Regional Development Australia Mid West and Gascoyne

Annual Business Plan and Budget

1 July 2023 to June 30, 2024

‘Place Based Growth, Liveability and Sustainability’

FORWARD FROM RDAMW&G CHAIR (YVONNE MESSINA)

Our organisation looks forward to the contribution that we can make to the Mid West and Gascoyne region over the next 12 months. The range and potential of the opportunities that will enhance the growth and liveability of the region continue to inspire our efforts and focus.

There is a strong and increasing awareness of regional Australia and its contribution to economy and lifestyle. Our focus on 'place based growth, liveability and sustainability' acknowledges the importance of directing the actions of government, community and industry towards a greater proportion of Australians living prosperously in our region.

RDAMW&G aims to better position the Mid West and Gascoyne regions to reach their potential by bringing together regional leaders to provide knowledge sharing and leadership to ensure local and regional aspirations remain relevant. It is important that different organisations can work together towards agreed outcomes, recognising that more can be gained when common interests are identified and effort is invested in outcomes that have local and regional benefits.

At the same time, RDAMW&G will be working alongside our stakeholders and partner organisations to create the funding and investment opportunities for the infrastructure required to support priority areas and projects. We will continue to play a role in communicating our region's challenges and opportunities to stakeholders, decision-makers, and funding bodies.

Like many other parts of Australia, the Mid West and Gascoyne region is facing skills, labour and housing shortages. We will continue to advocate for flexibility in policy and programs recognising that place-based solutions reflect unique local and regional circumstance. Agreement to establish a regional immigration program (DAMA) is anticipated and whilst it is not a silver bullet it will go some way to meeting the recruitment needs of regional business.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank the Hon. Kristy McBain MP, Minister for Regional Development Local Government and Territories for ongoing support to regional Australia. The recently announced Regional Investment Framework and the Growing Regions program signals a commitment to invest in Australia's regions through people, places, services, industries and local economies.

Our program will embrace the guiding principles that the Australian Government is taking to deliver regional investment to ensure an integrated and coordinated framework for regional development regardless of a regions' economic circumstances.

It is my pleasure to recognise the RDAMW&G Board and thank them for their support to date and acknowledge the contribution that they will make as Board members to the ongoing governance of the 2021 – 2025 funding agreement. I would also like to thank our staff Mark Holdsworth and Emmaline James for the contribution that they will make to the organisation and our region over the coming months.

Yvonne Messina *JP, GAICD*

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1.1 A STRONG CONFIDENT AND VIBRANT REGION

In fulfilling the 2023-24 Business Plan RDAMW&G will have an active and facilitative role in the Mid West and Gascoyne Communities, work with all levels of government, business and community, with a clear focus on strong and confident outcomes that harnesses the regions competitive advantages, pursues economic opportunities and attracts investment.

Our program is informed by Federal, State, Regional and Sub Regional Growth and Investment strategies which set the scene for Western Australia as a whole, Northern Australia, and the small Shires of the Mid West and Gascoyne. Our strategies will be guided and supported by an evidence base, reflect the policies of relevant agencies and provide a strategic framework to guide advocacy and decision making.

1.2 RDA CHARTER

The RDA Charter (October 2020) provides the Australian Government priorities for the activities of the RDA network. It supports the long-term priorities of government to grow Australia's regions and sets the framework for the RDAMW&G Strategic and Annual Plan.

a) Facilitate regional economic development outcomes, investment, jobs and local procurement

b) Promote greater regional awareness of an engagement with Australian Government policies, grant programs and research

c) Improve Commonwealth regional policy making by providing intelligence and evidence-based advice to the Australian Government on regional development issues

d) Co-ordinate the development of a strategic regional plan, or with suitable existing regional plans that align with the Commonwealth's regional priorities.

2.0 STRATEGIC REGIONAL CONTEXT

RDAMW&G has become increasingly confident of the ways in which it can fulfill its purpose, reflecting the unique characteristics and requirements of the Mid West and Gascoyne regions within the broader policy and program frameworks of the Federal and State Governments and other key stakeholder organisations.

The sections that follow describe a region that is geographically vast and characterised by remote towns that at one time had much larger populations, were much more vibrant and tied to different economic circumstances. The ghost towns of the region include Big Bell, Lennonville, Austin, Nannine and Paynesville and they are evidence that when payable gold ran out, or when a railway line closed, the miners and prospectors and business owners picked up virtually everything they had, including corrugated iron and other building materials, and transported them for use at their next location.

Regional liveability and population movements are themes that inform the approach that RDAMW&G takes to the region and the allocation of our resources. There are many signs that the region is undergoing a transition led in part by a rapid interest in decarbonisation. There is investment and popular community-based interest in:

- Renewables including green and blue hydrogen.
- Mining including rare earths.
- Revitalisation of southern rangelands pastoral lands through carbon sequestration initiatives.
- Eco and experience-based tourism including: dark skies, geotourism and nature-based tourism.
- Managing and enhancing liveability.

These developments signal the opportunity for Government to invest in the soft and hard infrastructure required to support further investment. At the same time there is an opportunity for the towns of the region to consider their relationships with these sectors and how they might participate for the benefit of current and future communities.

(i) Creating and facilitating the infrastructure and conditions that create opportunities and de-risk private sector investment.

(ii) Supporting the sustainability of small towns by understanding and responding to the very important things that create liveability and are essential to retention and attraction of people. This includes: health services, recreation services, community facilities, food security, skills, telecommunications and digital services.

Importantly whilst it is never easy it is not a case of one or the other but multiple elements: Economic investment and growth and small-town sustainability and liveability.

3.0 THE REGION

3.1 Spatial Context

The Mid West region spans around 294,000 square kilometres from Green Head to Kalbarri along the coast, and around 700km inland to Meekatharra. Its capital, Geraldton, is located 420km north of Perth. The region is divided into three subregions that demonstrate similarities in environment, land use, demography and industry. These are the Batavia Coast, Murchison and North Midlands subregion and is made up of 16 local government authorities (the Shire of Wiluna is in the process of transferring to align with the Goldfields-Esperance region).

North of the Mid West, the Gascoyne region is the western-most point of Australia, with about 600km of Indian Ocean coastline. The region extends inland about 500km and has a total land area of approximately 135,000 km^2, including islands. Carnarvon, the regional centre is located 1,000km north of Perth. The region includes the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ningaloo reef, which is Australia's largest and most accessible fringing reef.

In line with the above, the region faces two critical challenges associated with its geography; its distance from the state's capital, Perth, and a heavy reliance on long-haul road transport networks.

2.2 Population

The combined population of the Mid West and Gascoyne region is 63,985. 85% are located within the Mid West; 62% within the City of Greater Geraldton alone. This reflects the regions' remoteness, a persistent and core factor in attracting skilled workers and population and the challenges associated with availability of soft and hard infrastructure services.

2.2.1 Mid West population

Latest Australian Bureau of Statistics data (2021 Census) records the population of the Mid West region as 54,448[1]. The region's population had a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of only 0.14% over the last decade, compared to 1.74% for the state (or 0.36% growth when excluding Wiluna from 2011 census data). The sixteen LGAs in the region are identified in Table 1. 72.5% of the population reside in the City of Greater Geraldton, with other notable areas including the Shires of Irwin (6.8%) and Northampton (5.9%).

Figure 1. Mid West regional population

	2021	Regional Share	CAGR (10-Year)
Mid West	54,448	100.0%	0.14%
Carnamah	552	1.0%	0.11%
Chapman Valley	1,556	2.9%	2.86%
Coorow	1,055	1.9%	-0.11%
Cue	215	0.4%	-2.32%
Greater Geraldton	39,489	72.5%	0.61%
Irwin	3,680	6.8%	0.31%
Meekatharra	1,200	2.2%	-1.37%
Mingenew	407	0.7%	-1.64%
Morawa	660	1.2%	-2.99%
Mount Magnet	653	1.2%	0.15%
Murchison	101	0.2%	-1.20%
Northampton	3,227	5.9%	0.11%
Perenjori	629	1.2%	-3.56%
Sandstone	109	0.2%	0.37%
Three Springs	575	1.1%	-0.69%
Yalgoo	340	0.6%	-1.76%
Western Australia	2,660,026	-	1.74%

[1] Excluding Wiluna.

2.2.2 Gascoyne Population

Latest Australian Bureau of Statistics data (2021 Census) records the population of the Gascoyne region as 9,537, representing only 0.36% of the state's total population. The region's population has a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 0.26% over the last decade, well below the state's 1.74%. The four LGAs in the region are identified in Table 2. 55.1% of the population reside in the Shire of Carnarvon, with the Shire of Exmouth also containing a relatively large proportion of the region's population (32.3%). Only the Shires of Exmouth and Shark Bay have recorded an increase in population over the last decade.

Figure 2. Gascoyne regional population

	2021	Regional Share	CAGR (10-Year)
Gascoyne	9,537	100.0%	0.26%
Carnarvon	5,251	55.1%	-0.97%
Exmouth	3,085	32.3%	2.57%
Shark Bay	1,031	10.8%	1.87%
Upper Gascoyne	170	1.8%	-3.82%
Western Australia	2,660,026	-	1.74%

2.2.3 Mid West population projection

Most Mid West local government areas have experienced population decline. Greater Geraldton has recorded slow growth (0.64% per annum), but at a higher rate than the regional average. Highest growth was recorded in Chapman Valley and highest decline in Perenjori.

Population declines across the region are likely to be associated with state-wide and national trends for agricultural regions; where large population bases are largely unnecessary for productive agriculture practices, a mixture of farm consolidation, climate impact and the application of technology to improve productivity influence this trend. In contrast, Geraldton, Chapman Valley, Carnamah, Northampton, Exmouth, Shark Bay, and other LGA growth is likely reflective of both population transfer (e.g., from LGAs experiencing decline) and in-migration by lifestyle retirees.

This overall growth is expected to continue, particularly as the population of WA is predicted to almost double by 2066, projected to 4.9 million.[2] This growth is likely to be dominant in the existing urbanised areas of WA, although regional communities will need to assume a portion of the growth.

It is projected that there will be continued slow growth in regional centres, such as Geraldton, and the towns near them. Balancing the management of growth in coastal towns with improving the sustainability of inland communities represents a major challenge for the region.

[2] ABS, 3222.0 - Population Projections, Australia, 2017 (base) – 2066 - http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3222.0

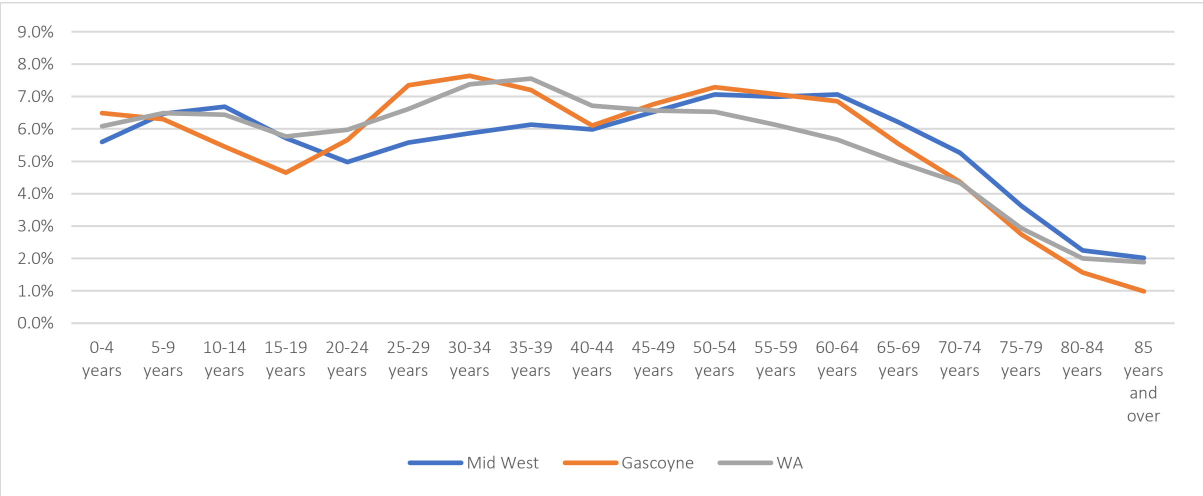
2.2.4 Gascoyne Population projection

For the Gascoyne, the regional centre (Carnarvon) experienced population decline over the decade between 2011 and 2021. However, this was balanced by growth in the Shires of Exmouth and Shark Bay. Both shires recorded growth rates more than the state average. These trends are expected to continue, with steady overall regional growth expected. The attraction of new residents to areas of outstanding natural beauty is expected to continue alongside increasing trends for remote work and outmigration from more densely populated areas globally (for example, as encouraged by COVID-19 and the current geopolitical climate).

2.3 Age profile

When looking at regional Australia, it is notable that: (i) measures of social capital suggest regional communities have stronger relationships and networks than capital cities[3]; and (ii) regional Australia is ageing faster than the national average. A higher proportion of adults aged over 45 live in regional areas; the need to access education, employment and other facilities may account for the larger proportion of younger and middle-aged adults in capital cities. In Western Australia as a whole (largely driven by the Greater Perth population), only 41% were 45 or over in 2021. This was 47% in the Mid West region and 43% in the Gascoyne.

