of development and choosing appropriate locations for developments was also important, as was the overall size and scope of development, so that the natural area was not overwhelmed with visitors.

Opinions about appropriate development differed depending on the location of the respondents and the suggested location of development, however the majority of respondents were against any high rise buildings, large resorts, hotels or marinas in the region. As one camper exclaimed "the last thing you want is high rise out here; [it would] stuff the place". In more general discussion of 'good' and 'bad' tourism development the ubiquitous presence of high rise hotels was seen as a manifestation of the very worst aspects of commercial mass tourism, accompanied by too many souvenir shops, theme parks and chain stores. Another negative consequence of the commercialism of mass tourism was the change which occurred in the character, identity and 'feel' of a destination; negatively affecting the 'culture' or 'heritage' of a place, which risked creating homogenous destinations, found anywhere in the world.

There was almost unanimous rejection of the idea of developing more sophisticated or substantial accommodation at the stations, where minimal facilities currently exist, particularly amongst respondents interviewed at these locations. As one young camper explained, there was no need to put extra facilities at Gnarloo Station as the reason for visiting is for "the outdoor side of it, rather than the pools and the cocktails". Another respondent commented: "Hey my clothes stink of smoke and my beer is lukewarm. I can live with that."

There was some acceptance by respondents that larger development *may* be appropriate in the 'gateway' destinations of Carnarvon or Exmouth. These towns could then act as 'entry points' to the more remote and pristine areas of the coast:

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

The larger and more permanent populations in these towns were seen to provide a social and economic rationale for further development in these areas:

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

In general, most respondents felt that future tourist development should take place in existing tourist destinations, however others felt that small, low impact developments spread along the coast might be less damaging to the natural environment.

A key rationale for further development for many respondents was that it might provide crucial resources to improve the infrastructure, such as sewage and water supply, which were seriously under threat, particularly in Coral Bay:

> You do have to allow some development because large numbers of people need more infrastructure. You have to have sewage works, you have to have reasonable road systems… but it has to be done in a way that is very managed and controlled.

As stated at the outset, peripheral areas often suffer from a lack of infrastructure, due to a combination of their geographical, economic and political peripherality. Brown and Hall (2000) acknowledge the successful lure of tourists to the remoteness of peripheral places must be matched with adequate management practices and infrastructure. While such developments may threaten the qualities which attract visitors, not attending to these issues has much more serious long term consequences. In the case of Coral Bay, it was clear from comments made during interviews that many people felt that the area had been developed with too little consideration of planning and infrastructural issues. One couple who passed through the town observed:

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

In discussing opposition to the Maud's Landing development proposal, one local resident expressed her frustration at what she saw as opponents' tendency to 'bury their heads in the sand' and oppose any development, while not doing anything positive to deal with planning, management and infrastructural issues threatening the region:

> The whole campaign is 'save the reef, stop the resort' … that's not going to save the reef. There are issues here right now that need addressing…. if

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anybody really cared about saving the reef they would be addressing all those issues and would have been doing it for years, rather than just trying to stop one thing from happening.

While many respondents did see scope for further development of accommodation options to cater for greater tourist numbers, others expressed the view that numbers of visitors should be capped, and no further development should take place, even if it meant that they couldn't visit in the future. A ballot system was suggested by a couple of people. Other suggestions to limit numbers included keeping roads unsealed, not expanding airport facilities, and charging for entry in the more remote parts of the region. These people felt that no matter what form development took, any more people to the area would ruin the experience – "There should only be a limited amount of people allowed in here at one time … too many people, too many things get destroyed it doesn't get a chance to grow back". A resident in Coral Bay expressed similar views:

> There's a lot of places in the world that you can't get in for ten years…. We can't go around and build multiple amounts of accommodation to suit, because the more accommodation there is the more people are going to say 'let's go'. They can only really get on the waiting list like everyone else everywhere else….

An interesting finding was that a number of people seemed to be willing to sacrifice the usual luxuries sought in holiday accommodation for the special experience of this region. For example, two women at Coral Bay expressed a preference for hotel or resort accommodation on their usual holidays 'because we don't have to do anything… we don't have to cook, or clean, or do washing'. With children, this was seen as their "only chance of a real break". However they were willing to compromise in Coral Bay:

> One of the beauties of coming here is the simplicity…. so it's a totally different holiday; I would hate to see any form of development of that density [high rise or large scale resort] in this area….we do all the washing and cleaning and cooking on these holidays, but somehow its different from being at home.

Many respondents felt strongly that good planning and proper management were an integral part of good tourism development, and that tourism development itself was not a problem. One respondent summed up this attitude best when she stated: "I don't actually have a problem with the people, I think we just need to manage it". Many respondents recognized that at the current time there was little management and few control mechanisms in place in the region to limit visitor impacts. Examples of tourists walking on sand dunes and the coral reef, littering and disturbing wildlife were cited situations which needed much greater control and monitoring. Education and encouragement of tourists to learn about the environment was viewed as a key issue in good tourism development also, particularly regarding regulations, signage, littering and environmental issues:

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

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One respondent suggested the provision of a free cinema in Coral Bay to educate tourists about the environment which they are enjoying as a relatively low cost and effective medium for such information. Greater monitoring of the activities of tourists was also seen as important, with the presence of more rangers suggested by a couple of respondents. Again, both of these suggestions would require additional funding, which some respondents acknowledged might be best met through further tourism development.

