Regional Development Australia Mid West Gascoyne

Annual Business Plan and Budget

1 July 2022 to June 30, 2023

‘Economy, Population and Regional Sustainability’

FORWARD FROM RDAMWG 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.

Like the rest of Australia there has been a high level of uncertainty around the impact of COVID. Interstate and international border closures offered respite from the health effects of transmission and contributed to range of social and economic outcomes. Our region experienced an increase in local regional tourism alongside increased output from the farming and resources sectors. There are staffing and skills shortages in just about every business sector. COVID has also influenced the movement of people and where they choose to live, and there are shortages in the supply of houses for both sale and rent.

The Mid West and Gascoyne region has an economy that is growing and transitioning. At the same time the population is drifting to capital cities. Over the next 12 months and beyond our focus is on the themes of 'economy, population and regional sustainability'.

The forward program includes a strong focus on building capacity to enable liveability and sustainable growth in small communities that have vulnerable population numbers. Our physical and virtual presence throughout our 20 communities assists greatly in connecting with local community leaders and building partnerships that bring positive benefits which reflect an understanding of local needs.

At the same time, RDAMWG 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 an important role in communicating our region's challenges and opportunities to stakeholders, decision-makers, and funding bodies.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank the Hon. Nola Marino, and the leadership given to regional development in her capacity as Assistant Minister for Regional Development for the Coalition Government. We look forward to working with the Hon Kristy McBain MP, Minister for Regional Development and Local Government and Territories and the direction that the Federal Government will bring to Regional Development.

It is my pleasure to recognise the RDAMWG Board and thank them for their support to date and acknowledge the contribution that they will make as Board members to the governance of the 2021 – 2025 funding agreement. I would also like to thank our staff Mark Holdsworth and Karin Grima 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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1.0 RDAMWG LEADERSHIP AND CHARTER

1.1 A STRONG CONFIDENT AND VIBRANT REGION

In fulfilling the 2022-23 Business Plan RDAMWG will have an active and facilitative role in the Mid West Gascoyne Community, 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 RDAMWG 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

RDAMWG 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.

Population change is a theme that informs the approach that RDAMWG takes to the region and the allocation of our resources. For many reasons regional and remote towns are an essential part of the region. However, as the sections below demonstrate, overall, the region has a declining population. On the other hand, the economic output is improving and there are many signs that the region is undergoing a transition. These two observations alone create an interesting and challenging dynamic:

(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 people. This includes: health services, recreation services, community facilities, food security, telecommunications and digital services.

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

2.1 Regional Population

The population (2021) of the Mid West and Gascoyne region is around 61,000 people with some 39,000 or 64 percent living on the City of Greater Geraldton. The balance is spread through the remaining 19 Shires with an average of 1,100 people per Shire. The reality is quite different with a spread of populations from around 90 to 5,000.

It is this simple context that provides the foundation for the way in which RDAMWG seeks to add value within the region and work with its communities.

2.2 Regional Transition

2.2.1 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.

2.2.2 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. These towns were once thriving communities with people who invested in their communities and livelihoods and might have believed their towns would not close.

2.2.3 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 RDAMWG 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.

2.2.4 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.

Table 1: Mid West and Gascoyne Subregions

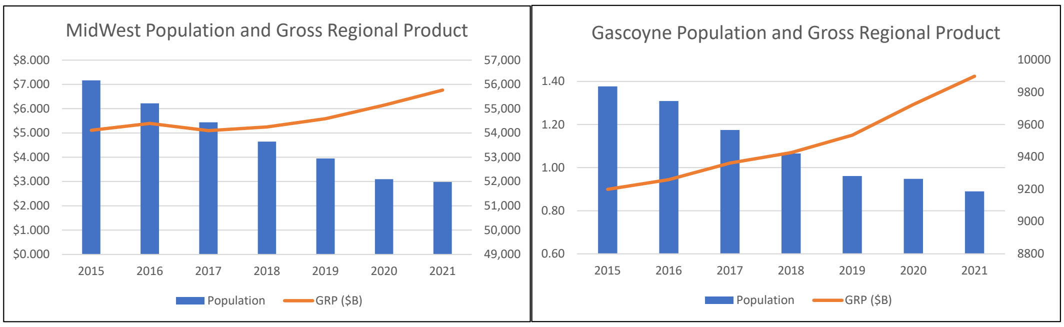
Mid West and Gascoyne Sub Regions	
Gascoyne	Exmouth Carnarvon Shark Bay Upper Gascoyne
Murchison	Meekatharra Cue Sandstone Mt Magnet Yalgoo Murchison (settlement)

Central	City of Greater Geraldton inc. Mullewa Chapman Valley Northampton inc. Kalbarri
North Midlands	Irwin Mingenew Morawa Three Springs Carnamah Coorow Perenjori

2.3 SUMMARY REGIONAL NARRATIVE

The RDAMWG approach and perspective is shown in the message conveyed the graphs below which show population and gross regional product trends for Mid West and Gascoyne. Whilst the productive output of the region is increasing the population is decreasing. There are many causes and outcomes and the simplest would be that if industry output was increasing there would be a corresponding increase in jobs and therefore population growth. This does not seem to be occurring.

Table 2: Mid West & Gascoyne: Population and Gross Regional Product[1]



3.0 THE WA ECONOMY[2]

3.1 A SUMMARY

After two years of restricted travel and isolation the opening of the West Australian domestic and international borders brings the promise of leisure and business travel and greater flexibility in the labour market as international students, backpackers and skilled workers make their way back to Australia and Western Australia in particular.

[1] Remplan (2021) Mid West and Gascoyne. 'Economy, Jobs, and Business Insights'

[2] Drawn from Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation: Western Australian Economic Profile: May 2021 and Deloitte Economics: WA Economic Outlook – May 2021

The hard border sheltered Western Australia from COVID-19 infections, but also prevented Western Australians from travelling interstate and overseas. Money normally spent on interstate and international travel was redirected towards local retail trade and state tourism, triggering a mini tourism boom and a staffing shortage in hospitality and tourism and just about every business sector. Now that the borders are open it would be expected that spending will be redirected towards interstate and international tourism.

There would be an expectation that interstate and international tourists will replace local tourism and this will depend on people’s propensity to travel. However not all international borders are open and as an example, the Chinese borders remain closed restricting travel of the state’s largest visitor segment.

As more people travel, businesses will have greater access to skills and labour to alleviate the labour shortages that face most businesses. There will however be a lag as travel and visa arrangements take time to arrange and are generally planned in advance. At the same time, the impact of COVID-19 in the community is now being more fully understood. Infections and subsequent isolations are creating disruptions through employee absences and isolation and thereby impacting the supply of goods and services.

