

Our new cathedrals: spirituality and old-growth forests in Western Australia

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This essay explores why two Western Australian (WA) social movement organisations (SMOs) on opposite sides of the logging debate have continued to contest the forest policy issue after thirty years.¹ Implicit in this focus is an understanding that other major Australian environmental debates were concluded more quickly.² During my research I analysed census data gathered by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) for the period 1971- 2001. I chose this starting point as it coincided with an intensification of the debate over the appropriateness of WA's forest policy following the formation of the Campaign to Save Native Forests (CSNF) in 1969 (Mills 1986, 229). This paper reports the findings from my research and subsequent exploration of other data sets to investigate particular social and economic factors about the people living in the south-west of Western Australia.

I utilise the New Social Movement (NSM) theoretical approach (Inglehart 1977; Maheu, ed. 1995; Melucci 1980) and propose that the demographic and economic factors identified from the ABS data may provide an explanation for some of the change in public attitude toward the logging of the remaining native forests in WA. The new public attitude became more obvious in the late 1990s and assisted the anti-logging SMOs to achieve the end of logging after a 32-year campaign. At the 2001 State election the Australian Labour Party gained power and swiftly moved to stop the logging of old growth native forests (*The West Australian* 2001, 1). I unexpectedly discovered that the level of reported religious affiliation had fallen dramatically in the south-west of WA throughout the period of the anti-logging campaign. I

1 The debate over the logging and woodchipping of native forests in Australia has been traced by Dargavel (1995) back to the seminal publication by the Routleys of *The Fight for the Forests* (1973).

2 For examples of particular Australian environmental campaigns, see Hutton and Connors (1999).

suggest that those West Australians who now report no religious affiliation fulfill their spiritual needs by a greater connection to the aesthetic qualities offered by the natural environment, particularly old-growth forests.

Theoretical framework

While some authors contest the nomenclature of ‘new’ (Cohen 1985, 663), most agree that there is something worth studying about the range of social movements (such as peace, anti-nuclear, gender and environmental) that have proliferated in developed Western societies since the mid-1970s. Cohen identified the rapidity of their formation, their replication in many Western countries, and their influence on political systems, as defining factors of these movements. The New Social Movement literature assisted me in understanding how changes in public values affected the external political and social environment in WA and in exploring how the changes in values are linked to particular socio-demographic changes in WA.

The labeling of movements involved in campaigning on issues, such as the environment, as ‘new’ is often made against the approach to ‘older’ movements as movements of the working class opposed to the power of ‘capital’ (Burgmann 1993, 5). Thus, the NSM approach defies earlier Marxist class-based understandings of social movements, such as Burgmann’s, and focused on factors that developed new values. Burgmann claims that NSMs are mainly supported by people from the middle social class, and their activists and intellectual core supporters were often well-educated public sector employees, such as teachers. Further, she claims that the NSM support base consisted of social classes that were immune from the commercial and economic pressures that were a characteristic of the older movements (1993, 1-6).

Berger *et al.* (1973, 170) highlight how the importance of ‘intellectuals’ or ‘elites’ derives from their origins in a social class that acted as a ‘carrier group’ for new ideologies and values in western societies. Likewise, Scott (1990, 138), while recognising that the new politics appeal to more than class interests, state that NSMs ‘are typically either predominantly movements of the educated middle classes, especially the “new middle class”, or of the most educated/privileged section of the less privileged groups.’ The involvement of society’s well-educated sector is an important point of focus in this paper.

Inglehart’s (1977, 28) empirical analysis of surveys in the early 1970s in six European

Community countries led him to propose that individuals brought up in western countries under conditions of peace and relative prosperity since World War II (such as Australia) would be most likely to have 'postmaterial' values. According to Inglehart, the shift in values away from 'materialist' concerns about economics and physical security caused 'the decline of elite-directed political mobilisation and the rise of elite-challenging issue orientated groups' (1977, 28). In Inglehart's view, policy formation on many issues (such as the environment) has thus moved from that led by mainstream political parties, with their traditional allegiance to labour (in Australia the Australian Labor Party, ALP) or capital (the Liberal Party/National Party Coalition), to a situation whereby NSMs construct new policy ideas and approaches. In other words, Inglehart suggests that changing values within a society facilitate the emergence of new social advocacy organisations that, in turn, shape new government policies as the policy elite respond to these new pressures.

