## Last Stand on of the Moore River

Inside the Plunketts' 25-year battle to sell land an hour north of Perth

**BEN HARVEY** AND PAUL MURRAY

When Tom Plunkett bought four miles of beachfront land near Guilderton in 1967, the idea that the Perth metropolitan area would one day extend to just south of his property would have been

Even in the just-released Falcon XR GT, or the soon-tobe-released inaugural Holden Monaro, the drive 60 miles north was a long and

Over the next three decades the steady creep of the rural-urban fringe slowly ate into the bush that separated the city and the cattle on Tom's 2000ha property. The northern outposts of Quinns Rocks, Yanchep and Two Rocks were swallowed up by housing estates and by the early 1990s it was becoming clear that the march north wasn't stopping.

It was about that time that the Plunkett family started thinking that a new housing development near Moore River wasn't so fanciful after all. This was a family who knew a thing or two about construction. In 1903 Tom's grandfather, Thomas Scott Plunkett, established Plunkett Homes with his son, Charles. Tom inherited the business in the late 1950s.

In 1994 the Plunketts bit the bullet and decided to develop it for housing. After a long process, the Shire of Gingin's town planning scheme was amended in 1995 to rezone the land for urban

development.

Five years later, the WA Commission agreed to an outline development plan under which 557ha would be developed into about 5000 lots to allow housing for 13,500 residents.

In August 1999, then Opposition planning spokeswo-man Alannah MacTiernan presented a parliamentary petition calling on the Court government to turn the land into a regional park to protect the mouth and lower reaches of the Moore River.

The feisty MacTiernan smelled a rat over the rezon-



Tom Plunkett and a colleague at Moore River.



The West Australian Feud linked to **Moore River** rezoning bid



How the feud has been reported in The West Australian.

The feisty MacTiernan smelled a rat over the rezoning.

ing, writing in a letter to the Plunketts that their company had "acquired certain rights by virtue of a number of planning decisions that have been made and that you will no doubt seek to exercise those rights"

"We are also concerned that it appears that some of the planning personnel engaged by the shire to assess and recommend on this project may have had a conflict of interest at the time that they were providing that advice which certainly creates at the very least an apprehension of bias," she wrote.

It wasn't the first time the member for Armadale had crossed paths with the building dynasty: in the 1980s she and her partner Derek Schapper were embroiled in legal action over the boundary between their Highgate home and the Plunkett family's joinery factory. Years later, when MacTiernan was serving as a Perth City councillor, the Plunketts claimed she had trespassed on their

Four years after MacTiernan became a minister in the Gallop government in 2001, there was still bad blood between her and the Plunketts.

In 2005 MacTiernan struck, vowing to reverse the urban zoning decision and sending a shock



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velopment industry. Gingin Shire Council refused the demand on the grounds it could be sued for \$25 million by the aggrieved family.

The future of the development became cloudier in 2007 when the State Administrative Tribunal upheld a WA Planning Commission decision to knock back a subdivision application for 661 lots that were to be the firststage development in the drawn-out bid to build housing on 557ha.

It took a change of government to get clarity. The unashamedly pro-develop-ment Barnett government approved a smaller development that allowed for a population of up to 6000 people in 2000 homes.

Today's announcement that the parcel of land is for sale will test whether the 25vear battle has been worth it.