Supply chain pressures will also take time to resolve, perhaps creating the opportunity for greater local diversification and less reliance on imports.

Increases in the cost of living, spurred by substantial increases in the cost of fuel (up 37% in the past year) balance out the benefits of full employment. For regional western Australia in particular, cost of transportation impacts all aspects of the supply chain including construction materials, adding to significant rises in rental prices and housing shortages.

A benefit of increased fuel and transportation costs might be greater motivation for faster investment in green energy which would benefit both the Mid West and the Gascoyne.

3.2 WESTERN AUSTRALIA CONTRIBUTION TO GDP

The WA economy recorded growth of 2.6 per cent of Gross State Product (GSP) to June 2021[3], marking the state’s highest growth in seven years, dating back to June 2014. In comparison the Australian economy, grew at 1.5% which is lower than the national five-year average of 1.8%.

In terms of industry performance over the last year, mining remains the biggest contributor to WA’s GSP in both value and share terms.

[3] BCEC Quarterly Economic Commentary (March 2022)

Mining outputs dominate economic output with goods producing industries accounted for 62% of Western Australia's GSP in 2020 – 21.

Table 3: Industry Share of Output, Perc. 2019 to 2021

Industry Share of Output %. 2019 to 2021[4]		
	2019 - 20	**2020 - 21**
Mining	43%	51%
Construction	5%	6%
Health Care & Social Assistance	n.a	6%
Manufacturing	4%	5%

The mining sector grew 30.3% in value over the 12 months to June 2021, driven by huge increases in the iron ore price and consistent production and export activity. Agriculture rebounded from negative growth in 2020 to an increase of 18.9 per cent in gross value added in 2021. Wholesale and retail trade grew by 14.4 per cent and 9.7 per cent respectively over the year to June 2021, reflecting the maintained consumer activity in WA over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. [5]

Table 4: Selected Industry Gross Value Added ($B) & GVA Change: 2019 - 2021

Selected Industry GVA ($B) & GVA Change: 2019 - 2021					
	Mining	**Agriculture**	**Wholesale Trade**	**Retail Trade**	**Health Care**
2020-21	169.6	6.4	7.9	9.2	17
2019-20	130.2	5.4	6.9	8.4	15.8
% change	30%	19%	14%	10%	8%

3.3 WESTERN AUSTRALIA LABOUR MARKET & SKILLS

3.3.1 Labour Market

The State's recovery is nowhere better demonstrated than in the labour market. WA's employment total of 1.45 million persons is the highest ever recorded in the state, highlighting how well the WA labour market responded to changing conditions over the past 18 months. The employment growth for WA in January 2022 was 6.1% higher, or 83,400 people, than January 2022.

[4] ABS: 5220. National and State accounts
[5] BCEC Quarterly Economic Commentary.

Full-time employment increased 7 per cent since January 2021 and part-time employment increasing by 4.4 per cent. Encouragingly, full-time employment growth in WA has grown at a faster rate for women (+9.3%), in comparison to men (+5.7%), with the inverse occurring for part-time employment with growth for men (+5.1%) slightly higher than that of women (+4.1%).

The unemployment rate improved to 3.7% in dropping 2.6ppts lower than 6.3% in January 2001.

Table 5: Employment & Unemployment, WA January 2022

Employment and Unemployment, WA January 2022[6]						
Persons employed ('000)	**Change from Jan. 2021**		**Change % from Jan. 2021**		**Unemployment Rate**	
Jan 2022	**%**	**('000)**	**Full Time**	**Part Time**	**Jan. 2022**	**Change from Jan. 2021**
1,452	+6.1%%	+83.4	+7%	+4.4	3.7%	-2.6

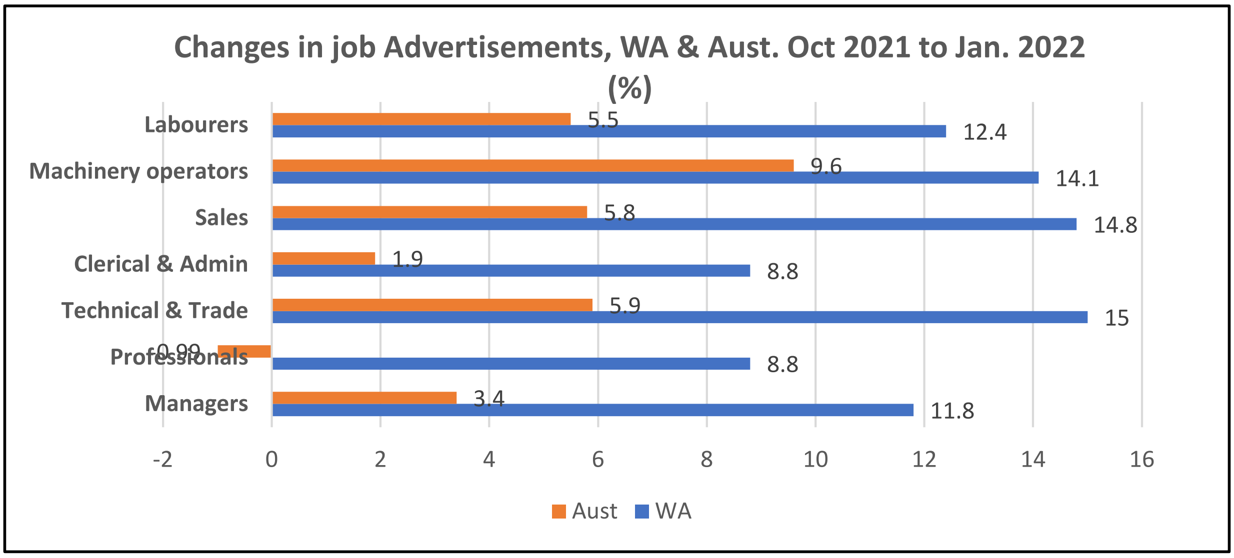
3.3.2 Skills

The National Skills Commission use internet job vacancies to understand demand for labour. The published data clearly demonstrate that for WA restrictions on interstate and overseas travel added to a tightening of the labour market. Anecdotally there has been a high level of awareness of skill shortages in all sectors, especially in the mining and construction industries and this has been shown in the changes in job advertisements to January 2022. [7]

The spike in labour demand in certain industries and occupations could mean that the State's next labour market challenge is addressing a shortage of skills, an ability to retain workers who now have greater choice and flexibility. Whilst it is likely that border movements will alleviate skill and labour demand to some extent, WA as whole and regions will need to utilise a range of attraction methods including targeted and skilled migrant VISA arrangements.