Pakulski and Crook (1998, 5) cite other researchers' concerns with Inglehart's reliance on value categories, as well as his inability to explain how new individual values translate into a coherent environment movement. However, Gundelach (1984, 1049) supports Inglehart's ideas of postmaterial values and develops them further by arguing that 'new' movements have common features and are related to the transition from an industrial society to a post-industrial one. Inglehart and Abramson (1995, 3) conclude that the major long-term force driving the increase in postmaterial values was generational replacement. They report that about 40 percent of the adult European population was replaced between 1970 and 1990, and argue that these older people were replaced with younger people with more postmaterial values. I utilise this idea of different generational values to understand changes in the south-west of WA.

Research setting

The Federal Government's Resource Assessment Commission (RAC) conducted research in 1991 that is unique in that it is the only research that has utilised Inglehart's framework in an Australian setting. In a national poll conducted during its inquiry into the Australian forest industry, the RAC (1991, 1) found that the majority of Australians were in favour of the halting of logging in National Estate forests, even if it caused economic hardship. They also found that the poll respondents most frequently nominated 'the environment' as a national problem, surpassing economic issues such as unemployment and interest rates. A multivariate analysis of their survey data indicated that involvement in social movements and personality

values were the strongest predictors of individual attitudes towards the forests. These results (RAC 1991, 8) also confirmed Inglehart's earlier findings (1977, 28) that people aged over 55 years have a far less postmaterial orientation than younger age groups. One critical outcome of the RAC's research in relation to attitudes to environmental issues was that it found that opposition to using native forests for economic purposes (e.g. logging and woodchipping) was strongly related to three factors: socio-economic status, such as having a university degree; being female; and having visited a native forest in the previous year (RAC, 1991, 44).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has been tracking Australian environmental attitudes every two years since 1992 with similarly worded questions to those asked by the RAC. Its latest report provides data over a range of issues and finds that Australians with a higher weekly household income have greater concern for environmental problems than other socioeconomic groups. In line with the RAC poll, the survey found that concern for environmental problems increases with education levels: 70 percent of people with skilled vocational training expressed environmental concern, and this figure rises to 90 percent for people with postgraduate university degrees (2001, 20). Both of these findings from the ABS support Inglehart's findings that income and education levels predict postmaterial attitudes toward the environment.

Quekett (2000, 20) suggests that WA people were 'the most environmentally-aware people in Australia.' Table 1 presents data from the 2001 Australian Election Survey to show that higher percentages of WA electors agree that environmental issues are extremely important to them.

Table 1: State Ranking of the Importance of Protecting the Environment

	WA	SA	VIC	ACT	NSW	TAS	QLD	NT
Extremely Important	49%	49%	48%	47%	46%	45%	42%	67%
Quite Important	45%	41%	43%	45 %	45%	40%	48%	17%
Not Important	6%	10%	9%	7%	9%	16%	11%	17%

(ANU 2002)³

³ The wording of the question was: "Here is a list of important issues that were discussed during the election campaign. When you were deciding about how to vote, how important was each of these issues to you personally? Environment". These results include the responses from only 6 voters from the Northern Territory. That NT sample was only 15 people.

The total population in WA in 2000 was about 1.89 million people, with most (1.39 million) residing in the capital city of Perth and its surrounding suburbs (ABS 2002). Approximately 19,000 people lived in the south-west region that contains most of WA's remaining native forests—the small area bounded by the coast and an imaginary line between Busselton in the west and Albany in the south (see the map below). The data reported below examines some of the changes that occurred to population, education, religious affiliation and industry in the south-west region of WA during the period 1971-2001. In particular, it focuses on three local government areas (LGAs) about 400km south of Perth. These are: Manjimup, which contains the majority of WA's native forest reserves, and the Denmark LGA to the east and the Augusta-Margaret River LGA to the west.