While respondents were clearly concerned about the environmental impacts of future tourist developments in the region, they were concerned also with the cultural and social impacts this would have on their tourist experience– "It just won't be the same place to come to" was a frequently heard claim. This concern was apparent also in respondents' general discussion about 'bad' development. Many felt that greater levels of tourist development had the potential to spoil the relaxed atmosphere and experience of a destination, with comments such as the following being typical: "you've got to dress up too much to go somewhere and your not allowed in if you are not dressed … it just takes the fun out of your time there". In fact, in discussions of tourism development in general, the social and cultural impacts of 'bad' development were more frequently cited than environmental impacts.

The fear that this might happen in the Coral Coast region was particularly evident amongst Western Australian holidaymakers staying at ampgrounds in the region. For many of these people, the Coral Coast played a significant role in their 'holiday heritage'; a visit to the region linked them with past memories and a sense of community. Many respondents had first visited the area as children with their families and had a strong connection with the place:

> Most people who [caravan], do have a past history of, from a very young age, they've all been camping with mum and dad and caravanning, so this is a progressive thing; they've got to the stage of their life where they've replaced their parents almost… [My husband] thinks that [camping is] the best because his memories are so strong and lovely.

Similarly, others saw their annual visit as something of a reunion – "We've just made so many friends, it's like a great big family, we know nearly everyone in the caravan park after the last twenty years … it's our once a year gathering." This sense of belonging, at times betraying a hint of ownership or territoriality, played an important role in people's attitudes towards future development of the area.

For respondents on limited incomes, there was a sense also that the development of more services and facilities in the region and a more 'sophisticated' holiday experience came with a higher price tag, which would force them out. The assumption for these respondents was that the "people who've got money" were the international tourists, while local holiday makers ran the risk of exclusion. As a woman camping at Coral Bay explained:

> The shires need to do something about getting proper sewerage in … and then the costs will go up, the costs will go skyrocketing and then this place will be just like one of those resorts that … the rich people can afford, and then we won't be coming, unfortunately, because that's just the way it goes.

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A similar view was expressed by another camper regarding the potential development of more 'upmarket' accommodation. He asks "If they build those wilderness chalets and everything else where will people like us go? That's what they want to do, squeeze the little person out." For a third camper, this has already occurred at Coral Bay:

> I'd love for us to go on the glass bottom boat and have a look … but $30 a head, for an hour's tour, it's just… they just put everything out of the price of a normal family with … kids… it's only the international people that come in that can pay it.

Respondents were not prepared to sacrifice 'their place' to any future development which would lead to a more 'sophisticated' and expensive holiday destination which would see them excluded from the type of holiday they had experienced for years, and in some cases, for generations.

Since completing this research, it is apparent that the Western Australian government appears to have heeded the calls for tourism marketing and development which supports the current market. During 2004, Tourism Western Australia launched a new domestic and international campaign to promote Western Australia using the catch line 'Western Australia is the real Australia', and supported by the Australian song 'The Real Thing', popularized during 1969 by Russell Morris. In so doing, this campaign clearly echoed the sentiment of one European backpacker interviewed: 'the East Coast is too built up – [Western Australia] is more like the real Australia'. This campaign highlights the natural attractions available in some of the lesser known regions of the state, including the Ningaloo Reef (TWA, 2004). One of the advertisements uses the image of a whale shark describing it as 'A real Australian fish' and supported by the following text:

> Once, there was an Australia where amazing creatures roamed pristine wilderness, where nature wasn't just another category of television programming, where the Outback was an adventure, not a theme park. Well, you can still find that real, unspoilt experience, in Western Australia.

Whether sentiments like these can be reinforced and supported by appropriate planning and policies in the future is yet to be seen.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The previous discussion has raised a number of issues regarding the attitudes of visitors to the Coral Coast region towards tourism development, which have implications for other peripheral destinations. While respondents were generally positive about the promotion and development of the Coral Coast region as a tourist destination, they voiced many concerns about the nature, scope and size of any future development. Future development would need to occur in a way that was sustainable in the long term and would be sensitive to the fragile and remote nature of the destination, in terms of the scope, scale and appearance of the development.

The idea that 'no development' is better than some development may prove costly, if development is the only way to implement appropriate infrastructure and planning process. Furthermore, new tourist development may ensure more funding is available is

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for monitoring and control of existing tourist activities. It appears that the current low level of development in the region has resulted in a haphazard and poorly regulated tourist environment, particularly in the township of Coral Bay. It is critical that before any further development is allowed to proceed water supply and sewage disposal issues are addressed. Rather than the current 'ad hoc' approach to tourism development, any future development in the Coral Coast region must be supported by a substantial management plan and strategy that is enforced through strict and well policed regulations. The continual monitoring of the effects of visitors on the natural environment, supported by greater resources to educate visitors about the impacts of their activities, is a crucial component of any future development in the region. No matter how 'environmentally friendly' any tourist development is, insensitive or uneducated visitor conduct can have a devastating affect on the sustainability of a region.

While the sustainability of the natural environment is clearly a major issue for respondents, the need to maintain the character, identity and experience of a place is critical. According to Jackson and Morpeth (2000: 123), it is vital that sustainability issues surrounding tourism ensure the maintenance of a diverse way of life, local social structures and the viability of local communities; the 'tourist culture' or the 'way of holiday' of existing tourists is less frequently emphasized or discussed in sustainable tourism literature. Any future development must be mindful of the current market for an area and be sensitive to the potential to undermine the current tourist experience in remote destinations in their planning, either through the scale or nature of the development. The experience of the failed Maud's Landing development project demonstrates that any proposal that does not respect the setting, either in terms of type, scale or market base, will not receive widespread approval from existing visitors. As many respondents in this study stressed, remote regions offer an experience not available in many other locations; altering this appeal may be counterproductive in the long term.

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