[6] ABS No. 6202.0
[7] Australian National Skills Commission in BCEC Quarterly Economic Commentary

Table 6: Changes in Job Advertisements, WA & Australia. Oct. 2021 to Jan. 2022. Percent



3.4 WESTERN AUSTRALIA HOUSING

It goes within saying that housing and housing affordability is a complex pattern and the housing situation for Perth is different to that of regional WA and the Mid West and Gascoyne region. In many small towns there is no housing market, as lenders will not secure a loan against an asset that has little or no value. The Shire of Carnarvon for example has not had a new house built for six years.

3.4.1 House Approvals

House approvals have declined significantly in the early part of 2022[8], returning to levels experienced prior to the pandemic. The reasons might include the end of the stimulus boost, a stagnation of supply chains, the potential for interest rate increases and a decline in interstate migration.

Table 7: Approved Dwellings & Changes in Dwelling Approvals, 2021 to 2022, WA

Dwelling Units WA, 2020 to 2022			Change in Dwelling Approvals, WA. Oct 2021 to Jan 2022			
Jan 2020	Jan 2021	Jan 2022	**Oct 2021**	**Nov 2021**	**Dec 2021**	**Jan 2022**
1,100	2,900	1,150	-1.5%	.04%	-9.8%	-19.9%

[8] See BCEC Quarterly Economic Commentary

3.4.2 New Development

Historically low interest rates below 3 percent and grants for new builds have reinforced low borrowing costs, sparking a boom in new credit for dwelling construction for both owner occupiers and investors. The early part of 2022 saw a decline in the value of home loans. This market is driven more by the investor market than owner occupiers, with loan commitments (debt) to investors at their highest known levels.

3.4.3 Rental Vacancies

Shortages of both owner-occupier and rental accommodation have emerged as Western Australians have returned from interstate and overseas due to travel restrictions. The Perth rental vacancy rate more than halved through 2020, to now sit below 1 per cent - levels not seen since 2013.

Whilst there might be hope that an increase in investor housing stock will alleviate rental supply shortages, international and interstate arrivals might cause increased demand and push rental prices further.

3.5 MID WEST HOUSING

Housing supply and rental affordability is emerging as an important regional issue and as the largest **population centre Geraldton is an example of issues within the larger region.**

3.5.1 Summary of Housing Matters

A summary of housing matters is:

- A current rental vacancy rate between 1 and 2 percent, in comparison to 4.1% in June 2020.
- A lack of variety in housing products means that there are fewer affordable options.
    - The lack of housing choice is a barrier to the attraction of new workers and residents.
- Costs of construction have increased 15-20% per sqm over the past 12 months because of tightened supply of timber, steel, fittings and a shortage of tradespeople.
- Construction costs are 20% above metropolitan averages with limited commercial builder capacity.

One of the key challenges to private sector housing investment is the mismatch between property values and construction costs. Historical developments have experienced poor sales performance and there is relatively low demand or depth for apartment living.

The existing housing stock is poor and the growth in property value has been low with current levels below those of 2010. Along with this income levels are 30% below WA averages.

3.5.2 Opportunities and Actions[9]

Opportunities that have the potential to influence the housing market are improving private project investments which suggests Geraldton is entering a growth phase. The requirement from both the private and public sector for housing and the availability of development sites.

Recognising that housing is complex matter there are a few levers that state and local government can use to unlock opportunities, drive increased housing choice and create the conditions for increased private sector residential investment.

(i) Information development and publication: improving developer and purchaser understanding of the opportunities and needs for housing in the region.

(ii) Enabling infrastructure delivery: supporting the private sector to bring forward housing supply that would otherwise be constrained or unviable.

(iii) Direct housing supply: through public-private partnerships, direct investment and / or financial incentives.

(iv) Policy controls: influencing investment decisions, housing development and redevelopment outcomes.

4.0 MID WEST AND GASCOYNE[10]

4.1 Spatial Dimensions

Overall, the RDAMWG region covers more than 600,000sq kms. Abutting the Indian ocean, the coastline stretches from Green Head to Exmouth and reaches more than 800klm inland to the Gibson desert.

The Gascoyne region itself covers nearly 138,000sq kms, which represents about 5.5% of Western Australia’s total land area. The Mid West on the other hand covers around 478,000 sq. kms which is around 18% of Western Australia’s total land area. [11]

4.2 Communities

The region supports 20 regional communities which are managed by Local Government authorities. There are 16 Shires within the Mid West and 4 in the Gascoyne regions respectively.

Within the Mid West and Gascoyne region the City of Greater Geraldton accounts for:

- 60% of the population
- 68% of jobs, and

[9] See Urbis: (April 2022) Geraldton Housing Market Advice
[10] See Table 1: Mid West Region Overview and Table 2: Gascoyne Region Overview
[11] Regional Blueprints (Mid West and Gascoyne) ABS (March 2020) Regional Population Growth

- 48% of economic output.

The remaining 20 communities share:

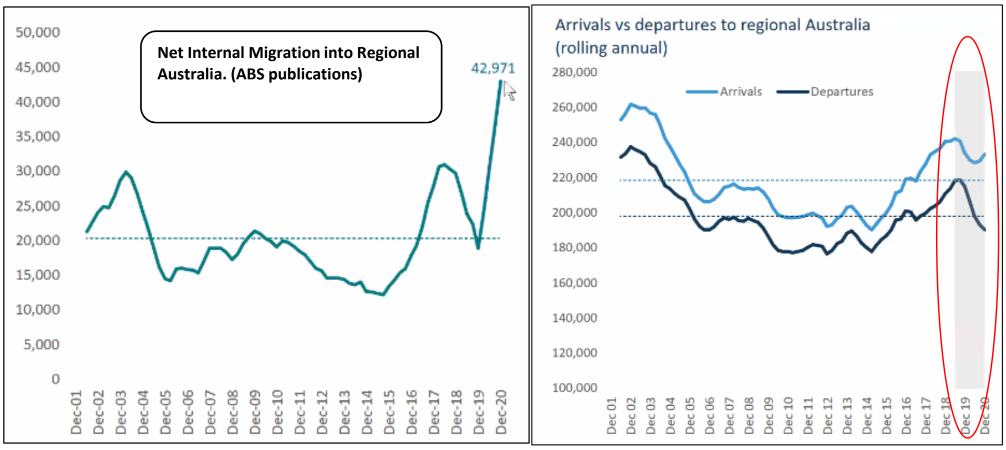
- 40% of the population
- 32% of jobs, and
- 52% of output.

