



Agenda

Ashburton Economic And Tourism Development Committee Meeting

Tuesday, 13 June 2023

Date:	Tuesday 13 June 2023
Time:	9:00am
Location:	Clem Thompson Sports Pavilion, Stadium Road, Tom Price
Distribution Date:	Thursday 08 June 2023



Shire of Ashburton
Ashburton Economic And Tourism Development Committee Meeting

Please be advised an Ashburton Economic And Tourism Development Committee Meeting will be held at 9:00am on Tuesday 13 June 2023 at Clem Thompson Sports Pavilion, Stadium Road, Tom Price.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donohoe".

Kenn Donohoe
Chief Executive Officer
08 June 2023

Disclaimer

The recommendations contained in the agenda are subject to confirmation by Council. The Shire of Ashburton warns anyone who has an application lodged with Council must obtain, and should only rely on, written confirmation of the outcomes of the application following the Council meeting, and any conditions attaching to the decision made by Council in respect of the application. No responsibility whatsoever is implied, or accepted, by the Shire of Ashburton for any act, omission, statement, or intimation occurring during a Council meeting.

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1 Declaration Of Opening

The Presiding Member declared the meeting open at [enter time](#).

1.1 Acknowledgement Of Country

As representatives of the Shire of Ashburton Council, we respectfully acknowledge the local Indigenous people, the traditional custodians of this land where we are meeting upon today and pay our respects to them and all their elders both past, present and emerging.

2 Announcement Of Visitors

The Presiding Member welcomed members of the public to the gallery.

3 Attendance

3.1 Present

Elected Members:	Cr M Lynch Cr T Mladenovic Cr A Smith Cr A Sullivan	Tom Price Ward Tom Price Ward Tom Price Ward Paraburdoo Ward
Employees:	K Donohoe C McGurk R Miller D Kennedy A Lennon R Marlborough A Furfaro N Cochrane	Chief Executive Officer Director Community Development Director Infrastructure Services Director Corporate Services Manager Media and Communications Senior Governance Officer Governance Officer Council Support Officer
Guests:	Enter names	
Members of Public:	There were enter number members of the public in attendance at the commencement of the meeting.	
Members of media:	There were enter number members of the media in attendance at the commencement of the meeting.	

3.2 Apologies

To be informed at the meeting.

3.3 Approved Leave Of Absence

3.4 Election of the Presiding Member and Deputy Presiding Member

The Chief Executive Officer to preside at the meeting in accordance with clause 3, Schedule 2.3 of the *Local Government Act 1995*, until the offices detailed are filled.

Election of Presiding Member

In accordance with section 5.12(1) and clause 2, Schedule 2.3 of the *Local Government Act 1995*, the office of Presiding Member is to be filled as the first matter dealt with at the first meeting of the committee after an ordinary election.

How elected:

The election of the Presiding Member is to be conducted in accordance with clause 4, Schedule 2.3 of the *Local Government Act 1995* as follows:

1. The committee is to elect a committee member to fill the office.
2. The election is to be conducted by the CEO in accordance with the procedure prescribed.
3. Nominations for the office are to be given to the CEO in writing before the meeting or during the meeting before the close of nominations.
4. Nominations close at the meeting at a time announced by the CEO, which is to be a sufficient time after the announcement by the CEO that nominations are about to close to allow for any nominations made to be dealt with.
5. If a committee member is nominated by another committee member the CEO is not to accept the nomination unless the nominee has advised the CEO, orally or in writing, that he or she is willing to be nominated for the office.
6. The committee members are to vote on the matter by secret ballot as if they were electors voting at an election.
7. Subject to clause 5(1), the votes cast under subclause (5) are to be counted, and the successful candidate determined, in accordance with Schedule 4.1 (which deals with determining the result of an election) as if those votes were votes cast at an election.
8. As soon as is practicable after the result of the election is known, the CEO is to declare and give notice of the result in accordance with regulations, if any.

Election of Deputy Presiding Member

How elected

The election of the Deputy Presiding Member is to be conducted in accordance with clause 8, Schedule 2.3 of the *Local Government Act 1995* as follows:

1. The committee is to elect a committee member (other than the presiding member) to fill the office.
2. The election is to be conducted in accordance with the procedure prescribed by the presiding member, or if he or she is not present, by the CEO.
3. Nominations for the office are to be given to the person conducting the election in writing before the meeting or during the meeting before the close of nominations.
4. Nominations close at the meeting at a time announced by the person conducting the election, which is to be a sufficient time after the announcement by that person that nominations are about to close to allow for any nominations made to be dealt with.
5. If a committee member is nominated by another committee member the person conducting the election is not to accept the nomination unless the nominee has advised the person conducting the election, orally or in writing, that he or she is willing to be nominated for the office.
6. The committee members are to vote on the matter by secret ballot as if they were electors voting at an election.
7. Subject to clause 9(1) the votes cast under subclause (5) are to be counted, and the successful candidate determined, in accordance with Schedule 4.1 as if those votes were votes cast at an election.
8. As soon as is practicable after the result of the election is known, the person conducting the election is to declare and give notice of the result in accordance with regulations, if any.

4 Declaration By Members

4.1 Due Consideration By Councillors To The Agenda

Councillors will be requested to note they have given due consideration to all matters contained in this agenda.

4.2 Declaration Of Interest

A member who has an Impartiality, Proximity or Financial interest in any matter to be discussed at this meeting must disclose the nature of the interest either in a written notice, given to the Chief Executive Officer, prior to the meeting, or at the meeting immediately before the matter is discussed.

A member who makes a disclosure in respect to an interest must not preside at the part of the meeting which deals with the matter, or participate in, or be present during any discussion or decision-making process relative to the matter, unless the disclosing member is permitted to do so under Section 5.68 or Section 5.69 of the *Local Government Act 1995*.

The following declarations of interest are disclosed –

To be advised at the meeting.

5 Public Agenda Items

5.1 Ashburton Economic and Tourism Development Committee Terms of Reference and 2023 Meeting Dates

File Reference	ED278
Applicant or Proponent(s)	Not Applicable
Author	J Bray, Manager Governance
Authorising Officer	D Kennedy, Director Corporate Services
Previous Meeting Reference	Nil
Disclosure(s) of interest	Author – Nil
	Authorising Officer – Nil
Attachments	1. Draft Ashburton Economic and Tourism Development Terms of Reference ↓

Report Purpose

Council is required to consider the draft Ashburton Economic and Tourism Development Committee (Committee) Terms of Reference and proposed meeting dates for the remainder of 2023.

The purpose of this report is to present a Terms of Reference to provide clarity on the role of the Committee.