Figure 3. Age distribution in the Mid West and Gascoyne regions[4]

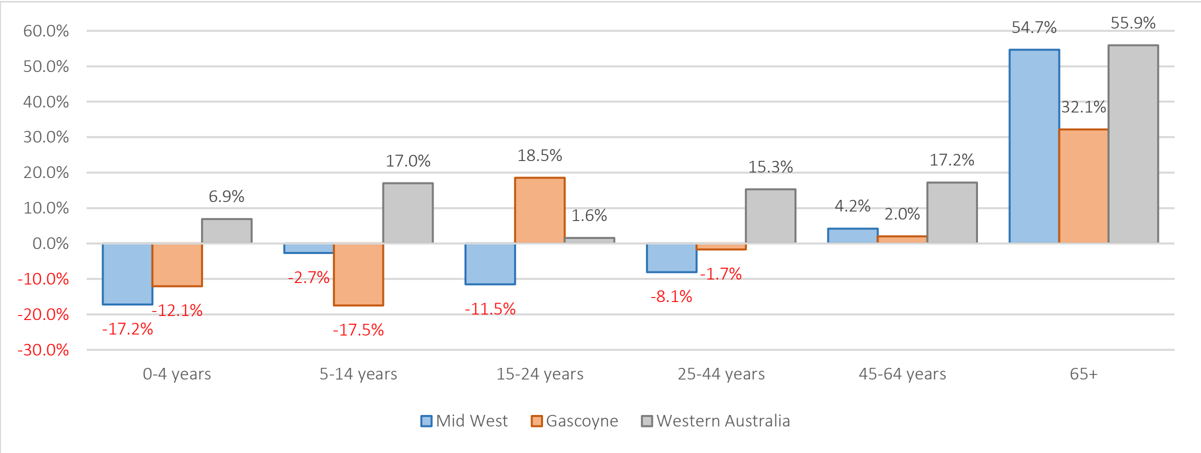


[3] http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/what-is-rai/defining-regional-australia; Regional Australia Institute.

[4] WA Tomorrow 2016-2031 sub State LGA forecast by age and sex - https://www.wa.gov.au/government/document-collections/western-australia-tomorrow-population-forecasts

The higher old age dependency ratio in regional areas indicates that a great number of seniors migrate from cities to regional areas.[5] This trend is no different in the Mid West and Gascoyne, which has a much higher proportion of older residents. The Mid West has a significant shortfall of young adults when compared with WA as a whole (Figure 5). The number of residents over 65 also rose significantly between 2011 and 2021. The Mid West experienced a slight increase also in the 45–64-year age bracket. Whilst the Gascoyne did also experience reasonable growth in the 15–24-year age bracket, the general trend for both regions is for outmigration of youth and an ageing population (Figure 6).

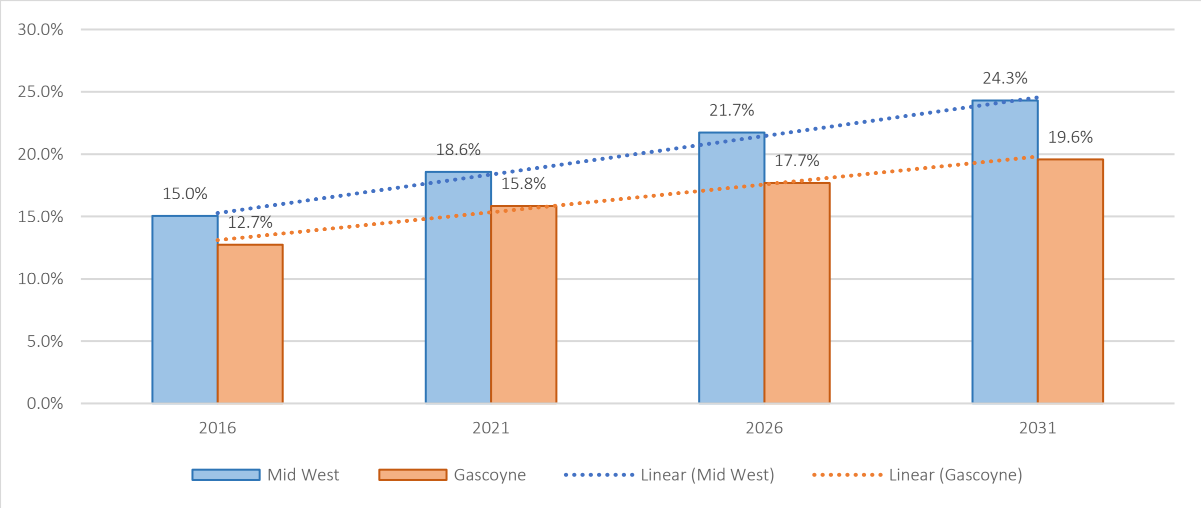
Figure 4. Population growth by age group, 2011-2021 (Mid West and Gascoyne)



The WAPC expect this trend to continue throughout the region toward 2031 (Figure 7). Current and projected growth is consistent with other coastal areas in Australia that have experienced strong in-migration by retirees and lifestyle/'sea-changers' over recent years. For inland and more remote LGAs, the effect is accentuated by continued population decline and outmigration of youth, coupled with current resident choices to age in place.

[5] http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/factssheets/2011/fs201103.html

Figure 5. Mid West and Gascoyne projected proportion of population over 65

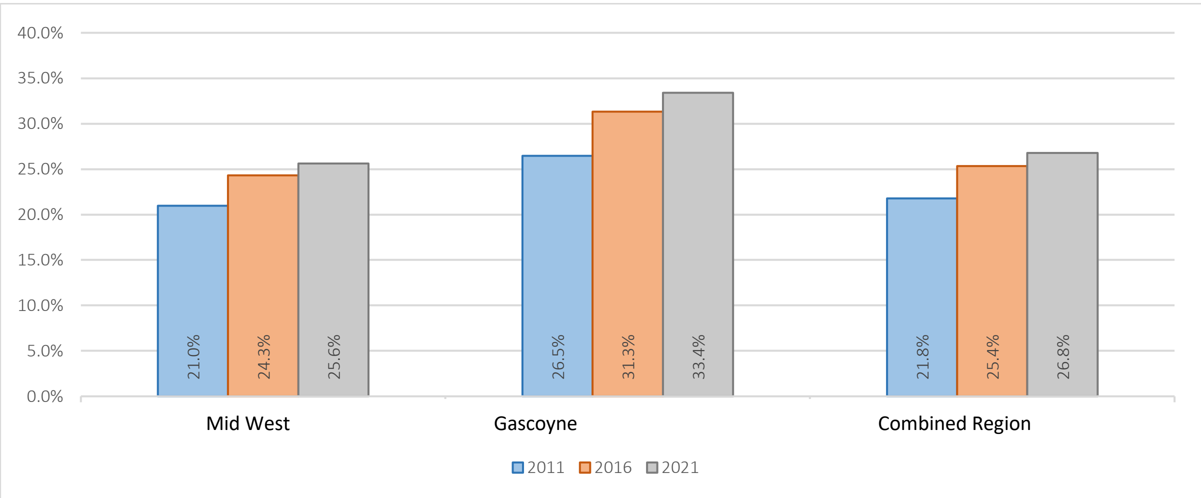


This age profile will lead to increased demand in the aged care, housing, retail, recreation and lifestyle industries. It will also require a skilled service sector workforce, with potential compounding of current labour and skills shortage issues in the region.

2.4 Ethnicity

Over a quarter of the Mid West's population (25.6%) and a third of the Gascoyne population (33.4%) were born overseas, with consistent upward trends since 2011 (Figure 8). Immigration for employment in specific industries or through humanitarian visa programs also contribute to multiculturalism. These trends are indicative of the underlying labour and skills trends in the regions, including the lack of available workers and outmigration of working age Australian-born residents.

Figure 6. Proportion of Mid West and Gascoyne residents born overseas



Those identifying as Aboriginal in 2021 has decreased to 9.5% in the Mid West and 12% in the Gascoyne (from 9.9% and 14.7% in 2011, respectively). However, the regions' proportion of Aboriginal people are considerably higher than the state average.

Figure 7. Number and proportion of Indigenous population (Mid West and Gascoyne)

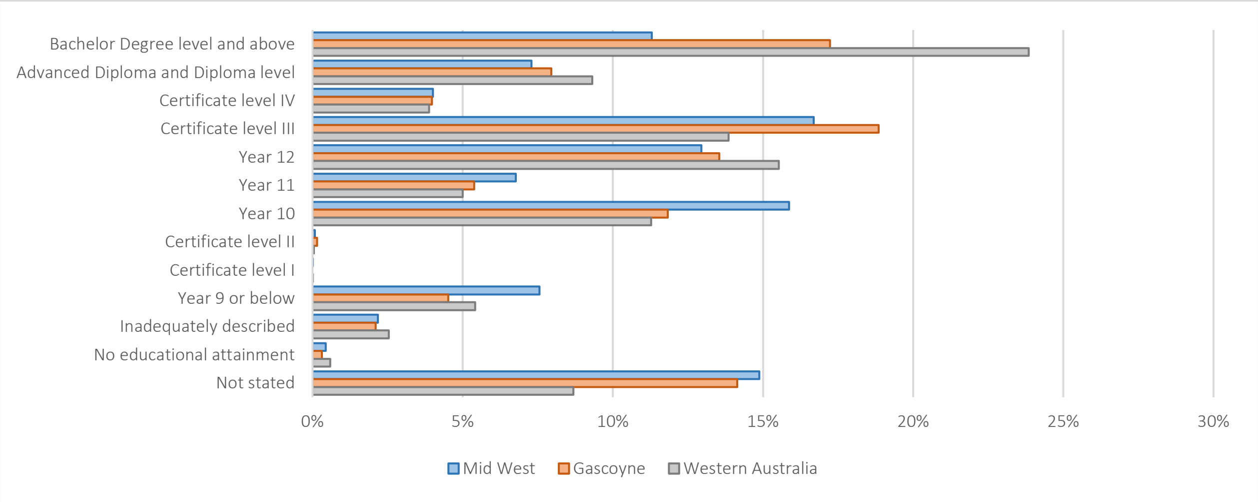
	2011		2016		2021		CAGR (10 Year)
	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Mid West	5,295	9.9%	5,177	9.6%	5,200	9.5%	-0.18%
Gascoyne	1,365	14.7%	1,281	13.5%	1,143	12.0%	-1.76%
WA	69,664	3.1%	75,978	3.1%	88,693	3.3%	2.44%

2.5 Education

Educational attainment in the Mid West and Gascoyne, like many regional areas, is lower than the state average. Latest ABS Census data (2021) show only 12.95% in the Mid West and 13.54% in the Gascoyne have completed year twelve or equivalent in the region, compared to 15.52% for WA as a whole. In line with this, a higher proportion of Mid West and Gascoyne residents finished secondary school in lower categories (Table 4). Similarly, proportionately fewer people have completed tertiary education at diploma, advanced diploma, bachelor's degree or postgraduate levels compared to the state average. However, a higher proportion of Mid West and Gascoyne residents have completed certificate level education when compared to the state average.

Figure 8. Highest level of educational attainment (people aged 15 years and over)

	Mid West	Gascoyne	Western Australia
Bachelor Degree level and above	11.30%	17.23%	23.85%
Advanced Diploma and Diploma level	7.29%	7.95%	9.32%
Certificate level IV	4.01%	3.98%	3.88%
Certificate level III	16.69%	18.85%	13.86%
Year 12 or equivalent	12.95%	13.54%	15.52%
Year 11 or equivalent	6.77%	5.38%	5.01%
Year 10 or equivalent	15.86%	11.83%	11.27%
Certificate level II	0.08%	0.16%	0.05%
Certificate level I	0.01%	0.00%	0.01%
Year 9 or below	7.56%	4.52%	5.41%
Inadequately described	2.17%	2.11%	2.54%
No educational attainment	0.44%	0.31%	0.59%
Not stated	14.87%	14.14%	8.69%



Of those with tertiary level education, the proportion of persons in each field is comparable to the state average in many cases. However, proportionately fewer people have qualifications in natural and physical sciences, information technology, health, management and commerce, and society and culture. In line with regional industry strengths, a higher proportion of people have achieved tertiary level education in the fields of agriculture, environmental and related studies than the state and national average.