Western Australia's South-West Local Government Areas

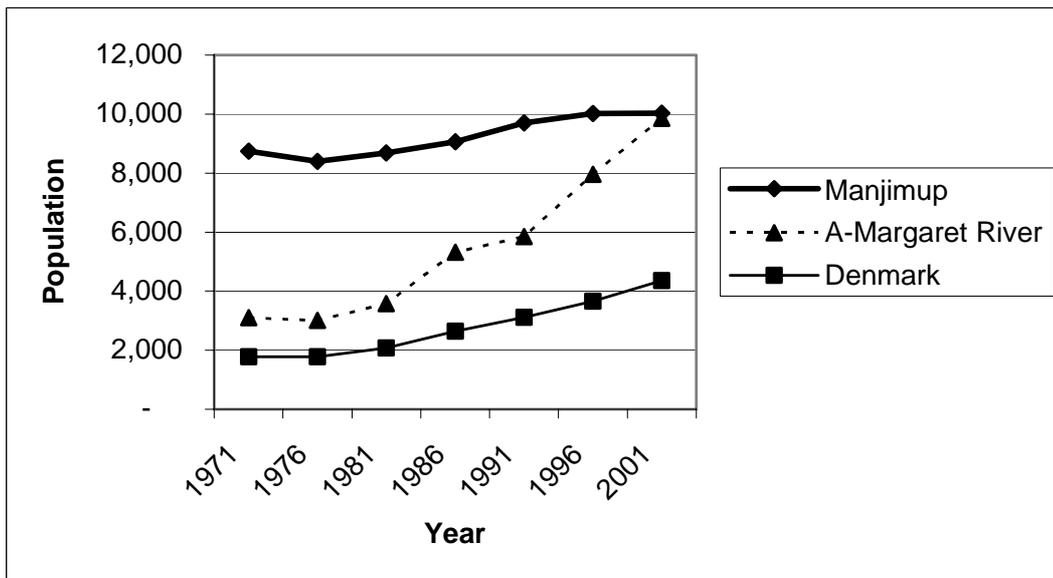
Research results

Population Changes

Table 2 (below) identifies the static nature of population growth within the Manjimup LGA over the 1971-2001 period compared with the LGAs on either side of it. The lower population growth rate of 15 percent over the 30 year period for Manjimup can be explained by two factors: the greater use of technology in lieu of labour in logging forests; and the overall declining output of the WA timber industry. The higher growth rate of the Augusta-Margaret River LGA to the west (320 percent) can be explained by the dramatic growth of new

industries in that region (e.g. the tourist, mining and vineyard industries, described in more detail below). Table 2 indicates that all three LGAs suffered a slight population slump in the early 1970s and their later population growth seems to coincide with the period after the first vineyards were established in the region in 1968 (Zekulich 2002, 12).

Table 2. South-West Regional Population Growth (1971-2001)



(ABS 1976; ABS 1986; ABS 1996; ABS 2002)

The higher population growth in the Denmark and Margaret River LGAs seems to be due to people migrating to these regions rather than from internal population growth. This is shown in Table 3 (below), which compares the numbers of people born in each LGA in 1971 and the number in the corresponding 30-34 age group in 2001. This table shows that in 2001 there were less people in the latter age group in Manjimup than were born in 1971, while this cohort has nearly tripled in the Augusta-Margaret River LGA due to migration. Migration to these areas can be explained by a number of factors, including the greater number of Perth people retiring to live in the south-west, a beautiful region that is close to both the coast and the remaining native forests. Additionally, younger and better-educated people were attracted by new employment opportunities in the new industries in the region. The economic growth over the period 1970-2000 has seen the coastal region between Bunbury and Augusta host a new range of industries, services and employment opportunities. Table 4 (below) compares the population distribution for all three south-west LGAs, and shows a higher percentage of the population in the Margaret River LGA for people in the prime employment age cohort