4.3 Regional Population Drift

4.3.1 Australian Perspective

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has reported that net migration to Australia's regions is highest on record with 43,000 people moving to regional areas from capital cities in 2020 [12]. These figures are qualified with the acknowledgment that whilst the exodus from Capital Cities has been occurring for some years, the difference in the COVID driven trend is twofold: (i) the number of people leaving capital cities has increased, and (ii) the number of people leaving regions for capital cities has reduced substantially (see Tables 2 below).

Table 8a & b: Internal Migration Australia: Arrivals and Departures Regional Australia



Some qualification of the regional population drift is required in the interpretation of what is regional particularly in the case of Western Australia, which has a different hierarchy of towns and cities to the more dominantly populated states of Victorian and New South Wales. It is considered that growth regions and centres are those within reasonable driving distance from capital cities with a significant liveability infrastructure offerings: health, education, transport, housing, access to retail goods and services and social stability.

There is growing evidence that a further shift in the application of public sector policy and programs is required to support the aspirations of the communities that live and work in the small Shires of the

[12] ABS: Regional Population Growth Australia (cat. No. 3218.0)

Mid West and Gascoyne. This topic is becoming a key feature of the RDAMWG work program in the context of communities that are struggling to attract and maintain residents and workers.

Our program is attracted to the work of the Regional Australia Institute[13] which has undertaken a significant body of research into the way that people move around regional Australia, where they choose to move to or move from, and the communities in which they choose to stay. The RAI contend that understanding the way that population moves around regional Australia is an important step in identifying the reasons that people are attracted to some places instead of others. This understanding has the potential to help us understand how RDAMWG can help shape population change in regional communities.

4.3.2 Perth and the Region's Population Change[14]

Perth was one of three Australian cities to record increased growth in 2019-20. Pre COVID and restrictions on international arrivals the growth is attributed to:

(i) Net overseas migration: 22,000 people
(ii) Net internal migration: 700 people
(iii) Natural increase: 14,600 people.

Whereas WA Regions had:

(i) Net overseas migration: 2,755 people
(ii) Net internal migration: -3,145 people
(iii) Natural increase: 3,133 people.

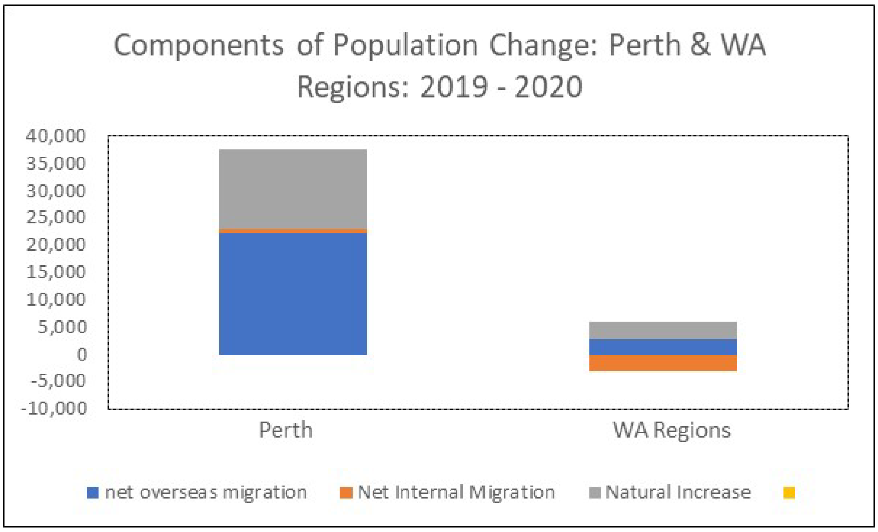
Regional Western Australia is growing slower than the Capital City with internal migration contributing to population loss. Over the June 2109 to June 2020 period Western Australian regions had a net internal migration loss of -3,100. This was a significant increase to 2018-19 levels where the net internal migration loss was -1,900.

[13] See RAI (June 2020) The Big Movers: Understanding Population Mobility in Regional Australia
[14] Centre for Population Analysis of Regional Population data from the ABS: Reference period July 2019 – June 2020: ABS Regional Population, Australia 2020.

Table 9: Population Change Perth & Perth Regions: June 2019 to June 2020

Population Growth in Perth, June 2019 to June 2020				
	Population in June 2020	Pop Growth 2019 %	Pop Growth 2020 %	Diff. Percentage Points
Perth	2,125,114	1.4	1.8	0.4
WA Regions	538,447	0	0.5	0.5

Table 10: Components of Population Change: Perth & WA Regions: 2019 - 2020



4.3.3 Mid West Population

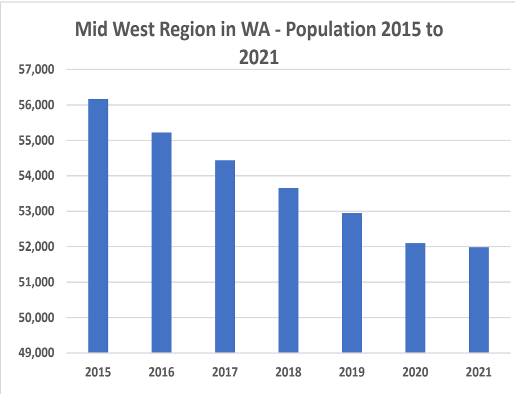
Between 2015 and 2021 the population of the Mid West region declined from 56,164 by 6% or 3,395 people to 51,980[15].

This is somewhat alarming as the recorded population decline exceeds the WA State Government predicted population forecast which indicated a population of 54,451 in 2031.