Figure 9. Tertiary qualifications by discipline

Discipline	Mid West Region	Gascoyne Region	Western Australia	Australia
Natural and Physical Sciences	0.7%	1.8%	1.8%	1.6%
Information Technology	0.5%	0.3%	1.3%	1.8%
Engineering and Related Technologies	8.5%	8.3%	8.8%	7.0%
Architecture and Building	2.6%	3.0%	2.6%	2.8%
Agriculture, Environmental & Related Studies	1.7%	1.7%	1.0%	1.0%
Health	4.6%	3.3%	5.5%	5.3%
Education	4.2%	3.7%	4.1%	4.0%
Management and Commerce	5.6%	5.6%	9.1%	10.1%
Society and Culture	3.7%	3.4%	5.6%	6.3%
Creative Arts	0.8%	1.0%	1.7%	2.0%
Food, Hospitality and Personal Services	2.3%	3.0%	2.6%	2.5%
Mixed Field Programmes	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%
Inadequately described	0.5%	0.7%	0.7%	0.8%
Not stated	11.6%	14.5%	6.7%	6.4%
Not applicable	52.8%	49.6%	48.6%	48.3%

2.5 Workforce Participation

2.5.1 Employment

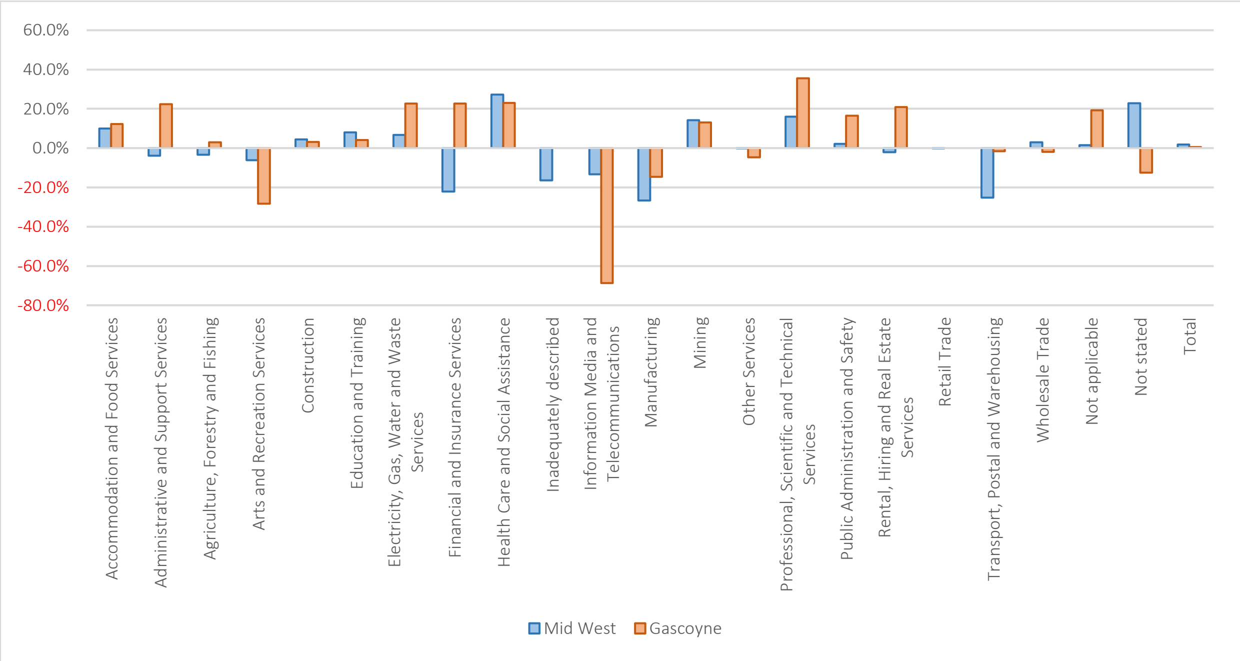
Most industry jobs for the Mid West are in health care and social assistance (5.8%) and education and training (4.4%) industries. In the Gascoyne region, top industries for employment were accommodation and food services (5.4%) and health care and social assistance (3.9%). Other strong industries of employment for both regions are construction, mining, and retail trade.

Figure 10. Industry of employment by proportion of working population (strongest performing industries highlighted)

	Mid West	Gascoyne
Accommodation and Food Services	**3.2%**	**5.4%**
Administrative and Support Services	1.2%	2.3%
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	**3.8%**	**5.2%**
Arts and Recreation Services	0.3%	0.7%
Construction	**3.8%**	**3.5%**
Education and Training	**4.4%**	**3.5%**
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	0.4%	0.7%
Financial and Insurance Services	0.4%	0.3%
Health Care and Social Assistance	**5.8%**	**3.9%**
Inadequately described	1.2%	1.5%
Information Media and Telecommunications	0.2%	0.1%
Manufacturing	1.1%	1.0%
Mining	**3.7%**	**2.6%**
Other Services	1.7%	1.6%
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	1.4%	2.1%
Public Administration and Safety	**2.8%**	**4.1%**
Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services	0.4%	0.6%
Retail Trade	**4.2%**	**4.3%**
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	**2.6%**	**3.1%**
Wholesale Trade	1.0%	0.4%

Between 2011 and 2021, the greatest positive change in jobs were seen in the health care and social assistance industry. Other positive changes were recorded in mining, professional, scientific and technical services, and education and training industries. Manufacturing and information media & telecommunications industries experienced a decline in jobs for both the Mid West and Gascoyne. Other poorly performing industries include transport, postal and warehousing, and arts and recreation services. Whilst the Mid West experienced significant job losses in the financial and insurance services industry, Gascoyne experienced growth. It is noted, however, that the population is far lower in the Gascoyne than the Mid West. As such, even small changes in the number jobs can show a significant percent change compared to similar small increase/decreases in numbers for the Mid West.

Figure 11. Change in occupational sectors: 2011 to 2021



2.5.2 Unemployment

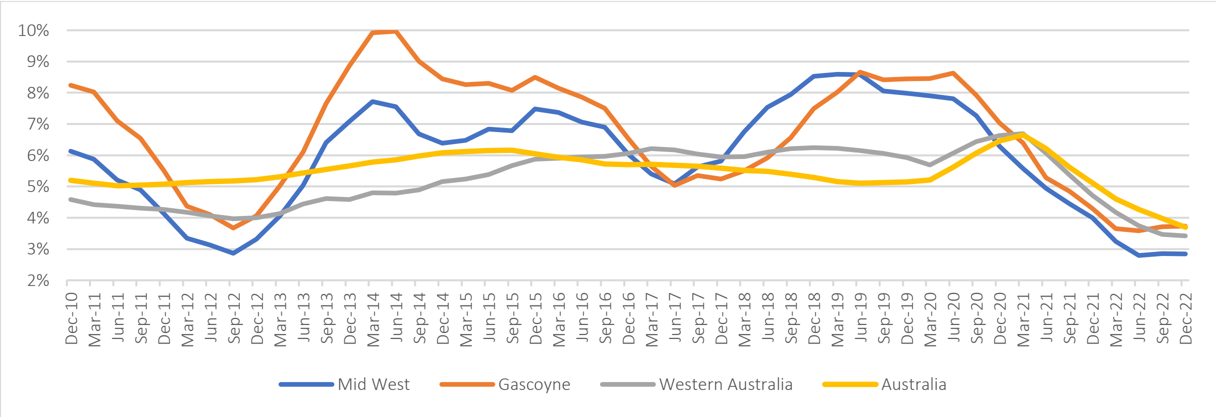
The Mid West had an unemployment rate of 3.8% compared to 3.4% for WA as a whole and 3.7% across Australia (December Quarter 2022).[6] The Gascoyne, however, is higher than the state and comparable to the national average at 3.7%. These are considered relatively low rates of unemployment when considering regional history and suggest a possible shortfall of a suitable labour pool.

[6] https://www.employment.gov.au/small-area-labour-markets-publication-0

The regions' unemployment rates are the lowest they have been in recorded history (from December Quarter 2010), recovering from a significantly high rate of 8.6% in the Mid West and 8.7% in the Gascoyne in the June Quarter of 2019.

Despite their current performance, the Mid West and Gascoyne have experienced notable volatility compared to the state and national averages (Figure 9). The ten-year average unemployment rates for the regions are 6.0% in the Mid West and 6.6% in the Gascoyne, higher than the state and national averages (5.3% and 5.5%, respectively).

Figure 12. Regional Unemployment Rates Comparison



When looking more closely at individual LGAs, the poorest performing are currently are the Murchison Shires of Mount Magnet, Cue, Meekatharra, Murchison, Yalgoo, Sandstone, and also Carnarvon. Despite the relatively poor performance of Carnarvon, all other Gascoyne LGAs have an extremely low unemployment rate at 1.5 or 1.6%. Mid West LGAs with unemployment rates at or below 2.5% include Carnamah, Chapman Valley, Irwin, and Perenjori. The regional centre, Greater Geraldton, has an unemployment rate of only 2.7%.

Figure 13. Unemployment rates by LGA (rates for some LGAs not available before March Quarter 2020)

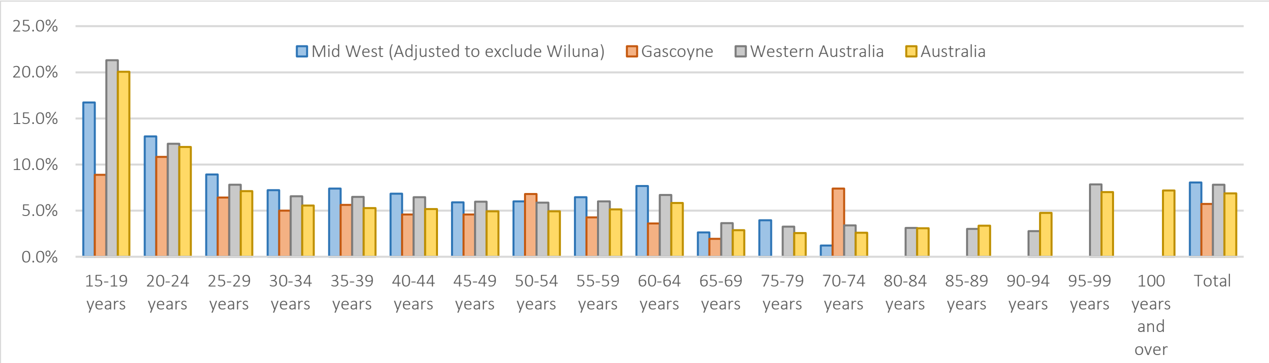
	Mar-20	Jun-20	Sep-20	Dec-20	Mar-21	Jun-21	Sep-21	Dec-21	Mar-22	Jun-22	Sep-22	Dec-22
Carnamah	5.5%	5.2%	4.9%	4.5%	4.0%	3.5%	3.4%	3.1%	2.5%	2.5%	2.5%	2.5%
Chapman Valley	5.8%	5.9%	5.5%	4.9%	4.4%	3.7%	3.2%	3.0%	2.4%	2.1%	2.1%	2.1%
Coorow	5.3%	5.2%	4.8%	4.4%	3.9%	3.6%	3.3%	3.1%	2.7%	2.5%	2.6%	2.6%
Cue	17.1%	16.2%	14.3%	11.1%	9.8%	8.5%	8.2%	7.3%	6.5%	6.5%	6.5%	6.4%
Geraldton	8.0%	7.9%	7.4%	6.4%	5.7%	5.0%	4.5%	4.0%	3.2%	2.7%	2.7%	2.7%
Irwin	4.4%	4.5%	4.4%	4.2%	3.8%	3.2%	2.9%	2.5%	2.2%	2.1%	2.1%	2.1%
Meekatharra	16.9%	16.0%	14.2%	11.2%	9.5%	8.6%	8.1%	7.5%	6.5%	5.9%	6.3%	6.4%
Mingenew	5.5%	5.1%	5.1%	4.6%	4.1%	3.5%	3.4%	3.0%	2.7%	2.7%	2.7%	2.6%
Morawa	5.4%	5.2%	5.0%	4.4%	4.0%	3.6%	3.3%	3.0%	2.6%	2.6%	2.6%	2.6%
Mount Magnet	17.0%	16.0%	14.2%	11.1%	9.4%	8.6%	8.2%	7.5%	6.4%	6.0%	6.3%	6.6%
Murchison	17.0%	16.0%	13.8%	11.5%	10.1%	8.7%	8.3%	7.3%	6.4%	6.4%	6.4%	6.3%
Northampton	7.0%	7.1%	6.7%	5.8%	5.3%	4.4%	4.0%	3.6%	2.9%	2.7%	2.7%	2.7%
Perenjori	5.3%	5.3%	5.0%	4.3%	3.9%	3.8%	3.4%	3.1%	2.5%	2.5%	2.5%	2.5%
Sandstone	18.2%	16.4%	14.5%	10.7%	8.5%	8.1%	7.8%	7.7%	6.3%	6.2%	6.2%	6.2%
Three Springs	5.5%	5.2%	4.9%	4.5%	4.1%	3.6%	3.2%	3.2%	2.6%	2.6%	2.6%	2.6%
Yalgoo	16.7%	15.8%	14.3%	11.1%	9.8%	8.8%	8.1%	7.5%	6.8%	5.9%	6.3%	6.3%
Mid West	*7.9%*	*7.8%*	*7.3%*	*6.3%*	*5.6%*	*4.9%*	*4.5%*	*4.0%*	*3.2%*	*2.8%*	*2.9%*	*2.8%*
Carnarvon	13.0%	12.6%	11.2%	9.6%	8.3%	7.2%	6.8%	6.1%	5.4%	5.4%	5.7%	5.7%
Exmouth	3.0%	4.0%	4.1%	4.1%	4.2%	3.1%	2.7%	2.2%	1.6%	1.5%	1.4%	1.5%
Shark Bay	3.1%	4.0%	4.1%	4.0%	4.2%	3.1%	2.7%	2.2%	1.6%	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%
Upper Gascoyne	3.0%	4.2%	4.2%	4.1%	4.0%	2.7%	2.6%	2.1%	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%
Gascoyne	*8.5%*	*8.6%*	*7.9%*	*7.0%*	*6.4%*	*5.3%*	*4.9%*	*4.3%*	*3.6%*	*3.6%*	*3.7%*	*3.7%*

Whilst the above data provide the most recent picture of regional unemployment, and a good overview of historic performance, they do not provide any demographic clarity. In contrast, ABS provide additional information for employment status at the time of the census (age, indigenous status and country of birth); however, data appears incomplete for Mid West and Gascoyne LGAs in 2021 (i.e., there were no values for unemployment across any of these categories). Thus, unemployment data with this level of detail cannot be provided for the latest census. To provide some additional clarity, data at this level does exist from the 2016 census.

2.5.3 Unemployment and age

Age related unemployment broadly follows state and national averages, though there are some notable differences. The first, is that Gascoyne unemployment is lower than the Mid West, state and national averages for all but two age brackets (50-54 years and 70-74 years). The second is that both Mid West and Gascoyne young adults (in the 15–19-year age bracket) are more likely to participate in the labour force than state and national averages. Unemployment in the Mid West is higher than or comparable to state and national averages across all other categories.