Council is requested to adopt the proposed Committee Terms of Reference and meeting dates.

Background

At its meeting held 19 October 2022, Council resolved, in part, as follows:

“Creates the following Committees, with the following general terms –

- *Ashburton Economic and Tourism Development Committee*
 - *The general purpose is to identify and develop strategies to promote tourism so there is a positive impact at a regional level and to advise Council on suggested actions to address relevant issues raised with, and by, the Committee.*
 - *Meeting cycle is as required.*
 - *Responsibility assigned to the Chief Executive Officer.*

Appoints the following Councillors to the following Committees –

- *Ashburton Economic and Tourism Development Committee*
 - *Councillor Cr M Lynch*
 - *Councillor Cr T Mladenovic*
 - *Councillor Cr A Sullivan*
 - *Councillor Cr A Smith”*

Comments

It is good governance to have an adopted and regularly reviewed Committee Terms of Reference which provide clear responsibilities and guidance on meeting requirements. Clear Terms of Reference assist the Committee to run efficiently and effectively, which in turn helps the community understand the purpose, structure and function of the Committee. As such, a new comprehensive Committee Terms of Reference has been developed.

As part of the review and to align to best practice, the Terms of Reference has expanded to include provisions relating to:

- Roles and Responsibilities – what the Committee is responsible for,
- Delegation – no delegated powers are proposed to be provided to the Committee,
- Membership – no change is proposed to the membership (ie. four elected members are appointed members of the Committee, with all other elected members being deputies,
- Quorum – in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1995*,
- Meetings – sets out how the Presiding Member and Deputy Presiding Member are elected to the Committee and how and when meetings will be scheduled, and
- Reporting – clarifying that the Committee reports to Council on any recommendations it makes.

The revised Terms of Reference will be made available on the Shire’s website.

The proposed meeting dates have been scheduled to coincide with Council meeting day to allow for meetings to be held in person.

To encourage public participation and maintain the Shire’s value of openness, it is intended that this Committee will be open to the public. Therefore, the meeting details as endorsed by Council, will be published on the Shire’s official website.

In the future, the Terms of Reference will be submitted to the Committee for review biennially following each local government ordinary election. Meeting dates will be scheduled annually and advertised prior to each new calendar year (approximately November).

Consultation

The Terms of Reference and proposed meeting dates have been prepared in consultation with the Chief Executive Officer and Manager Business and Economic Development.

Strategic Community Plan

Shire of Ashburton Strategic Community Plan 2022-2032

Strategic Objective	4. Performance - We will lead the organisation, and create the culture, to deliver demonstrated performance excellence to the community.
Strategic Outcome	4.6 Visionary community leadership with sound, diligent and accountable governance
Strategy	3 Deliver best practice governance and risk management.

Council Policy

Nil

Financial Implications

Current Financial Year

Nil

Future Financial Year(s)

Nil

Legislative Implications

Section 5.8 of the *Local Government Act 1995* provides Council with the power to establish committees of three or more persons.

Regulation 12(2)(b) of the *Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996* requires the Chief Executive Officer to publish the meeting details for committee meetings which are intended to be open to the public, on the Shire's official website.

Risk Management

Risk has been assessed against the Shire of Ashburton Risk Management Framework.

Theme	Risk	Likelihood	Consequence	Inherent Risk Rating	Risk Treatment
Compliance	Elected members are unclear on the roles and responsibilities of the Committee.	Possible (3)	Minor (2)	Moderate (5-9)	Adopt the draft Ashburton Economic and Tourism Development Committee Terms of Reference.

Based on the inherent risk rating and risk treatments, the residual risk to the Shire is considered to be low.

Voting Requirements

Simple Majority

Officer Recommendation

That with respect to the Ashburton Economic and Tourism Development Committee Terms of Reference and 2023 Meeting Dates, the Ashburton Economic and Tourism Development Committee recommends that Council,

1. Adopts the terms of reference as detailed in Attachment 1, and
2. Endorses the following meeting details,

Date	Time	Location
8 August 2023	9:00am	Council Chambers, Onslow Shire Complex, Second Avenue, Onslow
14 November 2023	9:00am	Ashburton Hall, Ashburton Avenue, Paraburdoo



Ashburton Economic and Tourism Development Committee

Terms of Reference

Purpose

The Ashburton Economic and Tourism Development Committee's (the Committee) purpose is to identify strategies/opportunities that promote economic development and tourism within the Shire of Ashburton (the Shire).

Role and functions

The role of the Committee is to provide guidance and assistance to Council on matters including but not limited to:

1. Positioning local businesses and industry to capitalise on global and emerging industry trends that facilitate new markets and investment.
2. The formulation of stakeholders, strategic partnerships and communication to facilitate new and developing industry initiatives across sectors to ensure ongoing and sustained economic growth.
3. Providing industry feedback and input, as appropriate, into strategic and high-level economic development documents/plans including future growth plans for the Shire.
4. The role Council should play to address industry specific feedback (including perceived impediments) on Federal, State and local regulatory processes and funding programs to create better investment conditions and refinements for economic growth and employment generation in the short, medium and long term.
5. Facilitation of identified industry and strategic initiatives across industry sectors and relevant organisations.
6. Policies relating to economic development.
7. Encouraging development and investment through active marketing.

Delegation

1. This Committee has no delegated authority and no authority to implement its recommendations without resolution of Council.
2. The Committee is a formally appointed committee of Council and is responsible to that body. The Committee does not have executive powers or authority to implement actions in areas over which the CEO has legislative responsibility.





3. The Committee does not have any management functions and cannot involve itself in management processes or procedures, other than by making a recommendation to Council.

Membership

1. The Committee shall comprise of four elected members of the Shire.
2. All other elected members shall be appointed as deputy members of the Committee.
3. The CEO or their nominee is to be available to attend meetings to provide advice to the Committee.
4. Appointments to the Committee will be for up to two-year terms, with membership expiry coinciding with the local government ordinary elections.

Quorum

The quorum for a committee meeting is set by section 5.19 of the *Local Government Act 1995*.

Meetings

1. The Committee must elect a presiding member and deputy presiding member in accordance with section 5.12 and Schedule 2.3 of the *Local Government Act 1995*.
2. A schedule of meetings will be developed and agreed to by the Committee.

Reporting

The Committee shall report to Council by way of its minutes and any recommendations it may make.