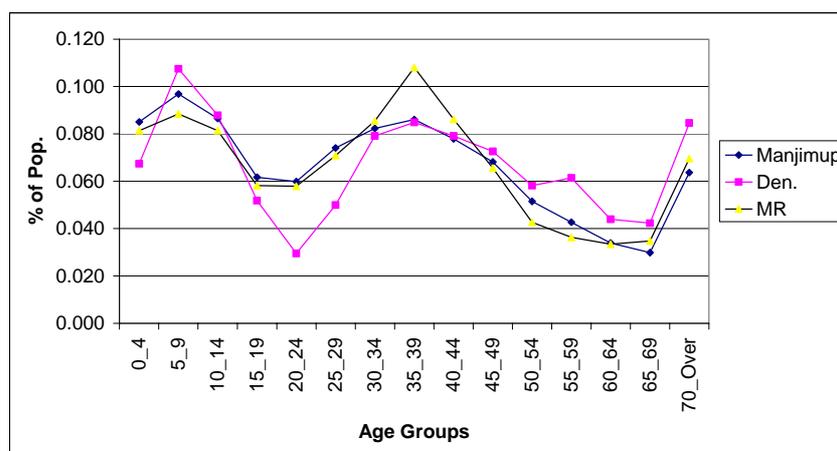
(30-50 years). This migration to the Margaret River and Denmark LGAs will have brought people with higher education levels, such as professional support service staff (e.g. doctors, teachers, government staff and managers). Such people are likely to be more supportive of postmaterial values toward the environment (Burgmann 1993; Scott 1990).

Table 3. LGA Comparison of Population Cohorts (1971-2001)

Local Government Area	No. of People in 0-4 Age Group (1971)	No. of People in 30-34 Age Group (2001)	% of Original 1971 Pop. Group in 2001
Manjimup	968	670	69%
Denmark	145	271	187%
Augusta-Margaret River	286	804	281%

(ABS 1971; ABS 2002)

Table 4. LGA Population distribution (1996)



(ABS 1996)

Education

Authors writing about NSMs have found an association between education levels and attitudes supportive of these NSMs (Burgmann 1993; Crook & Pakulski 1995). Table 5 (below) identifies an increase in university qualifications⁴ for all three south-west LGAs over the last 30 years. In 1971 Manjimup had a similar level of residents with university

⁴ These ABS education figures include people with bachelor degrees, postgraduate diplomas and higher degrees (eg PhDs).

qualifications compared to the Margaret River LGA and twice that of the Denmark LGA. By 2001 it had less than 6 percent of its residents with university qualifications while the two LGAs on either side had nearly 50 percent more.

Table 5. Level of University Qualifications in LGAs (1971-2001)

Region	1971 Qualifications		2001 Qualifications	
	No.	%	No.	%
Manjimup	56	0.6	572	5.7
Denmark	6	0.3	402	9.2
Augusta -Margaret River	24	0.8	911	9.2
WA	12,728	1.2	174,001	9.4
Australia	177,639	2.0	1,918,913	10.1

(ABS 1971; ABS 2002)

Religion

An important demographic change is the reported religious affiliation of those living in all three LGAs. In 1971 the south-west LGAs had a similar proportion of Christians and those reporting no religious attachment to the figures for WA and Australia as a whole.⁵ However, by 2001 all three south-west LGAs had fewer Christians and more people with no religious attachment than either the WA or Australian average (Table 6, below). Manjimup, of the south-west LGAs, was the closest to the national and state averages with 60 percent reporting themselves as Christian compared to the state average of 63 percent. Table 7 (below) tracks the changes in religious affiliation for the three south-west LGAs over the 30 year period. This indicates that the changes in religious affiliation plateaued in 1996, but remain at very high levels compared to other WA and Australian LGAs. The Denmark LGA has nearly twice the national average of people reporting no religious affiliation.