All Shires apart from Chapman Valley and Murchison experienced a decline in population.[16]

[15] Remplan: Economy ID.
[16] Remplan MidWest: using ABS Regional Population data (March 2022)

Table 11a & b: Mid West Region, Population Change and Forecasts



Mid West Region: Population Forecast 2016 to 2031					
Shire	2016	2021	2026	2031	2016 - 2031
Northampton	3365	3160	3005	2840	**-525**
Meekatharra	1090	855	705	595	**-495**
Irwin	3620	3470	3340	3195	**-425**
Coorow	1050	905	800	690	**-360**
Mount Magnet	490	390	320	255	**-235**
Yalgoo	350	260	225	180	**-170**
Perenjori	615	545	495	445	**-170**
Three Springs	610	545	485	445	**-165**
Carnamah	560	490	450	410	**-150**
Morawa	745	680	630	600	**-145**
Cue	205	140	90	80	**-125**
Mingenew	455	410	370	340	**-115**
Murchison	155	125	85	85	**-70**
Sandstone	90	65	45	40	**-50**
Chapman Valley	1460	1485	1485	1530	**70**
Greater Geraldton	39600	39440	39910	40690	**1090**
	56,476	**54,986**	**54,466**	**54,451**	**-2,040**
			Percentage Change		***-3.59***
Source: WA Tomorrow, Population Report No:11. Local Government Area. Medium Term Population Forecasts					

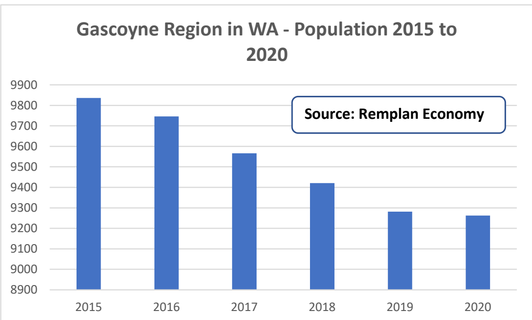
This suggests that there is a net migration from the region as whilst the population of City of Greater Geraldton is growing it is not increasing at a rate to counteract the population decline of the region.

4.3.4 Gascoyne Population

The Population of the Gascoyne region declined 6% from 2015 to 2020, which equates to 547 people. The population in 2020 is 9262 which is close to 2031 forecasts in the WA Tomorrow, population forecasts.

Whilst the Gascoyne region is declining over all, the Shires of Exmouth, Shark Bay and Upper Gascoyne are experiencing some population growth with significant population declines in Carnarvon.[17]

Table 12a & b: Gascoyne Region, Population Change and Forecasts



Gascoyne Region: Population Forecast 2016 to 2031					
Shire	2016	2021	2026	2031	2016 - 2031
Carnarvon	3365	3160	3005	2840	**-525**
Exmouth	1090	855	705	595	**-495**
Shark Bay	3620	3470	3340	3195	**-425**
Upper Gascoyne	1050	905	800	690	**-360**
	11,141	**10,411**	**9,876**	**9,351**	**-1,805**
			Percentage Change		***-16.07***
Source: WA Tomorrow, Population Report No:11. Local Government Area. Medium Term Population Forecasts					

[17] Remplan Gascoyne: Using ABS Regional Population data (March 2022)

5.0 INDUSTRY, ECONOMIC OUTPUT AND EMPLOYMENT

5.1 MID WEST REGION

With a nominal GRP of $7.02 billion in 2021, the Mid West contributed 2.8 per cent towards Western Australia's GSP. Mining, agriculture, fishing, tourism, retail and manufacturing are the Mid West's key industries. Mining is its most valuable sector, with a range of minerals and energy deposits available including gold, iron ore, copper, nickel, silver and more recently mineral sands, rare earths, and vanadium.[18]

Freight routes and supply chains are important for the Mid West and further work is required to capitalise on current infrastructure and to develop private and public investment that facilitates ongoing economic growth.[19]

The Mid West has a diverse range of minerals and is also highly prospective for wind, wave, geothermal and biomass energy production and is increasingly recognised as having a role as a future energy hub including renewable hydrogen.

It is also host to the State's largest fishing sector with a dominant rock lobster industry, and an emerging aquaculture sector, including finfish and oysters. The region produces approximately one-third of Western Australia's fishery (by export value).

Demand for the regions resources and domestic tourism has driven a rise in employment, triggering several new mining and construction projects and job growth in associated service sectors.[20]

5.2 GASCOYNE REGION

With a nominal GRP of $1.5 billion in 2021[21], the Gascoyne contributed 0.5 per cent towards GSP. Agricultural lands along the Gascoyne River make Carnarvon an ideal location for horticultural development.

The Gascoyne is known as a key food bowl. The Carnarvon Horticulture District is considered one of the best-managed irrigation district in Australia and contributes 99.5 per cent of the total production value of Western Australian bananas.

The Gascoyne River ground and surface water resources are vital for Carnarvon town supply, and the irrigated horticultural industry. Groundwater from the Lower Gascoyne alluvial aquifer is the main

[18] Remplan MidWest: Using ABS June 2021, Gross State product
[19] WA Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (Nov 2019) GRP
[20] Remplan Economy
[21] Remplan Economy using ABS June 2021 Gross State product

water source. Salinity is a critical issue for groundwater management in the water allocation plan area. Ensuring sustainable access to potable water over the long-term, while balancing reliance on groundwater sources, is important.

Tourists are drawn to the region's World Heritage-listed areas, Ningaloo Coast and Shark Bay, which are each also recognised as one of 16 regions on Australia's National Landscapes Program, a program that promotes and supports the conservation of Australian landscapes that offer uniquely Australian tourism experiences.

Salt being the main mining commodity with some interest being shown in mineral sands.

Significantly the pastoral leases of the Gascoyne cover 84 per cent of its land mass and opportunities to sustain this sector will need to be balanced with the need to mitigate and manage a range of complex environmental and economic sustainability factors.

5.3 Regional Employment

The Mid West supports 24,000 jobs representing 2% of the people working in Western Australia. These jobs are predominantly in the Mining, Health Care, Education, Retail trade and Agriculture, forestry and fishing sector which together account for more than 50% of employment.

Again, the City of Greater Geraldton dominates with 70% of regional jobs.

The Gascoyne supports 4,623 jobs predominantly in the Accommodation and food services, agriculture and fishing and public administration sectors.

Regional Shires are again seen as vulnerable with very few jobs recognising that the ABS data might count fly-in and fly-out workers in the jobs data. For example, Meekatharra had a population of 1260 people and employment[22] of 1060. In some Shires fly-in / fly-out and the seasonal agriculture-based workforce amplify the overall job numbers.