Office use only				
Relevant delegations	Nil			
Council adoption	Date		Resolution #	
Reviewed/modified	Date		Resolution #	
Next review due	Date			

5.2 Bank Closures in Regional Australia

File Reference	ED01
Applicant or Proponent(s)	Not Applicable
Author	P Hanlon, Manager Business and Economic Development
Authorising Officer	K Donohoe, Chief Executive Officer
Previous Meeting Reference	Nil
Disclosure(s) of interest	Author – Nil
	Authorising Officer – Nil
Attachments	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Shire of Ashburton Submission - Bank closures in regional Australia ↓2. Local Government Association of Queensland - Bank closures in regional Australia ↓

Report Purpose

Council is required to consider the impact on the community of no face-to-face banking services in the Shire of Ashburton.

The purpose of this report is to inform the Ashburton Economic and Tourism Development Committee of national efforts to address bank closures in regional Australia to develop a position as a Shire.

Council is requested by the Committee to support positive advocacy and engagement with the Australian Local Government Association for a business paper to be prepared investigating how and if local governments can facilitate or deliver face to face banking services through the recommendation presented for consideration.

Background

Following the closure of the Tom Price Westpac Branch, there are no physical banks left in the Shire of Ashburton apart from the limited services provided by Australia Posts Bank@Post.

In November 2022, Tom Price community members and representatives from the business community joined the Shire of Ashburton for an open discussion on the closure of the Westpac Bank. The session allowed for the community to discuss the banking requirements of residents, community organisations and local business following Westpac's announcement that they will shut the only local bank branch in December.

The community voiced their frustration over a lack of options for large cash handling from a business perspective and business banking requirements, along with community groups and organisations who without a local branch will not be able to access club accounts and for cash services. The group also discussed the impact that a lack of face to face services would have on vulnerable members.

A community bank model was also discussed, with the discussion group interested in forming a steering committee to research this option further.

Upon enquiring with Bendigo Bank to investigate their Community Bank model, the Shire of Ashburton received correspondence stating that a Community Bank would not be commercially viable in Tom Price or the Shire of Ashburton in general. A follow up working group meeting was held in November 2022 where it was decided that no further action be taken to assess the impacts of Westpac's closure.

National Attention

The impact of bank closures in regional Australia are being assessed at a national level. The issue has been at the centre of an Australian Government taskforce review and is currently under a formal Senate Inquiry. Finally, the topic has been raised as a motion of consideration at the Australian Local Government Association's National General Assembly in June.

Regional Banking Taskforce (2022)

The Local Government sector was represented by the Australian Local Government Association on the previous Federal Government's *Regional Banking Taskforce*, which brought together banks and other relevant parties to share information, assess the impact of regional bank branch closures and identify possible solutions. A copy of the Taskforce's final report can be found here:

[Regional Banking Taskforce - Final Report | Treasury.gov.au](#)

Australian Government Inquiry - Bank closures in regional Australia (Current)

The Shire of Ashburton provided the attached submission to the Australian Government's Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport *Bank closures in regional Australia* Inquiry.

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Rural_and_Regional_Affairs_and_Transport/BankClosures

Australian Local Government Association – National General Assembly (June 2023)

Motion 123 made by the Snowy Valley Council, NSW states that:

"This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to set in place appropriate legislation to ensure access to 'face to face' financial transactions through banks and/or building society branches in rural and regional areas across Australia."

[NGA23-BusinessPapers-WEB.pdf \(conferenceco.com.au\)](#)

Comments

The Shire continues to be a driving force of the Pilbara region and the Western Australian economy, delivering 12% or \$38.6B of WA's Gross Regional Product and 1.9% of Australia's Gross Domestic Product in 2021. Each worker within the Shire of Ashburton produces almost 11 times the Australian average for industry value add.

The resident population in the Shire of Ashburton is 7,785 people. Although growth is expected to continue, as natural gas and iron ore mining expands, the main employing industries in the Shire (being the resources sector) have moved a significant portion of the workforce to "fly in fly out" (FIFO). These workers live in the Shire on a temporary basis and are generally not counted in official population statistics. It is estimated that 7,300 people reside in mining camps and Aboriginal communities.

Despite the economic strength of our region, access to key services such as banking services are diminishing. With the recent closure of the Westpac Branch in Tom Price, none of our towns have a physical banking branch presence aside from limited services provided by Australia Post's Bank@Post.

This means that our residents must make the following round trips to Karratha to access physical banking services:

- Pannawonica – 400km
- Onslow – 600km
- Tom Price – 700km
- Paraburdoo – 850km

This travel will have an impact on vulnerable members of our community as well as on the productivity of businesses in the Shire if they are required to travel those distances to access banking services.

Possible Solutions to Investigate

Australia Post Bank@Post

An expanded Australia Post Bank@Post service. The attached Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) noted in their submission to the senate inquiry that the Bank@Post service needs to be enhanced. It is understood that Bank@Post is purely a transactional service which doesn't enable people to open financial products including accounts and loans. There is a concern about the impact that this will have on everyday services as well as on the availability of capital for investment purposes. Given the vast distances in the Shire of Ashburton and regional Australia, there will be reduced availability to 'have a conversation' with the local branch manager to access credit to purchase a home or start a business.

Alternate Options

The LGAQ submission also states that The Regional Banking Taskforce noted other possible options including:

- co-location (where banking services are co-located with other businesses at the same location)
- co-branding (where different bank brands are co-located)
- community banks (where there is a franchise or joint venture relationship between a bank and local company)
- reduced opening hours (where branches continued to operate by reducing their opening hours)
- banking hubs (where several banks use a common space to provide in-person banking services)
- advisory hubs (where banks provide information)
- mobile branches (where bankers travel to their customers)
- smart ATMs (which provide a broader variety of services than standard ATMs including the ability to deposit cash).

One possible solution to the above ideas that could be investigated is whether the Australian Local Government Association could look to establish a banking service as a commercial enterprise. Whilst there are many pressures on local government in Australia, with the right funding model and support there could be a system to utilise the buildings, staff, and presence of local government to facilitate or deliver this service to regional communities.

In practice, the customer facing part of Council may act as a connection between regional communities and a centralised banking service. This service could form the basis of Strategic Business Hubs with co-located services. Any profits could then be reinvested into regional Australian communities.

Whilst banking models like Bendigo Bank's Community Bank have delivered services like this in the past, recent experience suggests that this model is dwindling for new branches. The Shire of Ashburton enquired with Bendigo Bank to look at the Community Banking model in Tom Price but were told that it was not commercially feasible in our Shire.

For local government areas where the above model may prove too challenging, a less onerous option could be to have existing Council buildings upgraded and utilised on an agreed basis as a mobile branch with agents such as Armaguard and Commercial banks delivering face to face services for an agreed fee. Again, these profits could be invested into vital community projects.

Regional Australia needs innovative solutions and support to solve these complex problems to ensure no Australian gets left behind. As this is a national issue impacting Australian communities.

