

DIRECTOR

Re: Prawning and the Pelican Point Bird Sanctuary

Over the past few years I have become increasingly concerned about the rising level of disturbance on the Pelican Point bird sanctuary.

As you know, Pelican Point has long been the main night-time roosting site for the Swan River's migratory wading bird population. Over the past two wader seasons, however, the number of birds frequenting the Point has dropped off considerably. In fact, during the latter part of last season (that is, January to April) the Point was almost completely deserted by roosting waders.

I am sure that the main reason for this desertion has been the Point's sudden increase in popularity with prawners. From my observations, the Point was very rarely used by prawners prior to the summer of 1976/77. Last summer, however, a few prawners began trawling along the eastern shore on the odd occasion. This year prawning parties are working both shores of the Point, night after night. Last Tuesday night, for example, there were six parties of prawners, totalling some thirty people, spread around the entire shoreline of the Point - each party with its own gas lamp lighting up the area. At 5 pm there had been approximately six hundred migratory waders roosting on the Point; by 10 pm there were less than twenty. Importantly, the birds did not move to another part of the river. Instead they flew off towards the oceanfront.

I am concerned that if prawning continues at Pelican Point, even on the present scale, the area will be deserted completely by roosting waders. If that were to happen then a majority of waders may also desert the Swan River as their summer feeding ground. This Department's efforts to protect the waders' main feeding grounds at Point Waylen/Alfred Cove, Pelican Point and Como Beach would then have been in vain.

Although I am generally opposed to restrictions on public access and activities, I believe that such restrictions are unavoidable if Pelican Point is to serve as a sanctuary for the birdlife of the Swan.

I am therefore obliged to request that the Pelican Point bird sanctuary be permanently closed to prawning, and that such closure be considered as a matter of some urgency.

I do not believe that it will be necessary to close either Como Beach or Pt Waylen to prawning as these areas are not important as wader roosting sites.

J.A.K. LANE
Research Officer
Waterbird Research Unit.

Air photo + map with sketch.

November 24, 1977.