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8 December 2025

Committee Secretariat
Preparing for emerging industries across Northern Australia
PO 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

To whom it may concern,

RE: PREPARING FOR EMERGING INDUSTRIES ACROSS NORTHERN AUSTRALIA

The Karratha & Districts Chamber of Commerce & Industry (KDCCI) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Committee's inquiry into preparing for emerging industries across Northern Australia.

KDCCI represents more than 350 local businesses across all sectors within the West Pilbara—Australia's most economically significant region and a core contributor to the national energy, resources and export landscape.

The Pilbara is a region defined by scale, complexity and opportunity. It is also a region where the gap between wealth creation and local economic wellbeing remains stark. We generate extraordinary value for the nation, yet local businesses and communities experience the highest cost pressures in Australia, persistent workforce shortages, infrastructure constraints and limited service availability.

Effective preparation for emerging industries requires policy settings that reflect the practical realities of doing business in Northern Australia. National strategies often focus heavily on Queensland and the Northern Territory; however, Western Australia's northern regions, like the Pilbara, are powering the transition to net zero, enabling critical mineral supply chains, supporting defence capability and hosting globally significant industrial projects. It is essential that these dynamics are recognised in Australia's long-term strategic planning.

The insights provided in this submission draw directly from on-the-ground experience supporting the businesses, Traditional Owner-led enterprises and industry partners that operate within this unique environment.

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NET ZERO TRANSITION, RENEWABLE ENERGY AND DECARBONISATION

The Pilbara is poised to be one of the most critical hubs for Australia's decarbonisation agenda. Large-scale solar and wind developments, green hydrogen and ammonia proposals, and industrial electrification initiatives are already progressing.

| Key challenges: | Opportunities: |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Fragmented regulatory pathways for renewable integration into existing micro-grids. × Lack of firm energy capacity, limiting industrial expansion and advanced manufacturing. × High capital costs for SMEs transitioning to low-carbon technologies. × Insufficient coordination between government, proponents and local supply chains. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish Pilbara precincts specifically designed for renewable manufacturing, hydrogen production and low-carbon industrial operations. • Support SMEs with practical decarbonisation incentives rather than relying solely on major project investment. • The Pilbara's contribution to national net zero outcomes will only be realised if policy settings are grounded in the region's operational realities. |

EXPORT INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

New export industries—including hydrogen, ammonia, critical mineral products and advanced manufacturing—will require coordinated investment in transport logistics, port capacity, and digital connectivity. A Northern Australia export strategy should formally include the West Pilbara's unique capabilities and constraints. The Pilbara is perfectly positioned to be a gateway to Asia.

| Key challenges: | Opportunities: |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> × High freight costs. × Limited backhaul opportunities. × Lack of diversification in export pathways. × Barriers to establishing remote marine access points. × Challenges establishing supply chains. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a national Northern Australia export & import strategy. • Upgrade or expand federal-aligned ports and freight infrastructure (some projects in process or in pipeline). • Support the development of advanced manufacturing at ports and industrial precincts. |

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DECOMMISSIONING INDUSTRY GROWTH

A significant wave of decommissioning is approaching across offshore energy assets. This presents a genuine opportunity for regional capability building, provided that:

- Onshore decommissioning capacity is expanded in WA.
- SMEs can access accreditation pathways.
- Workforce development is aligned with projected demand.

A structured WA decommissioning industry plan would support local participation and reduce reliance on overseas contractors.

DEFENCE INDUSTRY SUPPORT

The Pilbara's strategic location, deep-water ports and industrial capability provide a strong platform for defence industry involvement. A more distributed defence strategy would strengthen national resilience and leverage existing Pilbara capability.

| Key challenges: | Opportunities: |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">× Investment remains disproportionately focused on the NT.× Region is critical to continued success of Australia as a whole, and thus a potential target.× Global instability and unrest. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vessel maintenance• Fuel and logistics capability• Advanced manufacturing• Remote operations technology |

INFRASTRUCTURE PRIORITIES

Foundational infrastructure continues to be one of the most significant barriers to industry growth. Local businesses consistently report that emerging industries cannot scale without concurrent investment in essential social and economic infrastructure.

| Key challenges: | Opportunities: |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">× Critical housing shortages affecting workforce attraction.× Health and childcare gaps impacting workforce retention.× Ageing or constrained (particularly power) industrial land and utilities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• WA Development Index – let's start measuring what matters.• Work to close the gaps on access to quality healthcare and childcare.• Put pressure on state government to unlock commercial land. |

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WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND RETENTION

Workforce challenges in the Pilbara remain acute, as it is nationally. But the cost to our nation's bottom line will be significant if these challenges are not addressed in the Pilbara. A national Northern Workforce strategy must reflect the distinctive pressures in WA's north.

| Key challenges: | Opportunities: |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">× High cost of living× Limited housing× Cost to rent is prohibitive – average weekly rental costs over \$1,000× FIFO structures drawing potential residents away from local communities | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Broader range of higher education and diverse course offerings (TAFE and University)• Practical incentives to attract long-term residents (focus on liveability of our regions)• Targeted visa pathways for skills in critical areas |

FIRST NATIONS UPSKILLING AND ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

Traditional Owner groups and Indigenous businesses are key partners in the region's economic future. We are proud to have 140+ Indigenous businesses in KDCCI's Pilbara Indigenous Business Networking Group program, that focuses on connecting businesses with procurement opportunities, upskilling and capacity building workshops and initiatives.

With the Pilbara's newly obtained World Heritage listing for the Burrup rock art, we are poised for development of a Pilbara tourism industry. When First Nations businesses are brought into emerging industries early and meaningfully, participation and economic benefits increase substantially. Notwithstanding, we understand that this hasn't always been done right, nor achieved desired outcomes when attempted in the past. Let's utilise our region, where culture is strong, there is proven collaboration and partnership between first nations and industry to understand what models work in this region.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Innovation is at the centre of the Pilbara's success. It's in the Pilbara where the tyranny of distance has born a business community that is innovative and resilient. It's here that autonomous trains, battery-electric haul truck, automations and data driven technologies have been implemented. These innovations show that the Pilbara is not just a legacy mining region — it is actively transforming into a high-tech, low-carbon operations hub, which demonstrates its readiness to support emerging industries.

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However, most R&D investment for Northern Australia is concentrated elsewhere. A Pilbara-based innovation and technology centre would enable commercialisation of solutions developed for remote industrial settings.

In closing, the future of Northern Australia depends on a strategic approach that reflects the experience of those operating on the ground. The Pilbara is central to:

- Australia's decarbonisation pathway
- Global critical mineral supply chains
- Export growth
- Defence readiness
- Innovation in remote operations

Yet the region continues to face challenges not often understood by policymakers outside WA. Bridging this gap requires strong engagement with local businesses, Traditional Owners and regional organisations that understand the practical barriers and opportunities shaping emerging industries.

KDCCI thanks the Committee for undertaking this important work. The insights in this submission reflect the lived experience of a region carrying a substantial share of Australia's economic responsibility, and one that stands ready to play a significant role in the nation's future industries—with appropriate support, targeted investment and informed policy design.

As you can see, I have a clear passion for our region and am adamant that our collective Pilbara voice needs to be heard in Canberra.

Should you require any additional information, please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Whelan

CEO

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