Consultation

Chief Executive Officer

Western Australian Local Government Association

Strategic Community Plan

Shire of Ashburton Strategic Community Plan 2022-2032

Strategic Objective	3. Prosperity - We will advocate and drive opportunities for the community to be economically desirable, resilient, and prosperous.
Strategic Outcome	3.4 Sustainable commerce and tourism opportunities
Strategy	2 Ensure Shire processes support the development of strong and sustainable local business opportunities.

Council Policy

Nil

Financial Implications

Current Financial Year

Nil

Future Financial Year(s)

Nil

Legislative Implications

Nil

Risk Management

Risk has been assessed against the Shire of Ashburton Risk Management Framework.

Theme	Risk	Likelihood	Consequence	Inherent Risk Rating	Risk Treatment
Reputation (social/community)	There is a risk to the Council's reputation if we do not act as the trusted voice for the region on important social/economic issues.	Possible (3)	Moderate (3)	Moderate (5-9)	Following the officer's recommendation will ensure the Shire takes further action advocating on behalf of the community.

Based on the inherent risk rating and risk treatments, the residual risk to the Shire is considered to be low.

Voting Requirements

Simple Majority

Officer Recommendation

That with respect to Bank closures in Regional Australia, the Ashburton Economic and Tourism Development Committee recommends that Council, authorises the Chief Executive Officer to request the Australian Local Government Association to prepare a business paper investigating how local government can facilitate or deliver face to face banking services in regional areas.



Shire of Ashburton

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ashburton.wa.gov.au

Committee Secretary

28 April 2023

Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Via email: rrat.sen@aph.gov.au

To whom it may concern,

SUBMISSION RE: BANK CLOSURES IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

The Shire of Ashburton makes the following submission regarding Bank closures in regional Australia.

The Shire of Ashburton is in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, about 1,400km north of Perth. At over 100,000 square kilometres in size, the Shire is nearly half the size of the State of Victoria and considered one of the largest Local Governments in the world. The Shire of Ashburton has four major townships being Tom Price, Paraburdoo, Pannawonica and Onslow.





Shire of Ashburton

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The Shire continues to be a driving force of the Pilbara region and the Western Australian economy, delivering 12% or \$38.6B of WA's Gross Regional Product and 1.9% of Australia's Gross Domestic Product in 2021. Each worker within the Shire of Ashburton produces almost 11 times the Australian average for industry value add.

The resident population in the Shire of Ashburton is 7,785 people. Although growth is expected to continue, as natural gas and iron ore mining expands, the main employing industries in the Shire (being the resources sector) have moved a significant portion of the workforce to "fly in fly out" (FIFO). These workers live in the Shire on a temporary basis and are generally not counted in official population statistics. It is estimated that 7,300 people reside in mining camps and Aboriginal communities.

Shire of Ashburton Strategic Community Plan 2022-2032

This submission takes its strategic direction from the community. The Shire of Ashburton Strategic Community Plan 2022-2032 is the overarching plan that captures the views of the Shire's diverse community our vision for the future and our planning direction for the next decade. Prosperity is one of the four pillars included in the plan, which states that we will advocate and drive opportunities for the community to be economically desirable, resilient, and prosperous.

Despite the economic strength of our region access to key services such as banking services are diminishing. With the recent closure of the Westpac Branch in Tom Price, none of our towns have a physical banking branch presence aside from limited services provided by Bank@Post.

This means that our residents must make the following round trips to Karratha to access physical banking services:

- Pannawonica – 400km
- Onslow – 600km
- Tom Price – 700km
- Paraburdoo – 850km

The Shire of Ashburton are concerned about the impact that this will have on vulnerable members of our community as well as on the productivity of businesses in the Shire if they are required to travel those distances to access banking services.



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The Shire of Ashburton believe that more work needs to be done to look at the level of services that Bank@Post provide. As we understand it, Bank@Post is purely a transactional service which doesn't enable people to open financial products including accounts and loans. We are concerned about the impact that this will have on everyday services as well as on the availability of capital for investment purposes. Given our vast distances in regional Australia, there will be reduced availability to 'have a conversation' with the local branch manager to access credit to purchase a home or start a business.

One possible solution that could be investigated is whether the Australian Local Government Association could look to form up a banking service as a commercial enterprise. Whilst there are many pressures on Local Government in Australia, with the right funding model and support there could be a system to utilize the buildings, staff, and presence of Local Government to deliver this service to regional communities. Any profits could then be reinvested into regional Australian communities.

Whilst banking models like Bendigo Bank's Community Bank have delivered services like this in the past, recent experience suggests that this model is dwindling for new branches. The Shire of Ashburton enquired with Bendigo Bank to look at the Community Banking model in Tom Price but were told that it was not commercially feasible in our Shire.

Regional Australia needs innovative solutions and support to solve these complex problems to ensure no Australian gets left behind.

On behalf of the Shire of Ashburton I would like to thank you in advance for your time reviewing our submission.

Kind regards,

Kenn Donohoe

Chief Executive Officer



Every Queensland
community deserves
to be a liveable one

Bank closures in regional Australia

Submission to Senate Standing Committee on
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
(References Committee)

31 March 2023

Web: www.lgaq.asn.au

Twitter: @LGAQ

Linkedin: Local Government Association of Queensland

Facebook: @LocalGovQld

Instagram: @localgovqld





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About the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ)

The Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) is the peak body for local government in Queensland. It is a not-for-profit association established solely to serve councils and their needs. The LGAQ has been advising, supporting, and representing local councils since 1896, enabling them to improve their operations and strengthen relationships with their communities.

The LGAQ does this by connecting councils to people and places; supporting their drive to innovate and improve service delivery through smart services and sustainable solutions; and providing them with the means to achieve community, professional and political excellence.

The Rural and Remote Councils Compact, pledges to amplify the voice of and improve outcomes for the state's 45 rural and remote councils and their local communities by enhancing engagement between both levels of government.



Bank closures in regional Australia

Executive Summary

The LGAQ welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee (the Committee) on the Inquiry relating to bank closures in regional Australia (the Inquiry).

The Association sincerely thanks the Committee for undertaking this Inquiry, which the LGAQ views as an opportunity to draw a line in the sand on the decline of banking services.

The Committee has the opportunity to establish a new model of service delivery that supports people who want to live or operate a business in rural, remote and regional communities.

Ensuring essential services, like face-to-face banking, are not only available but are provided in manner that matches customer need is critical for Queensland councils and the communities they represent.

Our members are a diverse group of councils – from those representing discrete First Nations communities to the largest councils in Australia in the south-east to regional coastal councils and councils in rural and remote Queensland that are large in geography, but small in their ratepayer base.

