

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIA

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Western Australian Government: Department of Training and Workforce Development

Question One:

Can you provide information on the Western Australian State Government's housing policy regarding reimbursement for housing and subsidies for locally employed people as opposed to those people moving into a regional area?

Answer:

The Department of Communities in Western Australia manages 5,500 homes for Government employees across the State under the Government Regional Officer Housing (GROH) program.

Individuals are eligible to be housed in a GROH home if they are an employee of a GROH client department. However, the decision to provide a person with a GROH home and the type of home they are given, is at the discretion of their department and is also dependent on the availability of GROH accommodation at the time of the request.

Before being provided with GROH accommodation, applicants are required to sign a Statutory Declaration which forms part of their application for GROH accommodation. By signing this Statutory Declaration, an applicant warrants that they (or their partner) do not own a property that is within proximity (50km) of the occupant's place of employment and in which they could reasonably reside. Determinations relating to eligibility, including whether a property is considered reasonable to reside, is made by the Housing Authority. Therefore, the ownership of any real property must be declared in the application for housing.

There is typically a shortage of GROH accommodation in North Western Australia that impacts on the ability of agencies to effectively recruit for positions, noting that good quality and affordable housing is a key attraction and retention measure for government agencies in a highly competitive recruitment market.

In addition to the GROH program, the Western Australian Government is investing \$2.6 billion in social housing homelessness services over the coming years, with an additional \$450 million being invested into the Social Housing Investment Fund in the 2023-24 State Budget. The construction of new housing in North Western Australia comes on the back of a \$25 million injection to the East Kimberley Transitional Housing Program in 2018, which saw 50 new homes built in the region, including 30 in Kununurra, 14 in Halls Creek and six in Wyndham.

The 50 home transitional housing project utilised a co-design approach with local stakeholders to decide housing location, density and design specifications to ensure the homes suited the needs of local First Nations people. Recent projects also included the Yura Yungi Employee Accommodation and Career Development project to provide affordable housing choices and supported, professional development opportunities for Aboriginal medical staff and trainees in Halls Creek.

The Western Australian Government is also progressing the \$20 million Kununurra Aboriginal Short Stay Accommodation in North Western Australia with a tender recently released for an architect to design the facility.

The Kununurra Aboriginal Short Stay Accommodation facility is expected to accommodate approximately 100 Aboriginal visitors to the town and provide guests with access to culturally informed, affordable, safe, and secure accommodation, helping to avoid rough sleeping and overcrowding of homes. The Kununurra Aboriginal Short Stay Accommodation will also provide local employment opportunities both during and after construction.

Question Two:

Can you provide information about Western Australia's Regional Coordinating Committees and Jobs and Skills Centres?

Answer:

Regional Coordinating Committees

On 30 July 2021, Hon Mark McGowan MLA, Premier and Hon Sue Ellery MLC, former Minister for Education and Training jointly hosted a Skills Summit to meet with industry leaders to hear ideas on what more can be done collaboratively and immediately, to address skill needs in industry sectors across Western Australia.

The State Government held a series of ten Regional Skills Summits across Western Australia over five months between August and December 2021. The Regional Skills Summits were attended by industry and community leaders and provided an opportunity for dialogue on practical actions that could be taken to address workforce challenges.

Five key themes were consistent across all 10 Regional Skills Summits as impacting the availability of skilled workers in regional Western Australia:

- the availability of affordable/suitable housing and accommodation;
- access to child care services in regional Western Australia;
- lack of healthcare and community services workers in regional Western Australia reduced the availability of community services and liveability in these communities;
- the need to attract new workers, migrants and their families to build sustainable regions; and
- young people and under-represented groups require additional support to participate in the local labour market.

Following each Regional Skills Summit, a Regional Action Plan was developed to identify practical actions to be led locally by a Regional Coordinating Committee (RCC), initially comprised of the relevant TAFE College, Regional Development Commission, Regional Chamber of Commerce and Industry and supported by the Department of Training and Workforce Development. RCCs were able to add additional stakeholders to join the committee to progress the priority actions.

During 2022, the RCCs operated from within the following regions and locations:

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|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Kununurra - East Kimberley; | 6. Northam – Wheatbelt; |
| 2. Broome – West Kimberley; | 7. Kalgoorlie – Goldfields/Esperance; |
| 3. Port Hedland – Pilbara; | 8. Mandurah – Peel; |
| 4. Karratha – Pilbara; | 9. Bunbury – South West; and |
| 5. Geraldton – Mid West; | 10. Albany – South West. |

Following the success in 2022, there was strong and consistent commitment across regional Western Australia to continue the RCCs into 2023. In addition to the original ten RCCs, two new RCCs have been established in the Gascoyne and Esperance regions.