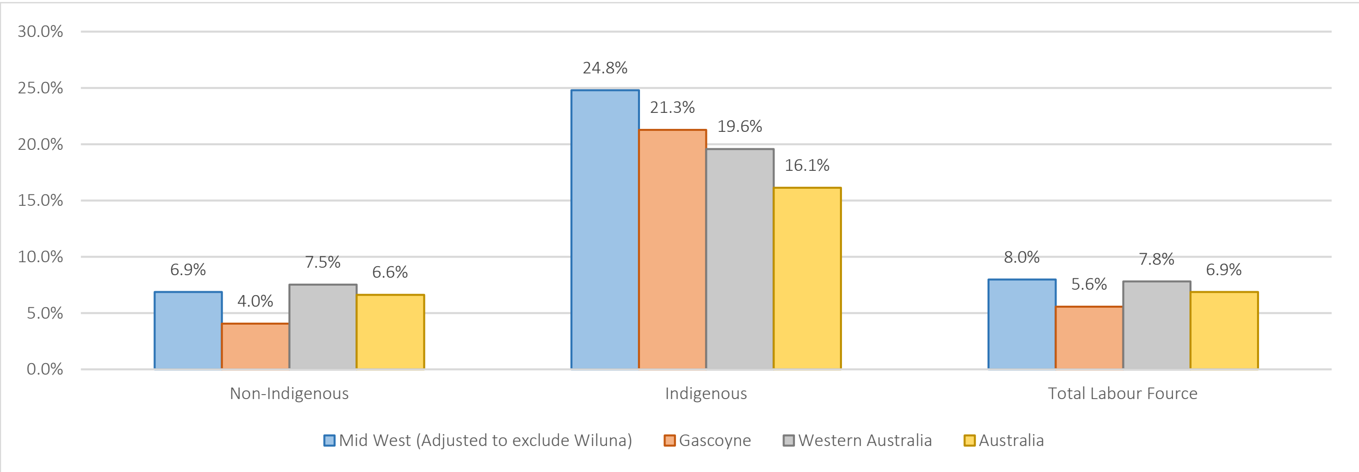
Figure 14. Mid West and Gascoyne unemployment rates by age bracket (compared to state and national averages), 2016 ABS



2.5.3 Indigenous unemployment

Unemployment is higher amongst Indigenous populations in the Mid West and Gascoyne. This is consistent with trends across the state and country, though regional unemployment rates are higher in both regions. In contrast, non-Indigenous unemployment rates are lower than state and national averages.

Figure 15. Mid West and Gascoyne unemployment rates by Indigenous status (compared to state and national averages), 2016 ABS



It is worth noting, however, that Indigenous persons make up a larger proportion of the employed workforce than state and national averages. This is consistent with the regions' higher proportion of Indigenous residents.

Figure 16. Indigenous status as proportion of employed work force (ABS, 2016)

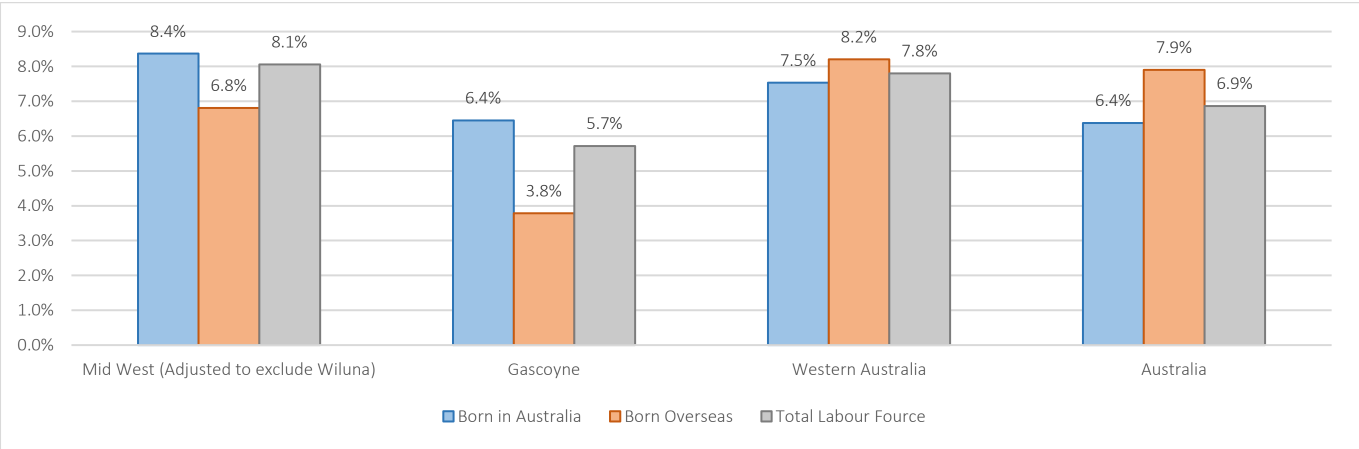
	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous
Mid West (Adjusted to exclude Wiluna)	94.9%	5.1%
Gascoyne	92.7%	7.3%
Western Australia	97.9%	2.1%
Australia	97.7%	2.3%

2.5.4 Unemployment and country of birth

Data at an LGA or regional level is not available for migration status. However, employment status by country of birth can provide some insight into the Australian workforce and willingness of Australian born citizens to engage/participate in the workforce in the regions.

To this effect, it is interesting to note that whilst unemployment rates are higher amongst persons born overseas for state and national averages, they are considerably lower than those born in Australia for both the Mid West and Gascoyne regions.

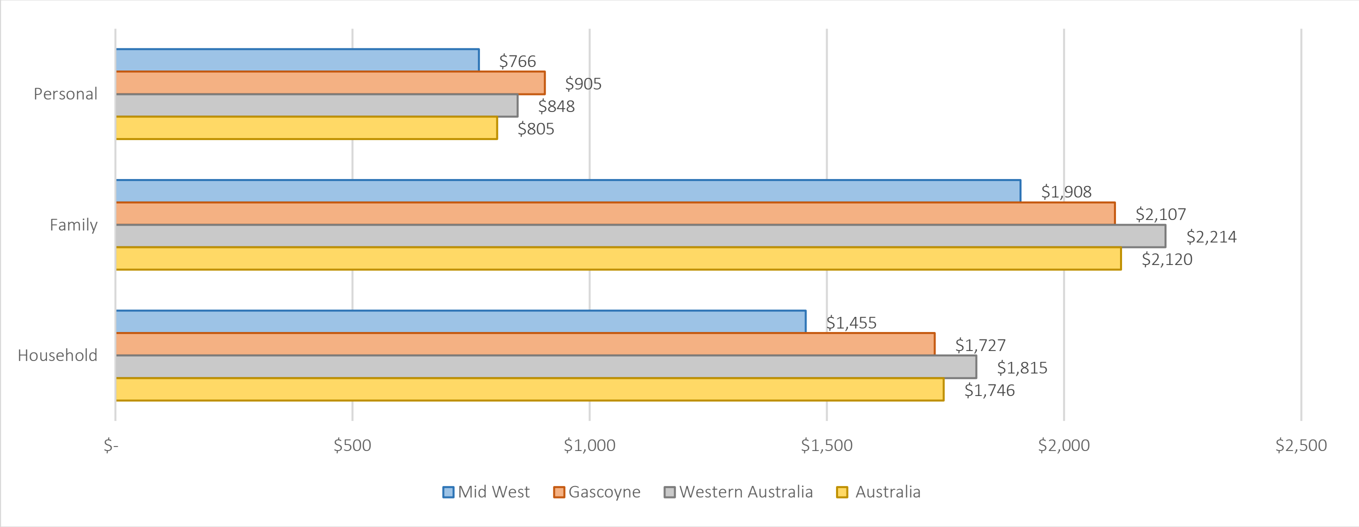
Figure 17. Unemployment and country of birth



2.7 Income and Cost of Living

The median weekly personal income is relatively low in the Mid West ($766) when compared to state and national averages. In the Gascoyne, however, weekly personal income is higher than state and national averages (at $905). In both regions, family and household incomes are lower than state and national averages, with a more notable gap for the Mid West.

Figure 18. Weekly incomes (Mid West, Gascoyne, WA, and Australia)



Despite its poor performance, the Mid West has increased its income at an annual rate exceeding that of the state average and in line with that of the national average over the past decade. Annual growth for the decade in the Gascoyne is comparable to that of the state average.

Figure 19. Compound annual income growth rate (2011-2021)

	Personal	Family	Household
Mid West	2.5%	3.3%	2.6%
Gascoyne	1.5%	2.5%	2.1%
Western Australia	2.5%	2.5%	2.5%
Australia	3.4%	3.7%	3.5%

Despite lower incomes in both the Mid West and Gascoyne regions, the cost of living for working families is comparable and slightly higher than Perth. The 2021 Regional Price Index[7] is the tenth State Government Index contrasting the cost of a common basket of goods and services at several regional locations to the Perth metropolitan region. The Mid West scores 100.7 overall, with lower costs than Perth for clothing, housing and transport, but higher costs for all other categories. The Gascoyne fares even worse, with a score of 102.3. Clothing is comparable to that of Perth, but all other cost categories are higher in the Gascoyne. The regions fare better overall than the Kimberley, Pilbara and Goldfields-Esperance regions, but worse than all others.

[7] Government of Western Australia, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, Regional Price Index 2021

Figure 20. Regional cost of living index (compared to Perth)

	Kimberley	Pilbara	Gascoyne	Mid West	Goldfields-Esperance	Wheatbelt	Peel	South West	Great Southern
Overall	110.8	114.9	102.3	100.7	103.7	100.5	98.2	99.7	100.8
Food	109.2	105.1	100.8	103.8	104.3	102.6	99.9	99.5	100.8
Cigarettes, tobacco, alcohol	103.7	108.8	106.6	108.2	109.0	107.5	98.9	104.5	102.8
Clothing	100.0	100.0	100.0	96.8	100.6	100.4	99.7	102.6	103.1
Housing	118.1	134.6	104.8	95.7	98.5	95.7	96.0	100.0	98.3
Household equipment and operation	106.1	105.4	100.5	101.3	105.4	102.0	96.1	99.5	100.4
Health and personal care	107.2	112.2	104.0	107.1	113.9	102.6	97.3	110.1	110.7
Transport	107.7	111.6	103.7	98.0	104.1	102.2	102.5	95.1	100.8
Recreation	109.7	103.8	102.4	105.3	111.6	102.4	98.8	98.7	103.2

The above income and cost of living factors can be a key deterrent to the attraction of workers from outside the regions (i.e., from elsewhere in Western Australia or Australia). Incentives are often required to improve working and living conditions for employees.

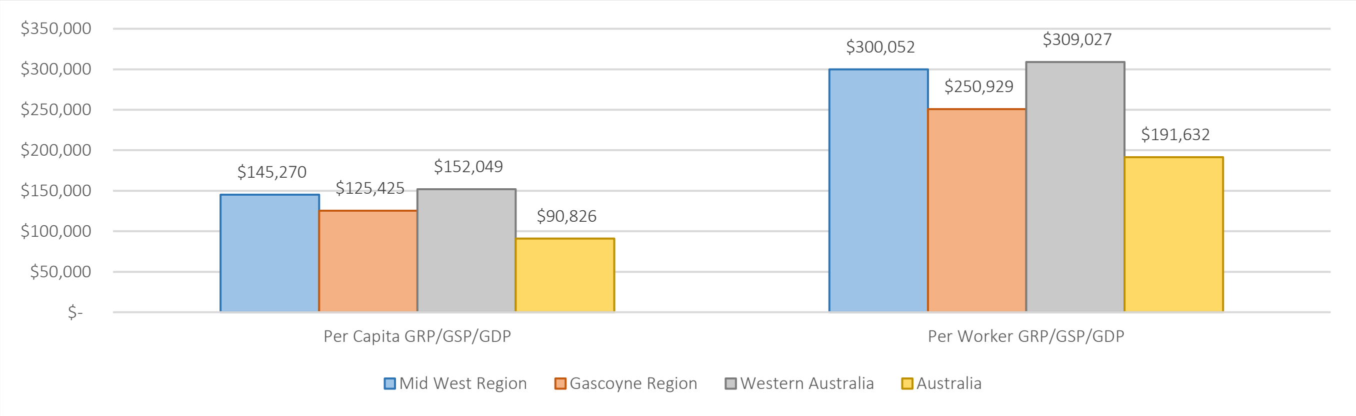
2.8 Economy

2.8.1 Economic Value

The estimate of Gross Regional Product (GRP)[8] for the Mid West was $7.9 billion in 2022 (REMPLAN[9,10]), 2.0% of the state total. GRP in the Gascoyne was $1.2 billion over the same period (0.3% of gross state product). Both per capita and per worker GRP are relatively strong in the Mid West (comparable to the state average and higher than the national average. Gascoyne per capita and worker GRP is lower than the Mid West and state, but still considerably higher than the national average. In all cases, these strengths are largely driven by mining industry performance in Western Australia's regions, including the Mid West and Gascoyne.