The way in which a major bank branch closure was announced in Cloncurry earlier this year typifies why this Inquiry is critical and that urgent action is needed to change the approach of banking services provided in rural, regional and remote communities in Queensland.

One such local government – Isaac Regional Council – is the size of Tasmania but only has two face-to-face banking services available. They are both in the same community. One is a bank branch and the other is a credit union that is only opened for four hours a day, three days a week.

That is entirely unacceptable for a region that is home to over 22,000 residents and more than 12,000 non-resident workers who are drive in drive out or fly in fly out workers in the 28 coal mines that produce around 80 per cent of the nation's metallurgical coal exports.

Another of our members – Douglas Shire Council – is home to 12,000 residents some of Queensland's iconic tourism destinations. The Shire plays a key role in attracting tourists to Tropical North Queensland and on average welcomes 443,000 overnight visitors and 264,000 day visitors each year, generating \$611 million while supporting over 2,500 jobs. In the largest town in that local government area – world renowned Port Douglas - there are three bank branches. But two of the three branches are only open for four and three and a half hours a day, respectively. One of the branches only takes appointments for one hour, every Monday.

There is not an unreasonable expectation that these services are comparable to the same services provided in our capital cities. However, the constant rationalisation of essential



services, like banking, will lead to no services being provided at all – a proposition that is entirely unacceptable.

In formulating this submission, the LGAQ hosted a webinar for members to share their concerns about the constant threat of a reduction in face-to-face banking services in their local communities.



Recommendations

The LGAQ has prepared detailed comments in relation to the impact of banking closures in regional communities, outlined in the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry and has made five recommendations, summarised below:

- **Recommendation 1:** The LGAQ recommends that the Federal Government immediately adopt the seven recommendations from last year's Regional Banking Taskforce final report.
- **Recommendation 2:** The LGAQ recommends the ABA extends branch closure protocols to also include branches that are reducing/downsizing their operations or a reduction of lending or other services provided.
- **Recommendation 3:** The LGAQ recommends a moratorium on further bank closures until this Inquiry is expanded to examine and remove any barriers to the success of viable, alternate face-to-face services.
- **Recommendation 4:** Given the importance of face-to-face banking services particularly the access to cash, to the liveability of every Queensland community, the LGAQ recommends that the Federal Government require Commonwealth Treasury approval for any further closure of a branch, following the end of the moratorium referenced in recommendation 3.
- **Recommendation 5:** The LGAQ recommends that as part of the review of Australia Post, the Federal Government immediately rules out the closure of any Australia Post outlets and adopts measures that will enhance the existing banking services provided through Australia Post.



Introduction

As the Regional Banking Taskforce noted in its 2022 report, Australia's financial and insurance services industry (which includes banks) plays a critical role in the Australian economy. It provides financial intermediation for the economy and accounted for around \$154 billion of total economic activities (Real Gross Value Added) and employed around 480,000 people in 2020-21.¹

Access to cash is still critically important. The Reserve Bank of Australia's Consumer Payments Survey (CPS) showed that cash still accounted for 27 per cent of all payments in 2019. This is because cash is a default fee free payment option for people to use in local businesses, as card transactions are sometimes surcharged. In addition, some businesses and consumers rely heavily on cash to make or receive payments. For example, 15 per cent of respondents in the 2019 CPS used cash for 80 per cent or more of their payments. These high cash users were more likely to be older Australians living in regional areas and less likely to have access to the internet. Around a quarter of respondents to the CPS also indicated that they would suffer major inconvenience or genuine hardship if cash could no longer be used as a method of payment. Another reason why cash remains an important payment method is that it is a backup option during outages in electronic payment systems.²

This is often experienced in Queensland, Australia's most disaster prone and decentralised state. Only just as recently as this last month – devastating floods in Queensland's northwest, around Burketown and Doomadgee, caused power outages and a loss of landline phone connection due to equipment failures. When technology fails, as it invariably does at the worst possible time, access to cash is the only way that people can pay and businesses function.

Access to cash is a fundamental service that is important to the liveability of Queensland communities.

The LGAQ notes the terms of reference for this Inquiry:

The current extent of bank closures in regional Australia, with reference to:

- a. the branch closure process, including the reasons given for closures;
- b. the economic and welfare impacts of bank closures on customers and regional communities;
- c. the effect of bank closures or the removal of face-to-face cash services on access to cash;
- d. the effectiveness of government banking statistics capturing and reporting regional service levels, including the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority's authorised deposit-taking institutions points of presence data;
- e. consideration of solutions; and any other related matters.

This Inquiry follows previous reviews, most recently last year. On 22 October 2021, the Regional Banking Taskforce was established by Commonwealth Treasury to:

- analyse the trends in bank branch closures in regional and remote Australia

¹ <https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-09/p2022-260600-final-report.pdf>

² <https://www.rba.gov.au/publications/bulletin/2021/jun/pdf/how-far-do-australians-need-to-travel-to-access-cash.pdf>



- assess the impacts of these branch closures on individuals, businesses, community organisations and regional industries (including business and land values) and determine accessibility issues and wider impacts on communities from these branch closures for banking facilities, services and products
- assess how banks transition their services and delivery models to communities where they have closed (or will close) branches
- identify alternatives to bank branch models that would maintain or improve banking services and accessibility in areas where branches have been closed and potential solutions to overcome accessibility issues.

The Regional Banking Taskforce reported in September 2022.

Submission

Before responding to the specific terms of reference, it is worth noting the current state of play, with respect to the provision of banking services in Australia.

As outlined previously in this submission, the Regional Banking Taskforce final report³ provided the following statistics, currently:

- The number of bank branches in regional and remote Australia has fallen from around 2500 to 1900 in the four years to June 2021, a 23 per cent decline.
- At a national level, the total number of branches declined from around 5800 to 4500 over the same period.
- Data indicates that other face-to-face services in regional and remote Australia has declined from around 2500 to 2400 over the same period.
- Reserve Bank of Australia statistics show that the number of Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs) also declined, with the total number of active ATMs nationally having fallen by around 20 per cent since late 2016.
- Australia Post banking facilities have remained steady, at around 1900.

It is also important to note the impact of COVID on spending habits and more general restrictions on the free movement of people throughout 2020, 2021 and 2022, that when considering this data. People used less cash for health reasons.

As the Financial Sector Union has said, the industry employs around four per cent of the total national workforce, with more than half of those positions being filled by women. They estimate that over 2,000 jobs have been lost in the banking sector since 2016, due to closures and downsizing.⁴ These are good paying jobs in regional communities. As some of our members have said, the contribution many of these people make in regional communities goes far behind their work at the bank, with many of them volunteering their time to support local community groups and executive committees.