[22] See Remplan: ABS Census Place of Work and Employment

Table 13: Mid West Region Jobs

Mid West Region Jobs				
Shire	Jobs		Perc. 2016	Change 2011 to 2016
	2011	2016		
Sandstone	50	30	0.13	-67%
Murchison	50	62	0.26	19%
Cue	193	91	0.38	-112%
Mingenew	233	229	0.96	-2%
Carnamah	350	287	1.20	-22%
Three Springs	358	290	1.21	-23%
Morawa	547	291	1.22	-88%
Mount Magnet	454	316	1.32	-44%
Chapman Valley	327	340	1.42	4%
Coorow	383	356	1.49	-8%
Yalgoo	687	732	3.06	6%
Perenjori	748	797	3.33	6%
Irwin	1177	1049	4.38	-12%
Northampton	1173	1156	4.83	-1%
Meekatharra	1274	1260	5.26	-1%
Greater Geraldton	15984	16653	69.56	4%
	23988	**23939**	**100.00**	-0.2%
Remplan: ABS 2011 & 2016 Census Place of Work Employment				

Table 14: Mid West Region Industry Sectors and Jobs

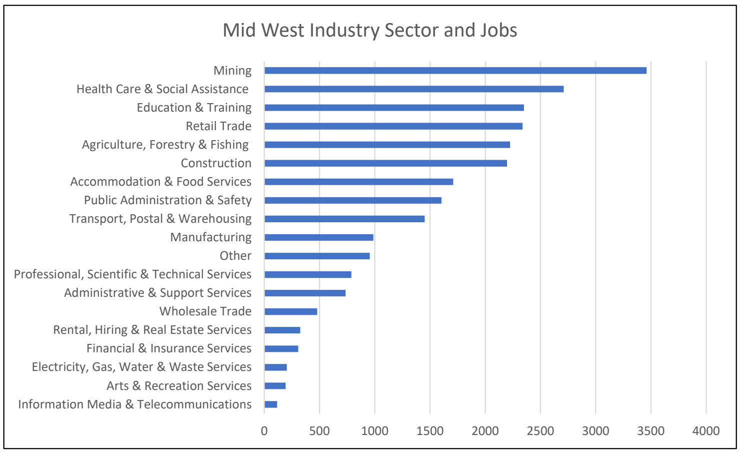
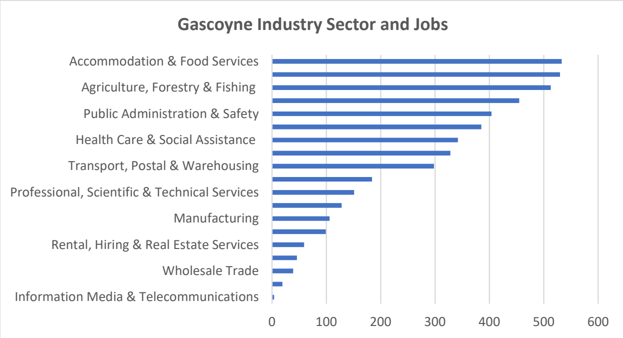


Table 15: Gascoyne Region Jobs, 2011 & 2016

Gascoyne Region Jobs				
Shires	**Jobs**			
	No. 2011	**No. 2016**	**Perc. 2016**	**Change 2011 - 2016**
Carnarvon	2554	2811	61%	9%
Exmouth	1323	1386	30%	5%
Shark Bay	468	364	8%	-29%
Upper Gascoyne	82	62	1%	-32%
	4427	**4623**		
Remplan: ABS 2011 & 2016 Census Place of Work Employment				

Table 16 Gascoyne Region Industry Sector and Jobs, 2016



5.4 COVID More Jobs than People & Skills

It is acknowledged that in the immediate COVID environment, demand for workers in regional Australia has reached an all-time high, with vacancies ranging from labouring, through to sales, trades and professions.[23]

The emphasis on resource regions reinforces the view that the post mining bust has bottomed out and serious skill needs are again emerging in these areas.

The Mid West is like other regions, experiencing more jobs than people with regional vacancies spread across demand for highly skilled trades and professionals including automotive, engineering and construction trades, medical practitioners and nurses, health diagnostic and therapy professionals, legal, social and welfare professionals as well as general-inquiry clerks, receptionists, carers and aides. To some extent this reflects the depth of the skill base in the international workforce. However, in the absence of a pool of migrant workers the real long-term solution is growing a regional skill base.

5.5 Housing

Along with grants for new builds, low interest rates, the fly-in-fly out work force locating closer to places of work, and a movement of rental vacancies from long term to short term (Airbnb) have all contributed to regional housing shortages: both rental and owner occupied.

Remote Shires have very low rental stock, limiting an ability to attract population and workers. There is no one single cause, however a key factor constraining housing supply in small towns is the

[23] See Regional Australia Institute (RAI): 'Breaking the Myth- Regional Jobs on the Rise'.

reluctance of financial institutions to offer mortgages against properties that might have low or negative return on investment.

5.6 CYCLONE SEROJA

In the 12 months since Cyclone Seroja the Department of Fire and Emergency Services has been working across the State Government and with local communities to manage cyclone response.

The programme is moving into recovery phase with communities recognising the need to build preparedness and resilience. RDAMWG is facilitating a Community Builders Program which is supported by eight (8) shires. This program is included in 2022/23 outcomes.

Table 17: Mid West Region Overview

Mid West Region Overview										
	Employment 2016			Output ($)			Housing (April 2021)		Driving time from Population Centre	
Shire	Jobs	Perc.	Population	GRP (Nominal) 2021	Perc	Unemployment (Dec 2021)	For Sale	For Rent	From Perth	From Geraldton
Sandstone	30	0.13%	90	$8,138,678	0.12%	8.70%			8.34	5.53
Murchison	62	0.26%	155	$15,218,489	0.22%	8.70%			8.38	4.52
Cue	91	0.38%	205	$44,866,589	0.6%	8.70%			7.05	4.3
Mingenew	229	0.96%	455	$45,097,646	0.6%	3.30%	0	0	4	1.1
Carnamah	287	1.20%	560	$64,310,639	0.9%	5.30%	6	0	3.1	2
Three Springs	290	1.21%	610	$61,782,804	0.9%	3.30%	9	0	3.24	1.5
Morawa	291	1.22%	745	$73,815,509	1.1%	3.30%	10	1	4	2
Mount Magnet	316	1.32%	490	$148,374,099	2.1%	8.90%			6.15	3.4
Chapman Valley	340	1.42%	1460	$81,315,400	1.2%	3.90%			5.1	1
Coorow	356	1.49%	1050	$82,868,428	1.2%	3.30%	1	10	2.5	2.2
Yalgoo	732	3.06%	350	$510,064,174	7.3%	8.70%			5.1	2.55
Perenjori	797	3.33%	615	$996,211,231	14.2%	3.30%	1	1	2.1	3.44
Irwin	1049	4.38%	3620	$265,102,447	3.8%	2.60%	53	3	3.5	1
Northampton	1156	4.83%	3365	$245,790,343	3.5%	3.90%	53	2	5	0.5
Meekatharra	1260	5.26%	1090	$542,093,130	7.7%	8.80%			8.15	5.45
Greater Geraldton	16653	69.56%	39600	$3,839,286,952	54.7%	4.20%	55	18	4.5	
	23939	**100.00%**	**54460**	**$7,024,336,556.15**	100%	**WA 3.5%**	**188**	**35**		
Remplan: ABS 2016 Census Place of Work Employment RealEstate.com.au (April 2021)										