Issues identified by the four RCCs based in North Western Australia are provided below for the Committee's consideration.

Pilbara

The Karratha and Port Hedland RCCs noted that skills and jobs required for the Pilbara's economy are forecast to change at an increasingly rapid pace in coming decades. The participants considered it essential that all levels of Government, and the resources and VET sector in the Pilbara, collaborate to develop the capability and capacity of the region to capitalise on major global trends and opportunities.

It was noted that the region's Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA) was in place, but the lack of suitable housing was a barrier for migrants to settle in the region.

Kimberley

The Broome RCC identified the need to support young people and under-represented groups into training and sustainable employment. While the Aboriginal population in the West Kimberley is almost equal to that of the non-Aboriginal population, when it comes to workforce participation there are considerably more non-Aboriginal people in employment.

Participants at the West Kimberley RCC highlighted that many of the region's Aboriginal communities are in remote or very remote locations meaning that their residents do not have easy access to the regional jobs market. It was reported that many of these communities and their leaders were calling out for economic opportunities to create meaningful jobs to sustain their communities. Coordination across all levels of Government and in consultation with the local community Elders is strongly recommended.

The East Kimberley RCC¹ also focused on the need of local Aboriginal communities and their members in education, training and employment opportunities. The development of the Aboriginal population was highlighted as critical to the development of the East Kimberley's workforce.

Stakeholders at the Kununurra RCC identified the need to maximise the use of the region's local workforce by:

- promoting the benefits of employment to residents not engaged in the workforce;
- recognising and developing the skills base for the local workforce; and
- continuing to align training delivery with the skills needs of local industries

Jobs and Skills Centres

Jobs and Skills Centres (JSC) are one-stop shops for career, training and employment advice and assistance. Services are free, and accessible to all members of the community. JSCs are located on TAFE campuses at Kununurra, Broome, South Hedland and Karratha in North Western Australia. Each of these centres provide outreach to other surrounding towns.

¹ The East Kimberley RCC merged with the East Kimberley Employment Roundtable, a joint venture between Binarri-binyja Yarrowoo Aboriginal Corporation (BBYAC), East Kimberley Job Pathways, Kimberley Group Training, MG Corporation and Wunan Employment and Training established to address low Indigenous employment in the region.

Each centre, which is open during business hours Monday to Friday, can provide advice on training and employment opportunities including careers advice, apprenticeship and training information to individual clients and have staff providing specialist support to Aboriginal clients.

Support services for employers and business are also available which include recruitment assistance, workforce development assistance including training solutions for existing employees as well as Aboriginal employment advice to help attract, recruit, retain and support an employer's Aboriginal employees.

Providers and Locations

In 2020-21 and 2021-22, the Kimberley had one primary JSC located at Broome TAFE campus which was operated by North Regional TAFE and the Wunan Foundation. A Satellite JSC was located on the Kununurra TAFE campus and was operated by Wunan Foundation.

In 2022-23, the Kimberley has two primary JSCs located at the Broome TAFE campus and Kununurra TAFE campus with Busy at Work and North Regional TAFE operating from Broome TAFE campus and Wunan Foundation operating from Kununurra TAFE campus.

In 2020-21 and 2021-22, the Pilbara had one primary JSC located at Karratha TAFE campus which was operated by Empowering People in Communities (EPIC). Satellite locations were located at Pundulmurra TAFE campus (South Hedland) operated by EPIC and Bloodwood Tree and Newman TAFE campus operated by EPIC.

In 2022-23, the Pilbara has two primary JSCs located at the Karratha TAFE campus and Pundulmurra (South Hedland) TAFE campus with EPIC operating from Karratha TAFE campus and Bloodwood Tree operating from the Pundulmurra (South Hedland) TAFE campus. Services to Newman are now delivered 1 week a month at the Newman TAFE campus by Bloodwood Tree.

Aboriginal artwork funding:

To support JSCs to provide culturally inviting spaces for their Aboriginal clients, the Department of Training and Workforce Development provided North Regional TAFE with \$20,000 (\$5000 per primary JSC location) to purchase Aboriginal artwork, artefacts and or signage to enhance the office spaces.

In recognition of the significant differences in Aboriginal art across the State, TAFE colleges were encouraged to purchase artwork and artefacts and/or have products designed by their Aboriginal students where possible, or by local Aboriginal artists where this is not possible. The products purchased are at the discretion of the local TAFE colleges and JSCs, to enable a place-based approach to providing culturally welcome offices.