The Taskforce made seven recommendations to Government which should be addressed.

³ <https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-09/p2022-260600-final-report.pdf>

⁴

https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/commsen/26608/toc_pdf/Rural%20and%20Regional%20Affairs%20and%20Transport%20References%20Committee_2023_03_02.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22committees/commsen/26608/0000%22



- **Recommendation 1: The LGAQ recommends that the Federal Government immediately adopt the seven recommendations from last year's Regional Banking Taskforce final report.**

Inquiry Terms of Reference:

- a. **the branch closure process, including the reasons given for closures:**

Banking standards and ABA closure protocols

The Australian Banking Association (ABA) provides a code of practice (the code of practice) on service standards, which means that industry effectively determines how they provide services to their customers.

In addition to the code of practice, the ABA Transaction Services and Branch Closure Protocol (the Protocol) provides the minimum standards of service delivery in the event of closing branches, in the applicable classes (five of the six classes). Therefore, this Protocol applies to the closure of branches in the inner regional, outer regional, remote, very remote and migratory classes only if there is not another branch of the same brand within 20 kilometres by road.⁵

Recommendation 1 and 2 of the Regional Banking Taskforce provided for reviewing and strengthening the Protocol and implementing new branch closure impact assessments.

These recommendations should be implemented as a bare minimum. Of concern should be the reduction in operating hours and/or services, including lending services, of branches that remain open. This also provides a reduction in services provided to a local community and is the slippery slope on the path towards eventual branch closure.

- **Recommendation 2: The LGAQ recommends the ABA extends branch closure protocols to also include branches that are reducing/downsizing their operations or a reduction of lending or other services provided.**
- b. **the economic and welfare impacts of bank closures on customers and regional communities;**

What councils are doing to ensure services are delivered

Some councils have had to resort to underwriting the cost of providing banking services in their local community. This includes paying for staff and premises, to underwriting the cost of security services for local businesses with large turnover of cash transactions.

This is obviously not ideal, given the sustainability challenge many Queensland councils already face and these additional costs are paid for by the community.

The Queensland Auditor-General reported in their report to the Parliament, *Local government 2021 (Report 15: 2021–22)* that:

⁵ <https://www.ausbanking.org.au/resource/branch-closure-protocols/>



"... 45 councils (approximately 60 per cent of the sector) are still at either a moderate or a high risk of not being financially sustainable."⁶

The LGAQ is currently undertaking a critical analysis of the cost-shift onto local governments from market failure, or a reduction in State or Federal government services.

Cost-shifting is occurring in every community across Queensland, where councils are now the 'provider of last resort', funding services that are critical to the liveability of their communities.

While not ideal, it shows the commitment that local governments have to the liveability of their communities. As the closest level of government to the community, local leaders play a critical role in not only governing their community, but also advocating for their needs.

Cloncurry

Earlier this year, Westpac announced the closure of their branch in Cloncurry. The announcement was met with widespread community condemnation.

Cloncurry Shire Council Mayor Greg Campbell responded to the announced closure and spoke of the impact to that region.

"There's a number of factors that'll impact our community – our elderly, our indigenous, our community groups who all rely on that face-to-face contact, they're not up to internet banking," Mayor Campbell spoke on national breakfast television.

"But there's also the message it sends. When our area is thriving, what should be a pillar of our community is walking away. It's not a good look."

Following the announcement, the Cloncurry Shire Council launched a petition, receiving support from hundreds of petitioners.

The petition stated:

"For a dynamic region that's growing in strength with massive expansion and investment from international mining companies and others, it is a slap in the face when a major finance company turns its back – yet expects us to stay on as customers!"

"Westpac employees who have recently relocated to Cloncurry are now left wanting answers, and jobs, following the shock announcement from Westpac, which reported a bottom-line net profit of \$5.7 billion in November 2022."

The petition noted that the community was growing in population, reporting that 2016 the population growth had been estimated at almost over 18%.⁷

⁶ <https://www.qao.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-05/Local%20government%202021%20%28Report%2015%E2%80%932021%E2%80%9322%29.pdf>

⁷ https://www.change.org/p/oppose-the-closure-of-westpac-bank-cloncurry?recruiter=1294555006&recruited_by_id=fc514240-a766-11ed-a053-61fcafd436de&utm_source=share_petition&utm_campaign=share_for_starters_page&utm_medium=copylink



Cloncurry was a viable local branch. In addition to the increasing population, it is home to large-scale mining and agricultural projects – with three long established local grazing families worth in excess of \$3.5 billion.

While we welcome a reversal of Westpac's decision to close the branch – in light of this Inquiry being undertaken – we hope that it is not just a stay of execution until January 2024.

c. the effect of bank closures or the removal of face-to-face cash services on access to cash;

Cyber security

The impact of forcing customers to utilise online or app-based banking services is a major concern.

On one hand, the banks say that more people are using digital services, requiring less face-to-face engagement. The Financial Sector Union says that the banks are the ones enforcing this change –

"... it has long been part of their business model and bank staff have had targets imposed on them to convert customers to digital banking. They have had limits placed on the number of over-the-counter transactions and how many new online banking accounts they had to open..."⁸

In that respect, the claim that branches are closing because there is less foot traffic is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Security of cash is of critical importance. While security threats in the 1980s and 1990s were personified by armed robberies, a physical act that was able to be foiled by police services – the threats these days come through online hackers, many of whom are hard to detect and are based on the other side of the world. And rather than targeting institutions, online threats target individual customers, preying on the most vulnerable in our community.

Austcyber reports that phishing scams remain one of the most common cyber security threats in Australia. These scams typically involve criminals sending out emails that appear to be from legitimate organisations, such as banks or government agencies, in an attempt to trick people into giving away personal information or money.⁹

In February 2023, Australian Bureau of Statistics data confirmed that in 2021-22: 8.1% of persons (1.7 million) experienced card fraud. 2.7% of persons (552,000) experienced a scam. 0.8% of persons (159,600) experienced identity theft. 2.5% of persons (509,500) experienced online impersonation.¹⁰

⁸ <https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-03/c2021-222961-financial-sector-union.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.austcyber.com/news-events/top-cyber-security-threats-facing-australia-2023-and-how-protect-yourself#:~:text=Phishing%20scams%20remain%20one%20of,away%20personal%20information%20or%20money.>

¹⁰ [https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/personal-fraud/latest-release#:~:text=In%202021%2D22%3A,persons%20\(159%2C600\)%20experienced%20identity%20theft](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/personal-fraud/latest-release#:~:text=In%202021%2D22%3A,persons%20(159%2C600)%20experienced%20identity%20theft)



The ABS added that people were most commonly exposed to a scam over the phone (48% or 9.8 million) or via text message (47% or 9.5 million). All modes of scam exposure increased from 2020-21 to 2021-22, the largest increases were for text messages (23% to 47%) and over the phone (38% to 48%).