⁵ Respondents are asked to identify their religion by the major beliefs (e.g. Christian, Buddhist) as well as 'no religion' which includes Agnosticism, Atheism, Humanism and Rationalism.

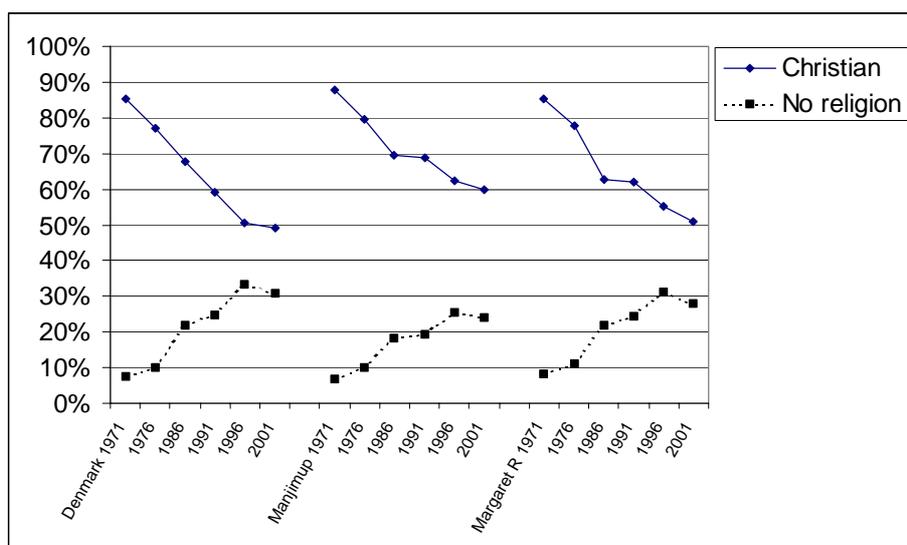
Table 6: Reported Religious Orientation (1971-2001)

1971	Christian	Other Religion	No Religion
Region	% of Pop.	% of Pop.	% of Pop.
Manjimup	7,685 88%	0.1%	595 7%
Denmark	1,518 85%	0.1%	131 7%
A-Margaret River	2,650 85%	0.0%	254 8%
WA	869,878 84%	0.6%	90,361 9%
Australia	10,990,379 86%	0.8%	855,676 7%

2001	Christian	Other Religion	No Religion
Region	% of Pop.	% of Pop.	% of Pop.
Manjimup	6,073 60%	0.5%	2,445 24%
Denmark	2,138 49%	1.4%	1,364 31%
A- Margaret River	5,059 51%	1.0%	2,782 28%
WA	1,160,787 63%	2.2%	361,011 19%
Australia	12,764,342 67%	2.9%	2,905,993 15%

(ABS 1971; ABS 2002)

Table 7: Changes in religious affiliation (1971-2001)



(Adapted from ABS 1971; ABS 1986; ABS 1996; ABS 2002)

Industry changes in the south-west

By the end of the twentieth century, the export value of timber products (excluding woodchips) had fallen dramatically to \$19 million, or less than 0.1% of WA's total exports (ABS 1998, 309). At the beginning of the twentieth century timber exports represented about 10 to 12% of WA's annual exports and in 1910 they were valued at \$500 million in 2000 Australian dollar terms (Forestry Department 1969). Other export commodities developed in the later part of the twentieth century, such as iron ore (\$3,800 million per annum), petroleum products (\$3,800 million per annum) and natural gas (\$1,900 million per annum), had annual export values far greater than those for timber exports (ABS 2002, 13). Within the period 1920-70 timber had moved from being a critical WA export product to a peripheral one.