Table 18: Gascoyne Region Overview

Gascoyne Region Overview										
	Employment 2016			Output ($)			Housing		Driving time from Population Centre (Hours/Min)	
Shire	Jobs	Perc.	Population	GRP Nominal (2021)	Perc	Unemployment (Dec 2021)	For Sale	For Rent	From Perth	From Geraldton
Carnarvon	2811	61%	5524	$1,045,872,496	70.71%	6.5%			9.26	5
Exmouth	1386	30%	5169	$334,982,624	22.65%	2.2%			13.9	8.4
Shark Bay	364	8%	947	$82,699,131	5.59%	2.2%			8	4.1
Upper Gascoyne	62	1%	280	$15,635,891	1.06%	2.3%			11.1	6.4
	4623	**100.00%**	**11920**	**$1,479,190,141.30**	**100.00%**	**WA 3.5%**				
Remplan: ABS 2016 Census Place of Work Employment RealEstate.com.au (April 2021)										

6.0 RDAMWG REGIONAL FOCUS

During the 2020/21 financial year RDAMWG turned its attention to the communities that support the 20 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 closer 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.
- Our major projects which are highlighting opportunities to create shared value and collaboration across 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 of the small Shires and therefore the region are declining. This has implications for liveability and services at all levels of government.
- RDAMWG 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 level is essential to develop the business case opportunities that are required for transformational programmes that will attract both private and public sector investment.

7.0 SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES 2021/22

7.1 OUTCOME 1: FACILITATION OF REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES, INVESTMENT, JOBS AND LOCAL PROCUREMENT.	
Performance Indicators	Strategic (i) Completed Gascoyne Infrastructure Priorities: Phase 1. (ii) Commenced Phase II of Gascoyne Infrastructure priorities: Regional Roads opportunity assessment. (iii) Developed an overview of the approach that small Shires were taking towards growth, population and liveability. This will provide input into proposed population and liveability forum in 2022/23 financial year. (iv) Strategic Regional Strategies for Murchison region commenced. (v) Phase two, Gascoyne Infrastructure priorities, accepted by Gascoyne Shires. (vi) Community leadership / builders' program in North Midlands region initiated. (vii) Established an MoU with Murchison Georegion project management group for provision of a Project manager resource. Governance (viii) Provide leadership to the Gascoyne Infrastructure program. (ix) Provided leadership to the development of Governance arrangements Murchison GeoRegion Project working group. (x) Established reference group and program management for North Midlands Community builders' program.

	Operational (xi) Phase two, Gascoyne Infrastructure priorities, 'Regional Roads' scope and current state completed. (xii) Community leadership / builders' program in North Midlands region initiated: community members and shires participating. Financial (xiii) RDAMWG ongoing use of shared resource to project manage the Murchison GeoRegion project. (xiv) Funding arrangements to support all initiatives. (xv) Funding allocations are transparent and followed responsible procurement protocols. Communications (xvi) All activities associated with 'Outcome 1' are aligned with the Communications strategy. (xvii) Stakeholder engagement and communications plans provided effective feedback to all stakeholders. (xviii) Communications and reporting allowed effective decision making by stakeholders.

7.2 OUTCOME 2: PROMOTION OF A GREATER REGIONAL AWARENESS OF AND ENGAGEMENT WITH AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT POLICIES, GRANT PROGRAMS AND RESEARCH	
Performance Indicators	Strategic (i) Initiated a reference group to undertake the Murchison Strategic Regional Plans. Governance (ii) RDAMWG 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

	• Murchison Georegion program • Gascoyne Infrastructure Priorities • North Midlands Community Builder program Operational (iii) RDAMWG 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) RDAMWG website was refreshed with grant and program opportunities. (v) RDAMWG Grant Guru portal was launched and has more than 300 registered users. Financial (vi) Regional leaders and organisations were updated on relevant funding / grant pathways as they became available.

7.3 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 RDAMWG were informed by an accurate and credible evidence base. (ii) RDAMWG programs and activities reflected the priorities and were aligned to the Commonwealth Government. Governance (ii) RDAMWG initiated regionally based reference groups to contribute to regional outcomes and its decision making.

	Operational (iii) 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.

8.0 RDAMWG PRIORITIES 2022 / 2023

8.1 PLACE BASED APPROACH

The 2022/23 program adopts 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 Jobs and Growth.

(i) Programmes

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

(ii) Leadership

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

(iii) Governance

- *Collaborative governance* structures that represent relevant cross sections and decision makers from within the community.

(iv) Shared Action (Bundled Investment)

- I*nvestment and implementation* that allows for both public and private sector participation.

8.2 RDAMWG: MISSION

The RDAMWG 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.

8.3 REGIONAL OUTCOME THEMES

In line with the contracted funding Agreement there are four **Regional Outcome Themes**. These outcome themes are.

1. Facilitation of regional economic development outcomes, investment, jobs and local procurement.
2. Promotion of a greater regional awareness of and engagement with Australian Government policies, grant programs and research, and
3. Contribution to regional policy making by providing intelligence and evidence-based advice to the Australian Government on regional development issues.

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

8.4 Regional Priorities and Key Business Activities

8.4.1 Top Five Strategic Priorities

Based on our understanding of regional needs RDAMWG has identified **five strategic priorities** that are supported by our operational program activities.

1: Community and Shire capacity, opportunity and growth

Continuation of our projects that examine the strategies used by small shires to address growth and liveability.

2: Regional growth and investment.

Gascoyne Infrastructure priorities and regional roads feasibility study. Preparation of Gascoyne Regional priority statement and alignment of this statement with Northern Australia priorities.

3: Regional collaboration

Facilitate preparation of the Murchison regional plan which includes consultation on collaborative agreements between Shires and mining companies.

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

Support the development of the governance and leadership arrangements for the Murchison GeoRegion and manage the MoU which supports the employment of the GeoRegion project officer.

8.4.2 Enabling Business Activities

1: Enhancing community capacity and sustainability

2: Collaboration

3: Facilitating policy and programme connections

4: Leadership and governance

5: Supporting access to grants

9.0 STRATEGIC REGIONAL PLAN

9.1 Better Practice Guide

It is acknowledged that the Better Practice Guide (May 2022, Draft) and the Outcomes and Performance Indicators[24] require as a major outcome a 'suitable strategic Regional Plan'.