We don't live in a cashless society. Access to cash is critical for the liveability of Australians. It is a real concern that the impact of regional branch closures will force more vulnerable Australians onto digital services that they may not understand how to use. Those people are sitting ducks for online scammers and hackers who prey on the vulnerable.

The Regional Banking Taskforce recommended continued support in telecommunications infrastructure and continued digital literacy support for customers. Of course, that should be implemented, as a priority, but that is only one part of the equation. Confidence in using digital services in the face of sophisticated online hackers is an equal consideration.

Impact on community and those most disadvantaged

The Regional Banking Taskforce noted the impact of branch closures on vulnerable community members:

*"Local bank branches are an important part of regional communities with elderly residents and community groups and businesses all relying on their local bank branch for their banking needs. Closures of branches can impact the accessibility of banking services for these and other customers, limiting their ability to use and benefit from important banking services. There can be challenges rearranging or transferring bank accounts and learning new ways of banking when a branch closes, with some submissions raising concerns about scams."*¹¹

It's not only the impact of branch closures, but also the reduction of operations at other branches, the shifting of lending services to larger centres which means that when existing branches stay open – they may provide a reduced range of services to local customers.

There are also impacts on small business and community groups needing access to cash floats for fundraising events and changing signatories on their account if there is a change in executive.

As the Regional Banking Taskforce also noted - the impact of branch closures in small communities is not only limited to the provision of local banking services. If a local customer is forced to travel to the next town to do their banking, they are likely to buy other goods and services in that town as well, thus impacting commerce in the town with the branch closure.

So in that sense, there is a direct and indirect impact on the local economy of the community that has lost the local branch.

- **Recommendation 3: The LGAQ recommends a moratorium on further bank closures until this Inquiry is expanded to examine and remove any barriers to the success of viable, alternate face-to-face services.**

¹¹ <https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-09/p2022-260600-final-report.pdf>



- Recommendation 4: Given the importance of face-to-face banking services particularly the access to cash, to the liveability of every Queensland community, the LGAQ recommends that the Federal Government require Commonwealth Treasury approval for any further closure of a branch, following the end of the moratorium referenced in recommendation 3.
- d. the effectiveness of government banking statistics capturing and reporting regional service levels, including the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority's authorised deposit-taking institutions points of presence data;

The LGAQ supports implementation of recommendation 7 of the Regional Banking Taskforce final report, that is for the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA) to commence in a review of its Authorised Deposit-taking Institutions (ADI) Points of Presence collection to better capture indicators on how banking services are accessed, with public consultation.

To support this recommendation, the report noted that the APRA points of presence publication does not include data on banking services provided online or via mobile banking applications, a key issue in an increasingly digital world.

Notwithstanding the challenges with digital connectivity in many rural and remote communities, digital banking services should only be considered as a like-for-like service if they offer the same level of service – full service – as a face-to-face service, and without additional fees or surcharges involved.

As outlined in recommendation 1, all recommendations from the Regional Banking Taskforce final report should be implemented as quickly as possible.

- e. consideration of solutions; and any other related matters.

Australia Post services and review

Banking services at Australia Post are a viable, but limited alternative. As the Regional Banking Taskforce noted in their final report, Australia Post provides a range of essential banking services via its Post Office Network including withdrawal, deposit, credit card deposits and balances enquiry via Bank@Post as well as payment of bills via Post Billpay. The provision of these services varies depending on the commercial arrangements for each institution.

When the report was released last year, it noted that there are more than 1,800 Bank@Post offices in rural and remote locations. Importantly, more than 1,150 of these offices are in communities with no bank branch at all.

Also, ANZ Bank – one of the four major banks in Australia, does not have a commercial agreement in place with Australia Post.

However, the service isn't a like for like. There are deposit limits and withdrawal limits.

Current arrangements between major banks and Australia Post are:

- Commonwealth Bank - \$6,000 deposit limit and \$2,000 daily withdrawal limit.
- Westpac - \$7,000 24-hour deposit limit.
- NAB - \$9,999 per customer day deposit limit and \$2,000 daily withdrawal limit.



On 2 March 2023, the Federal Government announced a review to support the long-term sustainability of Australia Post. The Ministerial media release announcing the review noted that “the growing digitisation of the way Australians live, communicate, shop and engage in commerce means it is critical the national postal service keeps pace with shifting demands.”¹²

The LGAQ acknowledges the broader context of the review on the full range of services that Australia Post provides, but we would urge the Federal Government to rule out Australia Post branch closures, in the first instance and look at how this review can enhance the existing banking services provided through Australia Post.

It is noted that the Australia Post review discussion paper refers to enhancing existing Post@Bank services.

“Almost 60 per cent of Australia Post’s retail presence is in regional and remote Australia, triple that of other Australian industries, like transport, finance and health. As banks and other service providers go online and close their shop fronts, Post Offices are becoming increasingly important in many communities by providing access to postal, financial, business and community services. Post Offices also provide vital face-to-face services for vulnerable Australians who are not digital citizens, or for those that live in remote, rural, and regional areas. For local businesses in these areas, the Post Office is often essential to their operations.”¹³

Alternate models

One of the best ways to put pressure on banks to provide better services in regional communities is through competition and choice.

It has long been challenging to break the market monopoly of the four big banks.

The LGAQ acknowledges the recent comments from Hon. Kristy McBain MP, Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories in a radio interview with 2GB Ben Fordham on 17 March 2023.

The Minister said that:

“What we’re seeing is customer-owned banking actually open up branches across the regions instead of closing them. It’s important that regional people have access to financial services, both from a banking and business point of view, but also from a well-being point of view, because our demographic means that some of those customers aren’t able to get to the online banking services like the rest of us.

“We’ve seen 720 branches available through regional Australia. The employment sector for customer-owned banking grew by 4.4 per cent in the last financial year alone. We’ve got over 11,000 people working in those customer-owned banks.