In contrast, tourism and vineyard industries have grown in significance. A report by the WA Tourism Commission (2001) indicated that the value of domestic visitors to the south-west region was as high as \$422 million, with over 1.5 million domestic visitors staying overnight.⁶ Importantly, in terms of my research, more than 76 percent of the visitors to the south-west were from the Perth region with 90 percent travelling to the region by car (WATC 2001, 3). Nearly half of these domestic visitors to the region had an annual household income of more than \$52,000 per annum—substantially higher than the average annual income for WA (WATC 2001, 5). These figures indicate the easy access and use of the south-west region for holidays and recreation by middle class and wealthy people from Perth. Popular activities enjoyed by these domestic visitors included visiting parks and the forest. This indicates a strong attachment between Perth residents and the natural attractions of the south-west. The West Australian Premier reported that by the late 1990s the tourism industry employed 7,000 people in the south-west, while the forestry industry employed just over 1,000.⁷

Similarly, in 2000 overseas grape export volumes from WA increased to more than 40 times that of 1990 levels (ABS 2001b, 3). The export value of \$31.1 million (DLGRD 2002, 13) was twice that reported for timber exports in the same period (CALM 2000, 95). The economic value to WA, however, is not limited to its overseas exports: interstate wine exports in 2000 were valued at \$72.3 million (DLGRD 2000, 13) and the wine industry also contributed to the growth of the south-west tourism industry outlined above. The wine

⁶ Some people made more than one visit to the south-west and it was visited by 72,000 international visitors.

⁷ Hansard WA Legislative Assembly 4 May 1999, 7756/2.

industry's value to south-west regional economies is also important in terms of employment. Wine-related employment is centred on the Margaret River LGA, which has nearly 50 percent of the wine employees in the south-west.

Further data on key factors

The information gathered above indicates that the changes in anti-logging attitudes between 1971 and 2001 in the south-west LGAs can be explained by an influx of younger, better educated people who came to work in the new non-forest-based industries. In terms of the NSM literature, important factors are the high level of non-religious affiliation, gender, and the education levels of these intra-state migrants. The falling level of no reported religious affiliation in the south-west LGAs is unusual for the state. The only other LGAs in WA with levels above 30% are in remote LGAs with smaller mining populations consisting of young and well-educated men. I do not further discuss the importance of gender as a factor in the development of new values toward the natural environment and participation in NSMs but have done so elsewhere (Worth 2004).

Table 8: Concern for Logging, by Religious Affiliation

		No Religion	Catholic	Anglican	Uniting	Orthodox	Presbyterian
Not urgent	1	3.2%	5.0%	5.1%	9.6%	3.4%	8.3%
	2	9.5%	14.0%	12.7%	9.0%	19.0%	15.5%
Fairly urgent	3	15.6%	27.7%	26.9%	28.8%	27.6%	26.2%
	4	20.4%	20.0%	17.2%	23.1%	17.2%	16.7%
	4	20.4%	20.0%	17.2%	23.1%	17.2%	16.7%
Very urgent	5	51.3%	33.3%	38.0%	29.5%	32.8%	33.3%

(ANU 2002)⁸

The link I suggest between the absence of a religious affiliation and the development of new attitudes to the logging of forests in WA is supported by the results obtained from the national 2001 Australian Election Study (Table 8). This shows that voters reporting no religious affiliation have a far higher concern about the logging of native forests than do those with various Christian religious affiliations. More than 86 percent of those surveyed with no religious affiliation rank their concerns for the logging of forests as fairly or very urgent. This

⁸ The wording of the question was 'In your opinion, how urgent are each of the following environmental concerns in this country? Logging of forests.'

survey also indicates that those with post-secondary education qualifications have a greater concern for the logging of native forests than those without one (Table 9), supporting my proposal that rising levels of higher education in WA also helps to explain the change in values toward the logging of native forests in south-west LGAs between 1971-2001.