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

9.2 Strategic Plans for the Mid West and Gascoyne

Planning Framework

The WA Planning Commissions (WAPC) State Planning Strategy 2050 (SPS) provides a settlement hierarchy which includes Geraldton and Carnarvon as Regional Centres and Morawa in the Mid West as a Supertown.

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 RDAMWG, in 2014 and the Gascoyne Development Commission in 2015.

The Regional Development Commissions are statutory authorities governed by a Ministerially appointed Board and in that capacity function under the provisions of Section 23 of the Regional Commissions Act (1993).

These planning documents provided comprehensive sector and industry-based aspirations for both the Mid West and Gascoyne regions.

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.

Geraldton Growth and Jobs Plan

The Geraldton Growth and Jobs Plan is a plan for the City of Greater Geraldton.

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.

Building safe, sustainable and thriving communities is at the heart of what Local Governments do. While each community is unique and will have its own needs and priorities, common desirable

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

features of sustainable communities include a healthy environment, strong social fabric, supporting infrastructure and a robust economy.

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.

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

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.

The last two themes are important to the Mid West and Gascoyne regions as these regions are characterised by Shires that have:

- A small and highly distributed population base.
- A small workforce, or a workforce that is predominantly fly-in, fly-out.
- A low revenue base.
- Below average or declining economic growth.
- Low levels of infrastructure including: community facilities, education, digital connectivity, health services.

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.

9.3 RDAMWG Strategic Plan Focus

RDAMWG 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.

10.0 OUTCOME AND PERFORMANCE INDICATOR TABLE

10.1 OUTCOME 1: FACILITATION OF REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES, INVESTMENT, JOBS AND LOCAL PROCUREMENT.	
Performance Indicators	Strategic (i) Strategic Regional Strategies for Murchison region commenced. (ii) Phase two, Gascoyne Infrastructure priorities, accepted by Gascoyne Shires. (iii) Community leadership / builders' program in North Midlands region initiated. (iv) Stakeholders & partners endorse small shires growth and liveability forum. (v) Renewed MoU with Murchison Georegion project management group. Governance (vi) Governance arrangements for Gascoyne Infrastructure priorities provide leadership for the program. (vii) Murchison Georegion Governance arrangements allow ongoing funding and progression of the project (viii) Established reference group and program management for North Midlands Community builders' program. Operational (ix) Consensus / advocacy statement for Gascoyne infrastructure priorities, phase 1 prepared. (x) Phase two, Gascoyne Infrastructure priorities, 'Regional Roads' scope and current state completed. (xi) Proposal for small shires growth and liveability forum prepared. (xii) Community leadership / builders' program in North Midlands region initiated: community members and shires participating. Financial (xiii) High level business case to support Gascoyne Infrastructure priorities statements.

	(xiv) RDAMWG ongoing use of shared resource to project manage the Murchison Georegion project. (xv) Funding arrangements to support all initiatives. (xvi) Funding allocations are transparent and follow responsible procurement protocols. Communications (xvii) All activities associated with 'Outcome 1' are aligned with the Communications strategy. (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) Lead the development of a Strategic Regional Strategy for the Mid West Murchison region. • Facilitate and support a regional strategy management group. • Support the formation 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: e.g., regional roads (iii) Investment in local leadership and collaboration by investing in regional leadership and capable local government: • Ongoing facilitation of 'Small Shires Growth Strategies' project. • Advocacy and informed discussion on the 'Relationship Between Shires and Mining Companies' project.

- Facilitate development of a community leadership/builders' program with the North Midlands Shires.
- Provide administrative support to Murchison Georegion project group

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) Identify funding options in line with agreed scope. (iv) Allocate resource responsibilities and undertake the work that will result in the plan. (v) Develop communications and socialisation strategy. (vi) 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 a regional roads strategy 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 Strategies' study.
(iii) Facilitate the delivery of a community leadership/builders' program in partnership with North Midlands shires and State agencies.
(iv) Manage the MoU between the Murchison Georegion and RDAMWG.

10.2 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) RDAMWG has worked with regional leaders and organisations to establish governance arrangements that allow effective advocacy to political and stakeholder decision makers. Operational (iii) RDAMWG 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) RDAMWG website is up to date with grant and program opportunities. (v) RDAMWG Grant Guru portal is known and utilised by the community. Financial (vi) Regional leaders and organisations are aware of relevant funding / grant pathways.

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: Gascoyne Infrastructure Priorities

(i) Align Gascoyne Infrastructure priorities and subsequent iterations with State and Commonwealth government infrastructure and Northern Australia plans.
- Socialise the Gascoyne Infrastructure Priorities 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 Gascoyne Shires develop a communications and advocacy strategy and program to support identified infrastructure priorities.
- Seek opportunities to have the Gascoyne 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 RDAMWG Grant Guru portal which currently has more than 320 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 Building Better Regions Fund (BBRF).

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.

10.3 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 (iii) Strategic documents prepared, supported or endorsed by RDAMWG are informed by an accurate and credible evidence base. (iv) RDAMWG programs and activities reflect the priorities of the Commonwealth Government. Governance (iv) RDAMWG uses evidenced based data to influence and contribute to regional outcomes and its decision making. Operational (v) 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 (iv) 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. (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 like the Gascoyne infrastructure statements, Murchison Regional Strategies, Small Shires Growth: • 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.

11.0 COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

11.1 STAKEHOLDERS

RDAMWG 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
- Progress Mid West – Greater Geraldton Growth Plan
- WALGA
- Murchison Zone of WALGA
- Northern Zone of WALGA
- Central Regional TAFE
- A broad range of working groups and committees.

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 RDAMWG 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. RDAMWG will continue to use partnership social media tools including LinkedIn and Facebook, and our own website.

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.

11.2 GOVERNANCE

The RDAMWG 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 RDAMWG Executive Officer and the RDAMWG Chair.

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

11.2.1 Policies and Procedures

The RDAMWG 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.

11.2.3 Financials & Accounts

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

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

The RDAMWG 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.

11.2.4 Constitution

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

11.2.5 Insurances

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

11.2.6 Risk Management

The RDAMWG Board has a risk management strategy that allows the organisation to identify potential risks and if necessary, put in place measures to manage and mitigate risks. Workers compensation insurance is paid annually.

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 has been recognised as key risk and is a standing item in the RDAMWG Agenda. RDAMWG has a separate COVID-19 Policy that allows flexibility in line with state and federal government health practices.