[8] GRP is the net measure of wealth generated by the region - all forms of final expenditure, including consumption by households, consumption by governments, additions or increases to assets (minus disposals) and exports (minus imports) are added together.
[9] REMPLAN, Mid West Economic Profile - https://app.remplan.com.au/midwestregion/economy
[10] REMPLAN, Gascoyne Economic Profile - https://app.remplan.com.au/gascoyneregion/economy

Figure 21. Per capita and per worker GRP (Mid West and Gascoyne)



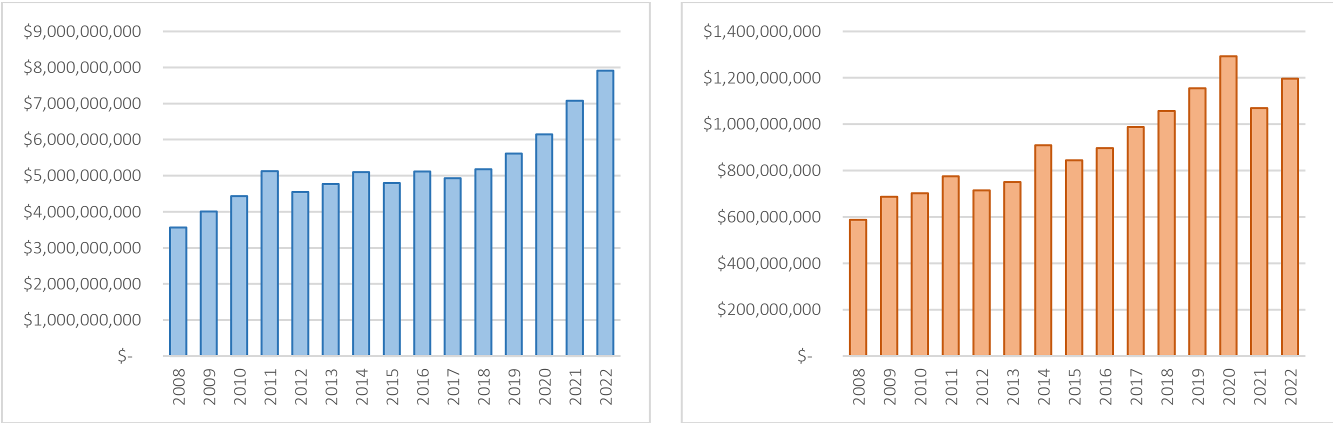
In the Mid West, the greatest share of GRP is contributed by Greater Geraldton at $4.0B (50.9%). Other notable contributors include Meekatharra (10.8%) and Perenjori (12.1%). In the Gascoyne, GRP is most notably contributed by Carnarvon (56.1%) and Exmouth (34.2%).

Figure 22. LGA contributions to Gross Regional Product in the Mid West and Gascoyne regions

Mid West LGAs	GRP	% Total Mid West
Carnamah	$61,495,254	0.78%
Chapman Valley	$66,004,201	0.83%
Coorow	$74,494,003	0.94%
Cue	$259,624,038	3.28%
Greater Geraldton	$4,024,227,350	50.88%
Irwin	$240,900,128	3.05%
Meekatharra	$853,488,587	10.79%
Mingenew	$41,800,491	0.53%
Mount Magnet	$478,996,482	6.06%
Northampton	$244,376,848	3.09%
Perenjori	$957,077,918	12.10%
Sandstone	$17,654,612	0.22%
Three Springs	$69,780,732	0.88%
Yalgoo	$418,681,143	5.29%
Morowa / Murchison	$101,063,817	1.28%
Total Mid West	**$7,909,665,604**	-
Gascoyne LGAs	**GRP**	**% Total Gascoyne**
Carnarvon	$671,505,487	56.14%
Exmouth	$408,732,767	34.17%
Shark Bay	$102,922,960	8.60%
Upper Gascoyne	$13,015,423	1.09%
Total Gascoyne	**$1,196,176,637**	-

Nominal GRP has increased with an average annual growth rate of 6.1% in the Mid West and 5.7% in the Gascoyne (between 2008 and 2022). GRP in both regions rose by 11.8% in the last year alone, though the Gascoyne did experience a 17.3% loss between 2020 and 2021.

Figure 23. Mid West and Gascoyne Gross Regional Product (2008-2022)



2.8.2 Industry Output

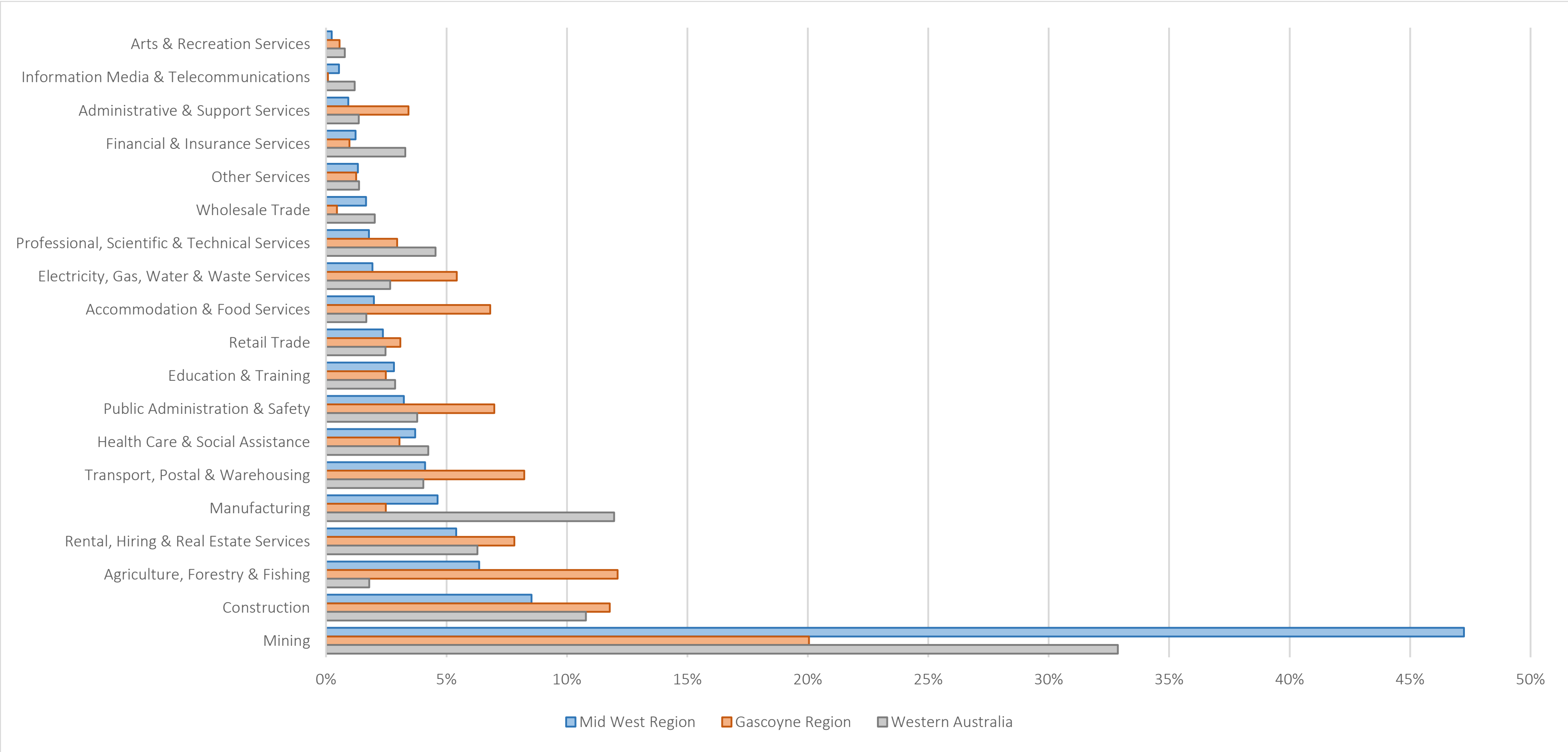
The total direct output[11] of the Mid West was $15.97 billion (2.1% of total state output). The highest output industries were mining ($7.54B or 47.2%), construction ($1.36B or 8.5%), and agriculture, forestry & fishing ($1.01B or 6.4%).

In the Gascoyne, total direct output was 2.20 billion (0.3% of total state output). High output industries are the same as for the Mid West, but providing different proportionate contributions to total regional output, where Gascoyne output is more evenly balanced across several industries. Mining produced $441.9M (20.0%) of Gascoyne output, agriculture, forestry & fishing produced $266.8M (12.1%), and construction produced $259.6M (11.8%).

Proportionate to total output, the agriculture, forestry & fishing in both regions performs best compared to the state average. In the Mid West, the mining industry also makes up a greater proportion of regional activity than it does for the state.

[11] Output data represent the gross revenue generated by businesses/organisations in each of the industry sectors in a defined region. Gross revenue is also referred to as total sales or total income.

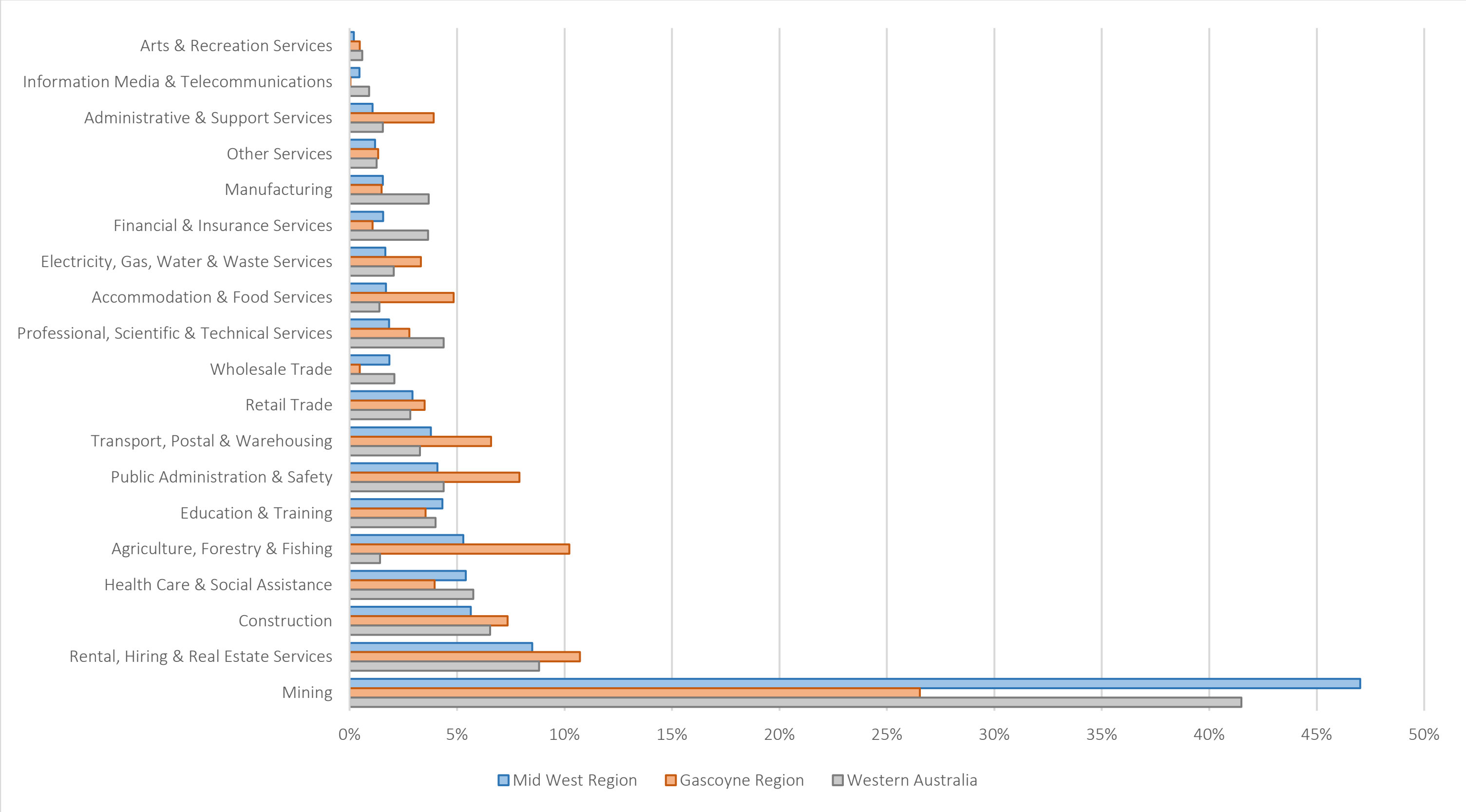
Figure 24. Industry proportions of total regional and state output



When looking at industry value-added[12] mining still leads in the Mid West and by a large margin ($3.56B or 47.0%). Industry value add for the region is next highest in rental, hiring & real estate services ($643.25M or 8.5%), and agriculture, forestry & fishing ($400.22M or 5.3%). Highest value-added industries in the Gascoyne were the same, with mining contributing $30.20M (26.5%) of total value-added, rental, hiring & real estate services contributing $122.01M (10.7%), and agriculture, forestry & fishing contributing $116.45M (10.2%).