Table 9. Concern for Logging, by Education Qualification

		Post-graduate	Graduate	Diploma	Other	None
Not urgent	1	1.7%	2.9%	4.9%	4.2%	7.8%
	2	7.5%	15.0%	11.5%	14.1%	10.9%
Fairly urgent	3	27.0%	17.0%	21.3%	24.1%	28.1%
	4	21.3%	24.8%	19.7%	20.5%	16.7%
Very urgent	5	42.5%	40.3%	42.6%	37.1%	36.4%

(ANU 2002)

There appears to be no research data about a person's attitude to the environment and their spiritual needs. I argue that those West Australians who report no religious affiliation have their spiritual needs met by non-religious sources, such as the aesthetic qualities of the natural environment in the south-west. The anti-logging SMOs seem to have recognised this and a key part of their campaign was the use of images of old-growth forests in newspaper advertisements, campaign posters and TV news stories. These images formed an important part of their campaign to particularly reach West Australians who had not recently visited the native forests in the south-west. For example, on 4 June 1998, a large colour photo of well-known football coach Mick Malthouse beside the stump of a large karri tree that had been logged, appeared on the front page of *The West Australian*. The accompanying story announced his opposition to the logging of old-growth forests (Miller 1998, 1). This photograph, placed in a prominent location in WA's only daily newspaper, was an example of Reich's suggestion that new public attitudes can be altered by images rather than by reasoning and the statement of facts (1988, 79). The effective use of images in environmental campaigns in Australia dates back to the Franklin Dam campaign in Tasmania (The Wilderness Society 1983).

The ANU data above supports the argument that new spiritual values that encompass the natural environment are also linked to the opposition to the logging of old-growth forests. There needs to be more research undertaken to see how an attachment to the natural environment might provide a person's spiritual needs and how it might differ from just a new aesthetic approach to the environment. A recent example from the UK supports the argument

on the importance of an attachment to the natural environment rather than an industrial or human-made structure. This example also provides some non-Australian evidence against the argument that people support environmental causes because their higher levels of education gives them a better understanding of the science behind the issues. Environmentalists have been strong supporters of renewable energy but in this case from the UK they have joined the campaign against the development of wind power. *The Guardian* noted the comments of one green opponent of a new wind farm:

But it essentially comes down to this. The colour, shape, form and movement of the physical infrastructure is obviously man-made. It introduces an angular, lined and discordant visual impact into a landscape which is valued precisely because it is one of the few pieces left in the UK where such development is noticeably absent. To make matters worse, the movement of the blades has the additionally harmful impact of constantly drawing attention [to itself]. There is no condition which will mitigate or limit the harm. (Ward 2005)

Conclusion

One clear finding reported in this paper has been the identification of major demographic changes in the south-west LGAs on either side of the Manjimup LGA. Intra-state migration to the south-west from Perth has included a generation of younger people with a university education, without a religious affiliation and presumably new values in relation to the remaining native old growth forests. A common comment from both the anti-logging and pro-logging supporters I interviewed was a confirmation that the increase in population in the south-west over the past two decades was associated with an increase in the number of anti-logging local environment groups (e.g. the South Coast Environment Group). Data presented from a national survey (ANU 2001) support my finding that people in the south-west with no religious affiliation and a university education strongly supported opposition to the further logging of native forests, rather than a more material approach to the natural environment.

These demographic changes in the south-west of WA have been associated with new industries such as tourism, wine-growing and their related services industries, such as short-stay accommodation. In line with Inglehart's theories of social change, these industries are associated with a post-industrial society. However, their location in a region with high environmental values could also place them as 'postmaterial' industries in that people watching whales, visiting vineyards and bushwalking through the old-growth forests are not receiving material benefits from their efforts. A high proportion of those now living in the south-west have no religious affiliation and I have argued that these new industries provide them with experiences that meet their spiritual needs.

Obviously, religious affiliation and spirituality are different, but related, concepts. The information I have presented in regard to the recent development of a new anti-logging forest policy in WA suggests that the relationship between levels of religious affiliation, development of spiritual feelings, and new public values to native forests and the broader natural environment, is worthy of more detailed research.

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