



• Elder Patrick Hume has lodged a native title claim over local wetlands, but fears they won't be enough to save them from the mooted six-lane Roe Highway. Photo by David D'Anger.

No highway of memories

by JENNY D'ANGER

ABORIGINAL elder Patrick Hume remembers making canoes out of paper bark for duck hunting on Bibra and North Lakes.

And riding the horse his father bought him for two shillings through the bush between the two lakes, back in the 1930s.

"I lived there as a kid, grew up there, rode a bareback horse around there," Mr Hume reminisced to the *Herald*.

But sections of the land sacred to Aboriginal people for more than 5,000 years are under threat with Main Roads plans to put the six-lane Roe Highway smack through the middle of the two lakes as it creeps west to meet the proposed Fremantle bypass.

It will also seal the fate of two smaller and important wetlands, Horse Paddock and Roe Swamps, and have a huge environmental impact on Bibra and North Lakes, says Mr Hume.

A number of Aboriginal people with links to the area have joined together to lodge a joint native title claim over a series of wetlands, but Mr Hume doubts this will save the socially and environmentally significant lakes.

"Section 13 of the Aboriginal Act allows the government to take land off us," he said with quiet anger.

Abundant wildlife, lush vegetation and fresh water made the two lakes an important region for Aboriginal people, and much of the bush between the two lakes is sacred with the oral history of the place still handed down.

"The lakes were traditional spring and summer camping grounds," says Mr Hume.

The fresh water springs are gone, destroyed when parts of the lakes became a rubbish tip and despite rehabilitation programs they've never returned.

Mr Hume says rehabilitation of the lakes and bushland needs to be ongoing and the land left for future generations of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

"People can use it look after it and respect it. No-one in government respects it they just want to build roads – and more roads mean more cars," he says.

Federal Fremantle MP Carmen Lawrence says the well-documented significance of the area to Aboriginal people and the environmental impact of the Roe Highway on the wetland chain was a clear red light to stop the highway.

"Breaching Aboriginal heritage sites would certainly stop the road," she said.

Roe Highway project manager Antony Missikos said it was still under strategic review; road building

was more than just putting a bit of bitumen down. Social and environmental impacts were serious considerations, and would be up for community consultation, he said.

The review was examining the expected change in road use following the government's FRIARS intentions, and the industrialisation of large parts of Cockburn, likely to increase the number of vehicles in the area.

"Eight hundred hectares that were farmland, and now the transport needs will be different," Mr Missikos said.

FRIARS was a wider issue than Cockburn and this was just what people in a number of suburbs south of the river had to fear, said Dr Lawrence: "A bloody great highway ripping through their suburbs."