[12] Value-Added represents the marginal economic value that is added by each industry sector in a defined region. Value-Added is calculated by subtracting local expenditure and expenditure on regional imports from the output generated by an industry sector. Value-Added by industry sector is the major element in the calculation of Gross Regional Product (GRP)

Figure 25. Industry proportions of total regional and state value-added



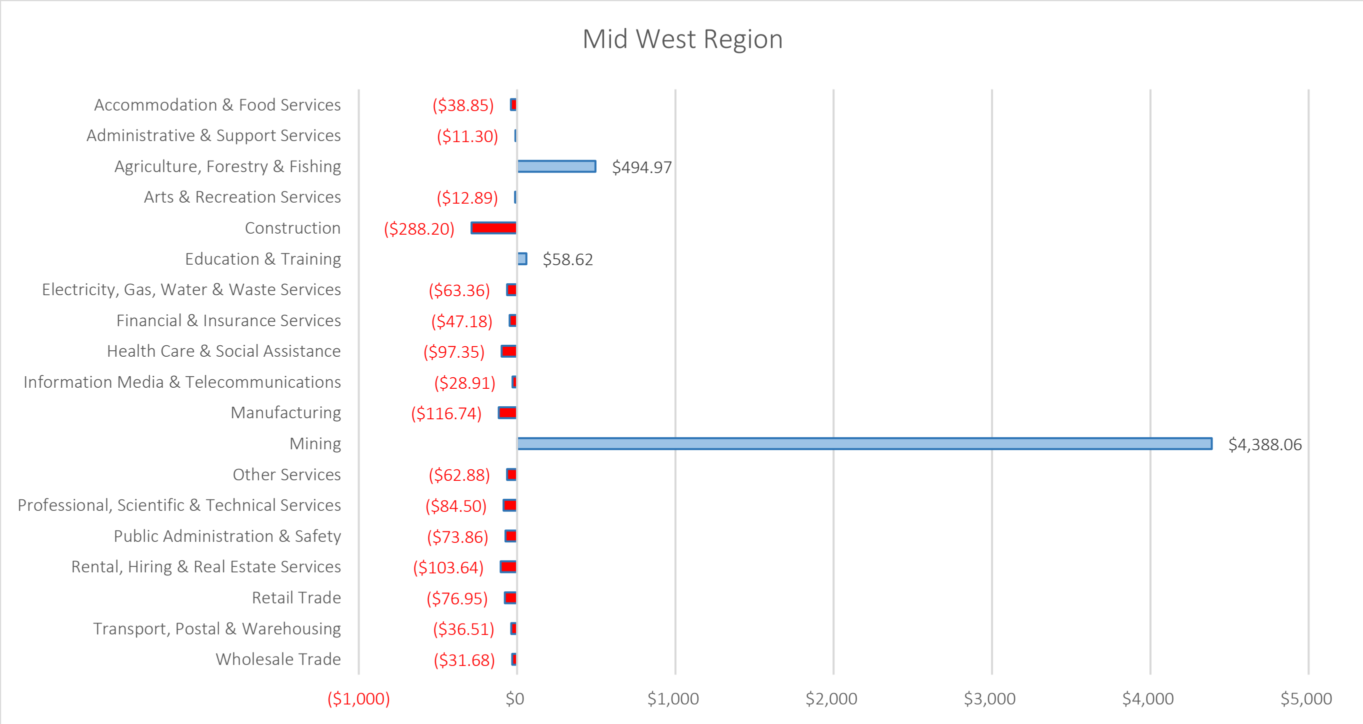
2.8.3 Imports and Exports

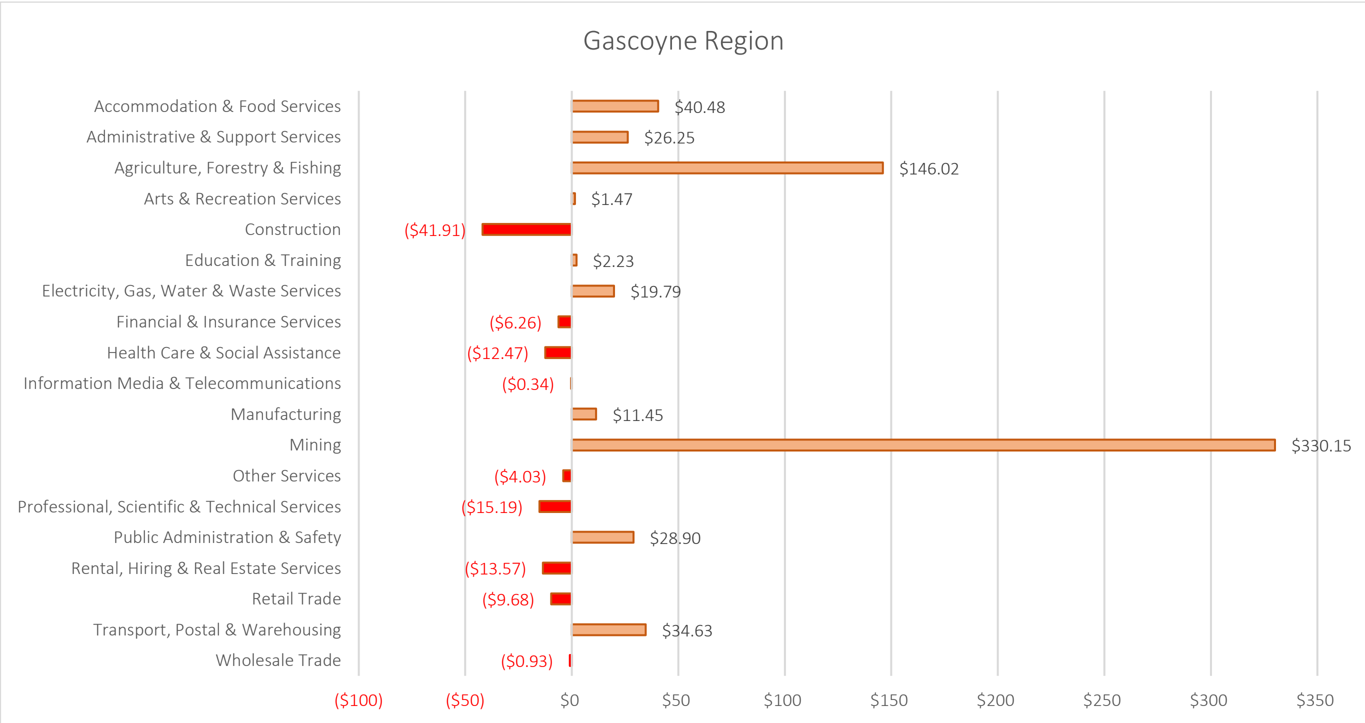
Both the Mid West and Gascoyne are net exporters, with total net exports of $3.77B and $536.97M, respectively. Both the state and Mid West region are heavily reliant on mining for their net export performance, with the only other (small-scale) net exporting industries as agriculture, forestry & fishing, and education & training. In contrast, the Gascoyne also produces net exports in accommodation & food services, administration & support services, arts & recreation services, electricity, gas, water & waste services, manufacturing, and transport, postal & warehousing industries.

Figure 26. Regional net exports by industry

	Mid West Region	Gascoyne Region	Western Australia
Accommodation & Food Services	-$38,847,941	$40,484,720	-$1,436,721,482
Administrative & Support Services	-$11,297,129	$26,247,703	-$301,846,372
Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing	$494,971,709	$146,015,003	$2,072,906,105
Arts & Recreation Services	-$12,891,104	$1,467,690	-$413,219,622
Construction	-$288,199,490	-$41,912,106	-$5,671,052,591
Education & Training	$58,621,099	$2,233,190	$2,681,247,579
Electricity, Gas, Water & Waste Services	-$63,362,616	$19,786,725	-$1,450,856,075
Financial & Insurance Services	-$47,184,139	-$6,260,806	-$3,345,637,017
Health Care & Social Assistance	-$97,350,417	-$12,470,886	-$2,653,049,096
Information Media & Telecommunications	-$28,912,666	-$343,213	-$1,943,605,172
Manufacturing	-$116,737,033	$11,445,453	-$3,733,152,986
Mining	$4,388,057,913	$330,148,315	$176,145,336,789
Other Services	-$62,875,627	-$4,030,506	-$1,235,962,950
Professional, Scientific & Technical Services	-$84,495,937	-$15,190,807	-$4,725,159,948
Public Administration & Safety	-$73,863,132	$28,897,444	-$1,670,831,563
Rental, Hiring & Real Estate Services	-$103,636,075	-$13,574,451	-$3,405,581,900
Retail Trade	-$76,946,834	-$9,683,814	-$1,416,506,526
Transport, Postal & Warehousing	-$36,505,748	$34,634,776	-$1,915,979,205
Wholesale Trade	-$31,680,177	-$925,595	$307,806,299
Total	$3,766,864,655	$536,968,838	$145,888,134,269

Figure 27. Regional net imports and exports ($M)





2.9 Dwellings and Building Approvals

2.9.1 Housing

It is also important to consider the characteristics of households and dwellings, particularly in consideration of housing availability.

More Mid West dwellings are occupied in 2021 than in 2011, and fewer in the Gascoyne (Table 13 - ABS 2021 Census). In both cases, there are fewer occupied dwellings in the region than the state average; however, a large proportion of unoccupied dwellings are expected to either be holiday residences or in a state of disrepair (i.e., unavailable or unsuitable for habitation). This is reflected in current rental vacancy rates, as explored below.

Figure 28. Proportion of dwellings occupied.

	2021	2011
Mid West	82.5%	81.3%
Gascoyne	79.5%	83.9%
WA	89.1%	87.9%

When looking at dwelling type by number of bedrooms (Table 14), the Gascoyne region has a proportionately high number of studio, one, and two bedroom dwellings, a positive factor that otherwise often limits the ability to attract workers (e.g. singles and small families who may not wish to dwell in and maintain a larger home). The higher proportion of these dwelling types in the Gascoyne is likely reflective of the existing resident and worker profile in the region.

In contrast, the Mid West is more reflective of the state average. Higher proportions of three- and four-bedroom dwellings can be considered a limiting factor in the attraction of workers, particularly for industries that typically attract younger singles and families to regions (e.g., accommodation & food services, health care & social assistance, retail trade, etc.).

Figure 29. Dwelling type by number of bedrooms

	Mid West	Gascoyne	WA
None	0.5%	2.4%	0.3%
1	3.5%	10.6%	3.7%
2	12.7%	14.4%	12.6%
3	39.7%	44.9%	37.5%
4	41.8%	24.9%	44.7%

2.9.2 Household Composition

Despite the higher number of three-bedroom dwellings and lower number of one-and-two-bedroom dwellings, and reflective of the higher proportion of smaller dwellings in the Gascoyne, the regions have a notably higher proportion of single (or lone) person households and a lower proportion of family or group households than the state as a whole (Table 15). The Gascoyne also has a relatively high proportion of group households, another indicator of resident and worker profile (e.g., younger and/or more transitory).

Figure 30. Household compositions

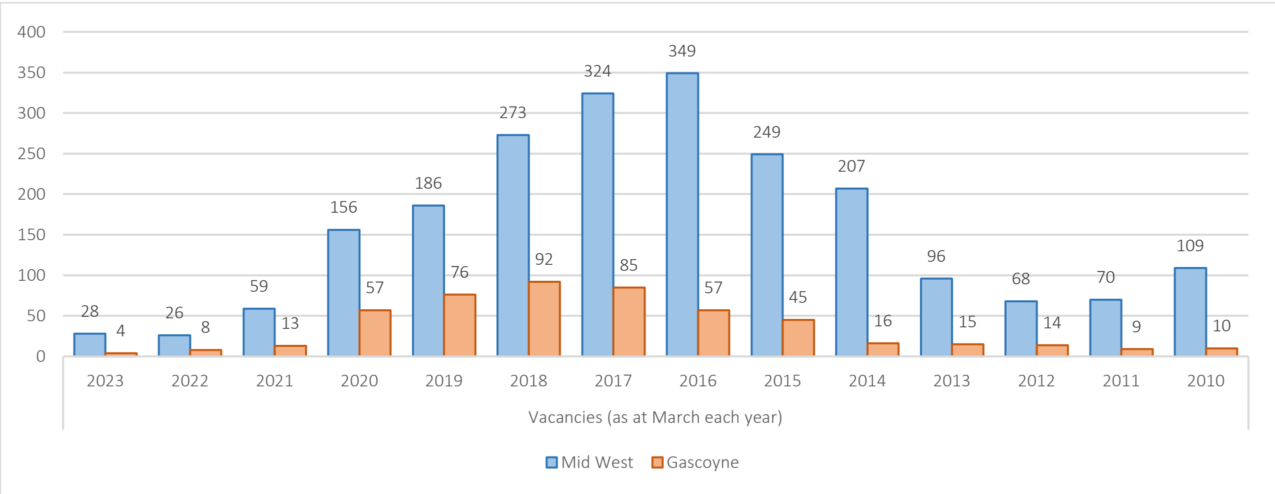
	Mid West	Gascoyne	WA
Family households	68.6%	63.8%	71.2%
Single (or lone) person households	28.9%	31.0%	25.4%
Group households	2.5%	5.1%	3.4%

2.9.3 Vacancy Rates

As with most regional areas in Western Australia., there is a current critical housing shortage with a significant impact on the ability to attract new residents and workers. The following chart shows the number of residential vacancies since 2010 (SQM Research[13]), with current combined total vacancies for the Mid West and Gascoyne at 32 properties. This represents on overall vacancy rate of only 0.22% in March of 2023. In the Mid West, the current vacancy rate is 0.45%. In the Gascoyne, it is only 0.05%.

For context, Brewsters Property Group state that a vacancy rate of 3% is considered 'healthy'. It is deemed the equilibrium point at which the market is evenly balanced between landlords and renters. A very low vacancy rate below 2% signifies high rental demand, requiring new properties on the market to fuel this tenant requirement.

Figure 31. Residential vacancies in the Mid West and Gascoyne regions (SQM Research)



Vacancies were available in only six of the 16 Mid West local government areas and one of the four Gascoyne LGAs. Vacancy rates in all other LGAs were 0.0%.

[13] https://sqmresearch.com.au/ - As at March each year

Figure 32. Residential vacancy rates by postcode and region[14] (SQM Research)

	Current Vacancy Rate
Carnamah	0.00%
Chapman Valley	0.20%
Coorow	0.00%
Cue	1.80%
Greater Geraldton	0.50%
Irwin	0.50%
Meekatharra	0.00%
Mingenew	0.00%
Morawa	1.90%
Mount Magnet	1.00%
Murchison	0.00%
Northampton	0.00%
Perenjori	0.00%
Sandstone	0.00%
Three Springs	0.00%
Yalgoo	0.00%
Mid West	0.45%
Carnarvon	0.30%
Exmouth	0.00%
Shark Bay	0.00%
Upper Gascoyne	0.00%
Gascoyne	0.05%

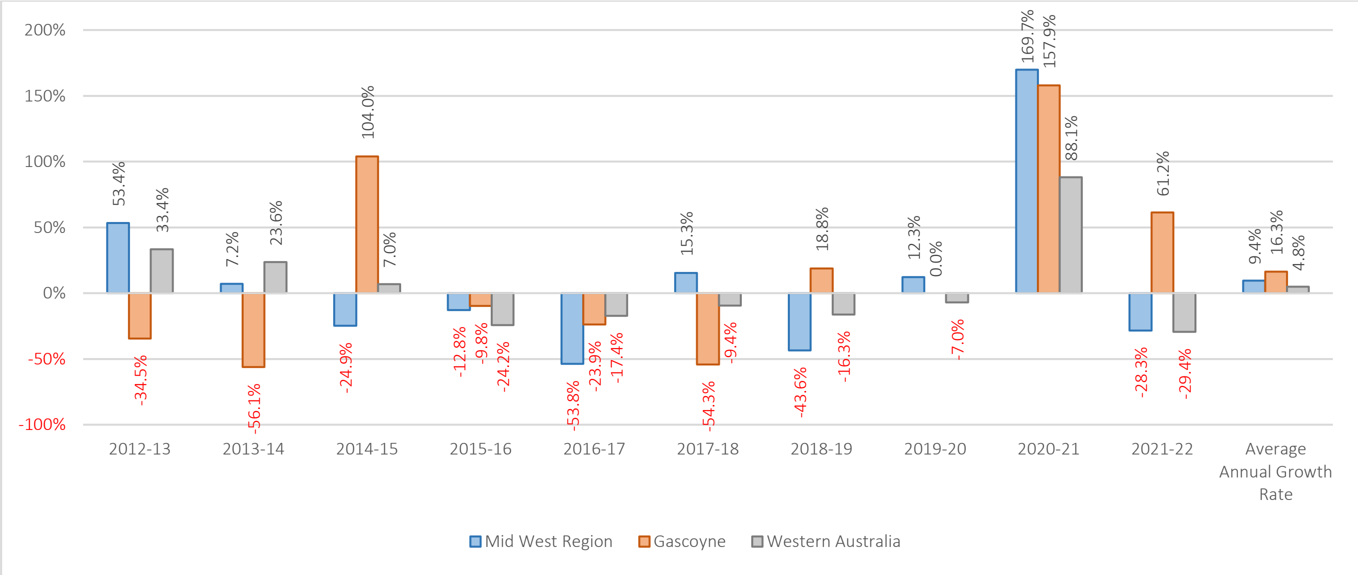
2.9.4 Building Approvals

Building approvals can be another indicator of population growth and demand (REMPLAN 2022). In the Mid West, residential approvals have broadly followed state-wide trends, with relatively stagnant or negative growth between 2015 and 2020, and high growth in 2020/21. Average annual growth for the Mid West region is 9.4%, higher than the state average of 4.8%.

Residential building approvals in the Gascoyne has experience greater average growth still, at 16.3%. Growth trends have been slightly different than for the Mid West and state, particularly between 2012 and 2015 (essentially experiencing the opposite of its counterparts). High approvals growth was also experienced in both 2020/21 and 20201/22.

[14] Regional vacancy rates are extrapolated form postcode level data.

Figure 33. Annual Change in building approvals: 2012 to 2022



3.0 Regional Transition

3.1 Evolution of economy

An important narrative is that the region is undergoing a transition or evolution in the sectors of the economy that create wealth. This includes: eco and adventure tourism, mining of mineral resources, carbon capture and land regeneration, production of green energy (solar, wind) potential for blue and green hydrogen, sustainable board acre farming.

3.2 Small Town Strategies

Despite the economic evolution the small towns of the region are losing population and whilst population reduction is not necessarily negative it does raise the question of 'what is a sustainable viable community? As this region has demonstrated there are towns that no longer exist. Examples include Big Bell, Lennonville, Austin, Nannine and Paynesville. These towns were once thriving communities with people who invested in their communities and livelihoods and might have believed their towns would not close.

3.3 The Opportunity

There are many reasons why the region has a transitioning and improving economy and at the same time the population is declining and towns are becoming less sustainable. RDA believes that it is not a case of one or the other, rather it is 'Economy and Population and Regional Sustainability'.

The focus of our successive business plans is on the small communities, investing and working alongside leaders to develop and implement a range of strategies and tools that are aligned with the core assets, challenges and opportunities within their regional context.

At the same time RDAMW&G is leading and facilitating regional strategies which focus on infrastructure and industry engagement that supports communities and businesses. Examples include regional roads and mining company relationships.

We are bringing this together through regional consensus statements that provide opportunity for the region to create its own narrative which is an important element in a developing advocacy program.

3.4 Observations and Statements

Our capstone lesson is that there is no silver bullet. Successful development in small towns and remote regions is always multifaceted and we have learnt that nothing should be taken off the table in selecting strategies to pursue.

Given the basic strengths, weaknesses opportunities and threats affecting each community and the virtually limitless menu of possible actions, no single package of strategies necessarily fits with a particular type of community. Keeping this in mind we have nominally arranged the overall region into four sub regions that are outlined below.

Figure 34: Mid West and Gascoyne Subregions

Mid West and Gascoyne Sub Regions	
Gascoyne	Exmouth Carnarvon Shark Bay Upper Gascoyne
Murchison	Meekatharra Cue Sandstone Mt Magnet Yalgoo Murchison (settlement)
Central	City of Greater Geraldton inc. Mullewa Chapman Valley Northampton inc. Kalbarri
North Midlands	Irwin Mingenew Morawa Three Springs Carnamah Coorow Perenjori

4.0 RDAMW&G Regional Focus

Since the 2020/21 financial year RDAMW&G turned its attention to the communities that support the 19 Shires outside the City of Greater Geraldton. This has been a deliberate policy and program position informed by:

An evidence-based understanding of economic and population-based indicators,

A maturing relationship with community leaders and the development of an improved understanding of the vision that they have for their communities and gaps in resources and capabilities.

The evolution of our major projects which are highlighting opportunities to create shared value and collaboration across smaller regional communities.

Observations are that:

- Sub-regional and regional interventions are required to develop and implement strategies that address growth and liveability opportunities in small shires.
- The population movements within and between the small Shires and the implications for liveability and services provision from all levels of government.
- RDAMW&G can bring the Shires together to address common issues.
- Implementation of both State and Federal Government programs is challenging within micro communities.
- There is no one single solution to the factors that support jobs and growth in small Shires. A multifaceted approach is required.
- The development of appropriate governance and implementation frameworks at both local and regional levels is essential to develop the business case opportunities that are required for transformational programmes that will attract both private and public sector investment.

5.0 Summary of Outcomes 2021/22

5.1 Outcome 1: Facilitation of regional economic development outcomes, investment, jobs and local procurement.	
Performance Indicators	Strategic (i) Completed Phase II of Gascoyne Infrastructure priorities: Regional Roads opportunity assessment. (ii) Commenced Phase IIb of Gascoyne Infrastructure Priorities: Regional Roads opportunity assessment: Upper Gascoyne Mining capability. (iii) Presented 'Small Shires: growth, population and liveability' in partnership with Regional Australia Institute. (iv) Strategic Regional Strategy Plan for Murchison region commenced. (v) Completed an MoU with Murchison Georegion project management group for provision of a Project manager resource. (vi) Initiated agreement with Gascoyne CEO's and GRA partners to develop Gascoyne Infrastructure Priorities statement. Governance (i) Provide leadership to the Gascoyne Infrastructure program. (ii) Established working group of Gascoyne CEO's to develop Regional Priorities advocacy statement. (iii) Initiated a leadership group to undertake DAMA (Designated Area Migration Agreement) business case. The leadership group comprises: RDAMW&G, Gascoyne Development Commission, Mid West Development

	Commission, Exmouth Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Carnarvon Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mid West Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Operational (i) Phase IIb, Gascoyne Infrastructure priorities, 'Upper Gascoyne Regional Roads' scope and current state completed. (ii) Co-ordinated the production of 17 narrative 'podcasts' that share unique stories from our regional towns. Financial (i) Funding arrangements to support all initiatives. (ii) Funding allocations are transparent and followed responsible procurement protocols. Communications (i) All activities associated with 'Outcome 1' are aligned with the Communications strategy. (ii) Stakeholder engagement and communications plans provided effective feedback to all stakeholders. (iii) Communications and reporting allowed effective decision making by stakeholders.

5.2 Outcome 2: Promotion of a greater regional awareness of and engagement with Australian Government policies, grant programs and research	
Performance Indicators	Strategic (i) Ongoing support to reference group to undertake the Murchison Strategic Regional Plans. Governance (ii) RDAMW&G worked with regional leaders and organisations to establish governance arrangements that allow effective advocacy to political and stakeholder decision makers. This includes:

	• Murchison Regional Strategy • Gascoyne Infrastructure Priorities (roads) • Gascoyne Advocacy statement (CEO group) • Designated Area Migration program Operational (iii) RDAMW&G has attended regional Local Government zone meetings in the Gascoyne, Murchison and Northern Zones and has regular contact with CEO;s and elected members where relevant. Commenced refresh of RDAMW&G website. (iv) RDAMW&G Grant Guru portal maintained with more than 500 registered users. Financial (i) Renewed provision of Grant Guru grant portal, partnership with RDA Wheatbelt through to June 2025. (ii) Regional leaders and organisations were updated on relevant funding / grant pathways as they became available.

5.3 Outcome 3: Contribution to regional policy making by providing intelligence and evidence-based advice to the Australian Government on regional development issues.	
Performance Indicators	Strategic

	(i) Strategic documents prepared, supported or endorsed by RDAMW&G were informed by an accurate and credible evidence base. (ii) RDAMW&G programs and activities reflected the priorities and were aligned to the Commonwealth Government. Governance (i) RDAMW&G initiated regionally based reference groups to contribute to regional outcomes and its decision making. Operational (ii) Participated in forums, briefings and discussions that raise awareness of Commonwealth programs and the relevance of these to regional Australia regional intelligence briefings held by the Commonwealth Government. Financial (iii) Business case, investment and advocacy were validated by accurate data.

6.0 RDAMW&G PRIORITIES 2022 / 2023

6.1 PLACE BASED APPROACH

The 2023/24 program continues a place-based approach to population, growth and liveability in the Mid West and Gascoyne region. Embedded in our program is an understanding that our small and vulnerable regional and remote communities can be successful, however this requires mix of capabilities, mindsets, policies and resources from both community and government with an overall focus on Liveability, soft and hard infrastructure, jobs, investment and importantly leadership.

Programmes

(i) An acknowledgement that there is no 'silver bullet', rather a response to complex intersecting issues that cross multiple organisational boundaries.

Leadership

(ii) A clear understanding and buy-in to regional outcomes that reflect agreed priorities by local stakeholders.

Governance

(iii) Collaborative governance structures that represent relevant cross sections and decision makers from within the community.

Shared Action (Bundled Investment)

(iv) Investment and implementation that allows for both public and private sector participation.

6.2 RDAMW&G: MISSION

The RDAMW&G Mission 'Together we Grow our Region' reflects the importance of being visible and well recognised throughout our diverse communities, forming alliances and strategic partnerships that leverage the 'power of many' to achieve mutually recognised outcomes and progressing our role as an important facilitator and connector across the Mid West and Gascoyne.

6.3 REGIONAL OUTCOME AND INVESTMENT FRAMEWORK THEMES

In line with the contracted funding Agreement there are four Regional Investment Framework Priority Focus areas.[15]

Key objectives across Government are that the priority focus areas:

- Meet the needs of, and provide opportunities for First Nations people.
- Support the transition to a net zero economy and decarbonisation.

[15] See Regional Ministerial Budget Statement: Working Together to Build Strong and Sustainable Communities. P4, 9th May 2023.

- Achieve gender equality.

Priority Focus Areas			
Investing in **People**	Investing in **Places**	Investing in **Services**	Investing in **Industries and Local Economies**
Listening to local voices and partnering with communities. Targeted investment in skills, education, training and local leadership capacity.	Supporting adaptive, accessible, sustainable and liveable regions. Delivering infrastructure where and when it is needed.	Enhancing connectivity, accessibility and equity of services. Investment including across communications, health, water and transport.	Investment to help activate economic and industry growth. Supporting the conditions for regional industries to diversify and grow.

6.4 TOP FIVE REGIONAL PRIORITIES

Based on our understanding of regional needs RDAMW&G has identified **five enabling business activities** that are supported by our operational program activities.

1: Community and Shire capacity, opportunity and growth

- Continuation of our projects that examine opportunities to promote regional towns and enhance liveability and growth.

2: Regional growth and investment.

- Facilitating initiatives that bring together regional stakeholders to progress regional projects which have common interest and shared value.

3: Regional collaboration

- Bring together stakeholders and regional leaders who can contribute to the identification and endorsement of regional priorities.

4: Facilitating access to grants.

- Ongoing provision of the Grant Guru product to Shires and community in the Mid West, Gascoyne and Wheatbelt. Provision of support to private and public sector organisations applying for grants.

5: Governance and leadership

- Bring together stakeholders and regional leaders who can contribute to regional decision making and governance arrangements that support capability and investor confidence.

7.0 STRATEGIC REGIONAL PLAN

7.1 Better Practice Guide

It is acknowledged that the Better Practice Guide (May 2022, Draft) and the Outcomes and Performance Indicators[16] require as a major outcome a 'suitable strategic Regional Plan'.

The section that follows summarises the known regional documents and outlines the approach that RDAMW&G proposes to follow.

7.2 Strategic Plans for the Mid West and Gascoyne

7.2.1 Regional Blueprints: Mid West and Gascoyne

Regional vision and strategies were portrayed by within the Mid West and Gascoyne Blueprints which were prepared by the Mid West Development Commission, in partnership with RDAMW&G, in 2014 and the Gascoyne Development Commission in 2015.

The Blueprints highlighted the need for critical infrastructure, including roads, energy, water and liveability services to act as the catalyst and unlock private and public sector investments.

7.2.3 Local Governments

At a local level the region is managed by 20 local government authorities who provide services to communities that range in size from around 90 people to 39,000 people.

As part of the State Government Local Government Reform local governments are required to produce a plan, under S5.56 91 of the Local Government Act 1995. This integrated planning and reporting process is intended to produce the following outcomes:

(i) A strategic community plan that clearly links the community's aspirations with the Council's vision and long-term strategy.
(ii) A Corporate Business Plan that integrates resourcing plans and specific council plans with the Strategic Community Plan, and
(iii) A clearly stated vision for the future viability of the local government area.

7.2.4 Infrastructure WA

Infrastructure WA 'Foundations for a Stronger Tomorrow' (2021) provides a long-term vision and infrastructure outlook for the state over the next two decades.

[16] See S1.3 Outcomes and Performance Indicators, Better Practice Guide, May 2021, p5.

7.2.5 Infrastructure Australia

Infrastructure Australia released 'Regional Strengths and Infrastructure Gaps' (March 2022) to provide a national view of infrastructure opportunities. Three of the four Place based themes are:

(i) Connecting Smaller Cities and Regional Centres.
(ii) Lifting Access in Small Towns, Rural Communities and Remote Areas.
(iii) Northern Australia and Developing Regions.

7.2.6 Northern Australia

The Office of Northern Australia released 'Our North, Our Future 2021-2026 to set a path for growth in Northern Australia. The Gascoyne region and some Shires within the Murchison and Goldfields Esperance Regions fall within the Geographic scope of Northern Australia. The included Shires are: Carnarvon, Exmouth, Shark Bay, Upper Gascoyne, Wiluna and Meekatharra.

7.3 RDAMW&G Strategic Plan Focus

RDAMW&G is approaching Strategic Plans for its subregions in the following manner:

(i) In the Gascoyne through a series of regional Infrastructure statements.
(ii) In the Murchison though a Regional Strategy
(iii) In the North Midlands through an overview of approaches that small shires are taking to growth and liveability and the implementation of a community builder program.

8.0 OUTCOME AND PERFORMANCE INDICATOR TABLE

8.1 Outcome 1: Facilitation of regional economic development outcomes, investment, jobs and local procurement.	
Performance Indicators	Strategic (i) Socialisation of Strategic Regional Strategies for Murchison region. (ii) Phase IIb, Gascoyne Infrastructure priorities: Upper Gascoyne Roads, by Upper Gascoyne Shire. (iii) Consensus / advocacy statement for Gascoyne infrastructure priorities, phase 1 agreed by Gascoyne CEO's (iv) Stakeholders & partners endorse analysis provided by RDA on regional population trends. (v) Completion of DAMA (Designated Area Migration Agreement) business case. (vi) Undertake stakeholder engagement to provide input 'mining companies and small town' relationships. (vii) Investigate opportunities for international cultural and knowledge exchange. Governance (viii) Governance arrangements for key initiatives provide leadership and oversight for the programs. Operational (ix) Phase IIb, Gascoyne Infrastructure priorities, 'Upper Gascoyne Regional Roads' scope and current state completed. (x) Statement on regional population movements prepared. (xi) Marketing strategy to support 'Storytowns' podcasts agreed and implemented. Financial (xii) High level business case to support Gascoyne Infrastructure priorities statements. (xiii) Funding arrangement to support DAMA administration. (xiv) Funding arrangements to support all initiatives.

	(xv) Funding allocations are transparent and follow responsible procurement protocols. Communications (xvi) All activities associated with 'Outcome 1' are aligned with the Communications strategy. (xvii) RDAMW&G social media supports regional and Government priorities. (xviii) Stakeholder engagement and communications plans provide effective feedback to all stakeholders. (xix) Communications and reporting allow effective decision making by stakeholders.

What will we do?
(i) Support the socialisation of a Strategic Regional Strategy for the Mid West Murchison region. • Facilitate and support a regional strategy management group. • Support the refinement of the strategy and alignment with local government and other relevant strategies. • Communicate and socialise this framework with key stakeholders. • Develop draft strategies. (ii) Lead the development and enhancement of a Gascoyne Infrastructure Priorities Framework. • Reach agreement with Gascoyne Shires for a regional consensus statement that can be used for advocacy purposes. • Facilitate more focused review of infrastructure priorities. (iii) Investment in local leadership and collaboration by investing in regional leadership and capable local government: • Ongoing facilitation of 'Small Shires Growth & Liveability's' project. • Advocacy and informed discussion on the 'Relationship Between Shires and Mining Companies' project. • Facilitate participation of towns in the production and marketing of 'Storytowns' podcast narratives.

Activity 1.1: Strategic Regional Plan: Murchison Region
(i) Facilitate the formation of a reference group for the Murchison regional plan. (ii) Establish the focus, scope and purpose of the strategic plan. (iii) Allocate resource responsibilities and undertake the work that will result in the plan. (iv) Develop communications and socialisation strategy. (v) Assumptions: • The Strategic Regional Plans will be high level statements that are aligned to existing plans. • The draft Strategic Regional Plan will require a high level of socialisation. • The Strategic Regional Plan will identify regional priorities and highlight areas where and how RDA's can add value.

Activity 1.2: Gascoyne Infrastructure Priorities	
(i)	Prepare an advocacy / consensus statement that supports the Gascoyne Infrastructure Priorities Statement and seek endorsement of this statement from the Gascoyne shires.
(ii)	Seek support from the Gascoyne Shires for preparation of a business case to support the priority initiative and facilitate agency partnerships to assist this process.
(iii)	Provide opportunities for the Office of Northern Australia and Northern Australia Infrastructure Fund to present to stakeholders in the Gascoyne region.

Activity 1.3: Regional Growth / Capacity and Relationships	
(i)	Facilitate opportunities to support initiatives that build capacity and support the growth and liveability of regional and remote communities.
(ii)	Ongoing refinement of the 'Small Shires Growth and Liveability Strategies' study.
(iii)	Undertake the stakeholder engagement to identify the Mining company and Shire priorities and interests.
(iv)	Explore opportunities for international cultural and knowledge exchange.

8.2 OUTCOME 2: PROMOTION OF A GREATER REGIONAL AWARENESS OF AND ENGAGEMENT WITH AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT POLICIES, GRANT PROGRAMS AND RESEARCH	
Performance Indicators	Strategic (i) The Gascoyne and Mid West Strategic Regional Plans are aligned to State and Commonwealth policies, grant programs and research. Governance (ii) RDAMW&G has worked with regional leaders and organisations to establish governance arrangements that allow effective advocacy to political and stakeholder decision makers. Operational (iii) RDAMW&G has attended regional Local Government zone meetings in the Gascoyne, Murchison and Northern Zones and has regular contact with CEO;s and elected members where relevant. (iv) RDAMW&G website and social media platform is up to date with grant and program opportunities, providing links to RDAMW&G news and social media. (v) RDAMW&G Grant Guru portal is known and utilised by the community. Financial (vi) Regional leaders and organisations are aware of relevant funding / grant pathways and federal programs in particular.

What will we do?
(i) Align the Regional strategies and programs with relevant state and federal priorities. Examples include: Infrastructure Australia and Infrastructure WA statements, Office of Northern Australia. (ii) Seek support for regional advocacy statements and initiatives to political and stakeholder organisations.

(iii) Assist organisations and people with funding pathways.

(iv) Attend meetings of Northern, Murchison and Gascoyne local government groups.

(v) Develop relationships that support and influence regional priorities.

Activity 2.1: Infrastructure Priorities
(i) Infrastructure priorities are aligned with State and Commonwealth government infrastructure and Northern Australia plans. ○ Allow development of advocacy strategy . ○ Allow socialisation with relevant State and Commonwealth offices. ○ Identify and/or assess opportunities to create the business case for any of the identified priorities. (ii) In partnership with Shires develop a communications and advocacy strategy and program to support identified infrastructure priorities. ○ Seek opportunities to have the Infrastructure Priorities supported by Shires and stakeholders as a consensus agreement. ○ Develop an advocacy and communications strategy that includes opportunities to present to political representatives and seek funding.

Activity 2.2: Grant and Funding Pathways
(i) Promote and support the use of the RDAMW&G Grant Guru portal which currently has more than 500 registered users. • Maintain the Grant Guru partnership with RDA Wheatbelt. • Promote the use and benefits of the Grant Guru grant finder to all potential users. (ii) Provide regular face to face updates on Grant and funding opportunities to Local Government leadership groups. • Ensure local government representatives are registered to use the website. (iii) Support, where necessary, applications for Grants that are relevant to projects in the region, including the federal government regional investment programmes.

Activity 2.3: Relationships with Special Interest Groups
(i) Undertake engagement and feasibility for knowledge sharing, regional innovation and trade through agreements with Special Interest Groups.

8.3 OUTCOME 3: CONTRIBUTION TO REGIONAL POLICY MAKING BY PROVIDING INTELLIGENCE AND EVIDENCE BASED ADVICE TO THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT ON REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT ISSUES.	
Performance Indicators	Strategic (i) Strategic documents prepared, supported or endorsed by RDAMW&G are informed by an accurate and credible evidence base. (ii) RDAMW&G programs and activities reflect the priorities of the Commonwealth Government. Governance (ii) RDAMW&G uses evidenced based data to influence and contribute to regional outcomes and its decision making. Operational (iii) Participation in forums, briefings and discussions which raise awareness of Commonwealth programs and the relevance of these to regional Australia regional intelligence briefings held by the Commonwealth Government. Financial (iii) Business case, investment and advocacy are validated by accurate data.
What will we do? (i) Collate evidence-based information to support initiatives and organisations. (ii) Provide regular regional information updates to DITRDC&A's.	

(iii) Participate in briefings that support the responsible Minister and department.

Activity 3.1: Strategic Regional Initiatives
The Strategic Regional Initiatives are: • Informed by evidenced based data. • Aligned to or able to inform Government policy and programs for advocacy and delivery purposes.

Activity 3.2: Sub Regional Priorities and Initiatives
Initiatives: • Are informed by an understanding or a gap in regional needs. • Provide the opportunity for communities to communicate their unique selling points, why they matter and how Government can add value. • Provides the basis for effective advocacy strategies to state and federal government. • Provides the basis for selection of priorities that will deliver opportunities for public and private sector place-based outcomes and alignment to policy. • Identifies opportunities for regional collaboration and governance. • Allows selection of priorities projects on a regional or sub regional basis.

Activity 3.3: Regional Information
RDA Board and staff can offer advice that contributes to the enhancement of policy and programs that benefit regional WA. Provision of timely advice on regional issues to Commonwealth government and relevant stakeholders.

9.0 COMMUNICATIONS & SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

9.1 STAKEHOLDERS

RDAMW&G major stakeholders are the:

- Business and general community,
- 20 local government authorities,
- Mid West and Gascoyne Development Commissions,
- State and Federal Government Departments,
- State and Federal politicians,
- Education providers including Geraldton Universities Centre,
- Other RDA's,
- Indigenous groups and organisations,
- Mid West and Gascoyne Chamber of Commerce
- Mid West Ports
- WALGA
- Murchison Zone of WALGA
- Northern Zone of WALGA
- Central Regional TAFE
- A broad range of working groups and committees.

9.2 WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The RDAMW&G website is relevant and communicates the strategies and operations of the organisation.

RDAMW&G will continue to use partnership social media tools including LinkedIn and Facebook to strengthen and support operational strategies and connect with a wide range of stakeholders.

9.3 ALIGNMENT WITH PURPOSE

The Business Plan is aligned with relevant regional and decentralisation policies of the state and federal governments and the regional development commissions.

Importantly over the next year it is important that RDAMW&G listens to the voice of the regional and remote communities as this will allow the organisation to provide advice to the federal government on regional priorities and allow consistent and aligned input from all stakeholders.

Face to face communications through regular visits and attendance at regional forums will be vital to success outcomes and adding value in the utilisation of scarce resources.

It is further recognised that alternative ways of communicating with our various stakeholders across a very large and distributed region need to be considered.

Regular updates of state and federal members are also envisaged and already issue specific approaches to Canberra and Perth are being discussed with key stakeholders.

9.4 GOVERNANCE

The RDAMW&G Board meets up to four times per year and ongoing oversight of the Business Plan is provided through:

- Project management protocols and the development of operational plans for each program area.
- Budget and financial review against programs,
- Regular meeting between RDAMW&G Executive Officer and the RDAMW&G Chair.

A calendar which outlines strategic, governance and operational activities is a standing item on the RDAMW&G Board agenda.

9.4.1 Policies and Procedures

The RDAMW&G has a range of financial, risk management, operational and health and safety policies and procedures. Policies and Procedures are a standing item on meeting agenda and are reviewed on a regular basis.

9.4.2 Financials & Accounts

RDAMW&G accounts are managed under contract by offsite bookkeepers. The bookkeeper uses MYOB and most records are maintained in electronic form.

MYOB data is held in state-of-the-art data centres and cloud servers. These facilities automatically back-up data online weekly, retaining it for six months.

Financial reports are presented to each Board meeting and reports are reviewed at the end of each month.

The RDAMW&G Auditor is renewed on a 2–3-year cycle with regular communication of end of year requirements maintained between the Executive Officer, bookkeeper and Auditor.

9.4.3 Constitution

The RDAMW&G Constitution is up to date (Associations Incorporations Act 2015) and registered with the WA Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety.

9.4.5 Insurances

In addition to Public and Products Liability Insurance provided through the DITRDC, RDAMW&G has Business Pack Insurance that includes Public Liability Insurance, Burglary and Contents insurance.

Workers compensation insurance is paid annually.

9.4.6 Risk Management

The RDAMW&G Board is in the process of renewing its risk management strategy. This allows the organisation to identify potential risks and if necessary, put in place measures to manage and mitigate risks.

Risk management process allows risks to be identified, analysed, evaluated, treated and monitored across a range of category areas that include financial, legal, political, governance, health and safety.

COVID-19 and cyber security have been recognised as key organisational risks and sustainability as a regional risk. Both are standing items in the RDAMW&G Agenda. RDAMW&G has a separate COVID-19 Policy that allows flexibility in line with state and federal government health practices.