¹² <https://minister.infrastructure.gov.au/rowland/media-release/consultation-begins-delivering-modernised-postal-service>

¹³ <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/postal-services-modernisation-discussion-paper.pdf>



"My message loud and clear is service us or we will shift our money. At the moment, customer-owned banking seems relatively small, at about \$158 billion worth of assets compared to a lot more in the major banks. But regional Australians want service as well."¹⁴

The Regional Banking Taskforce noted the different options available for consumers. These included:

- co-location (where banking services are co-located with other businesses at the same location)
- co-branding (where different bank brands are co-located)
- community banks (where there is a franchise or joint venture relationship between a bank and local company)
- reduced opening hours (where branches continued to operate by reducing their opening hours)
- banking hubs (where several banks use a common space to provide in-person banking services)
- advisory hubs (where banks provide information)
- mobile branches (where bankers travel to their customers)
- smart ATMs (which provide a broader variety of services than standard ATMs including the ability to deposit cash).¹⁵
- **Recommendation 5: The LGAQ recommends that as part of the review of Australia Post, the Federal Government immediately rules out the closure of any Australia Post outlets and adopts measures that will enhance the existing banking services provided through Australia Post.**

¹⁴ <https://minister.infrastructure.gov.au/mcbain/interview/transcript-radio-interview-2gb-ben-fordham-breakfast-show>

¹⁵ <https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-09/p2022-260600-final-report.pdf>



Conclusion

Overall, the LGAQ provides five recommendations to increase protection for customers and recognise the importance of face-to-face banking services to the liveability of all communities.

We also acknowledge that while banking is a private business, the provision of these services are essential services.

Individual Queensland councils or regional organisations of councils may also lodge their own submissions to this Inquiry. We support them doing so, as this is a critical issue for Queensland councils.

The LGAQ would be happy to appear at a public hearing of this Inquiry, however we would also strongly encourage the Committee to hear from individual council representatives about the impact of banking services in their respective communities. Those include Cloncurry Shire Council, Isaac Regional Council, Douglas Shire Council, Longreach Regional Council, Cassowary Coast Regional Council, to name a few.

We would also encourage the Committee to conduct regional hearings across Queensland.

5.3 Ashburton Ranges Trail Park Preliminary Concept

File Reference	ED01
Applicant or Proponent(s)	Not Applicable
Author	P Hanlon, Manager Business and Economic Development
Authorising Officer	K Donohoe, Chief Executive Officer
Previous Meeting Reference	Ordinary Council Meeting 9 June 2020 - Item 14.1 – 92/2020 Ordinary Council Meeting 10 May 2022 - Item 11.1 – 051/2022
Disclosure(s) of interest	Author – Nil
	Authorising Officer – Nil
Attachments	1. Ashburton Ranges Trail Park - Preliminary Concept ↓

Report Purpose

Council is required to consider the Ashburton Ranges Trail Park Concept as a key tourism project proposal.

The purpose of this report is to inform the Ashburton Economic and Tourism Development Committee of the opportunity to create a coordinated trail experience (mountain biking, hiking and all abilities trail) across Tom Price and Paraburdoo.

Council is requested to endorse the Ashburton Ranges Trail Park Preliminary Concept as a key tourism project for the Shire.

Background

The popularity of mountain biking continues to grow globally and is fast becoming one of the world's most popular sport, recreation and physical activities. This trend is similar in Western Australia with participation levels at all time records with the most recent AusPlay data recording 53,116 people participating in mountain biking in WA across 2021 (WA Mountain Bike Strategy 2022-2032). Cycle tourism has been identified globally as an attractive market for tourism operators as a key growth adventure tourism activity due to its low-impact, high-spend, and high dispersal nature. Cycle tourists typically stay longer, spend more and engage in a broader range of experiences than the average visitor.

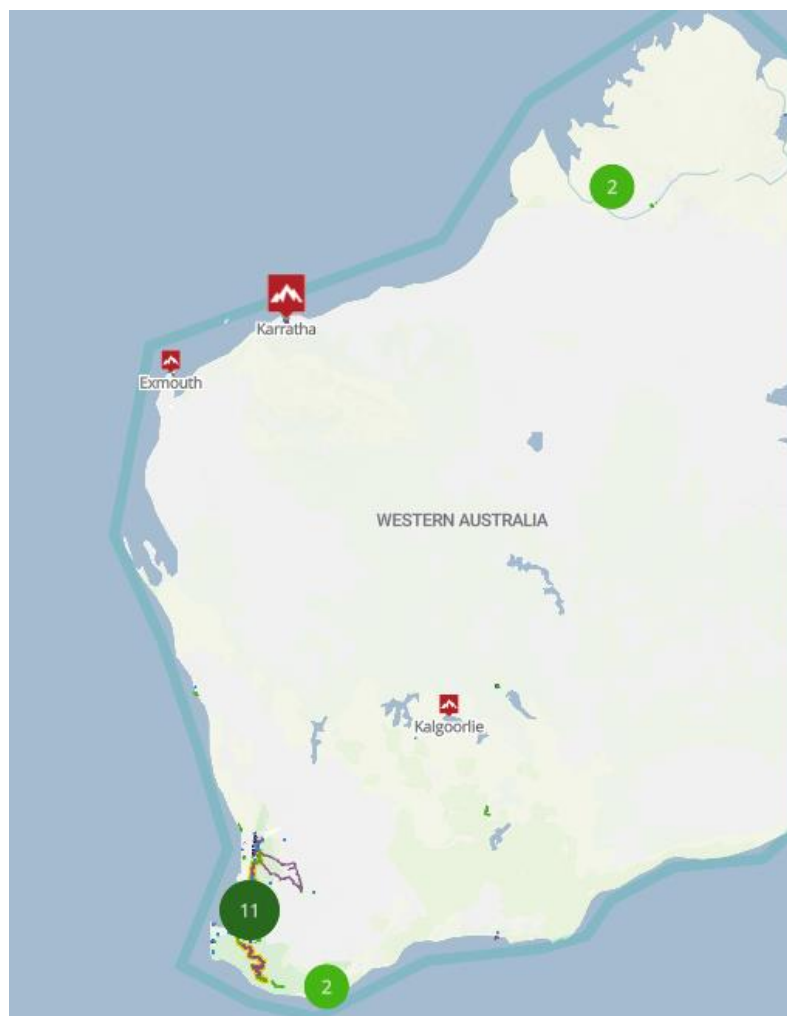
Western Australia is blessed with diverse terrain, offering locals and visitors alike the opportunity to engage in a variety of mountain bike experiences across a variety of landscapes.

Western Australia has benefited from record investment into major trail developments in recent years, with prominent new mountain bike trail networks in Collie, Dwellingup, Margaret River, Nannup and Perth Hills, and with trails in Walpole, Mt Barker and Albany in the planning and development stages. However, the majority of WA trail experiences are in the south-west of the State which presents a great opportunity for the Shire.

The Opportunity: North of the 26th Parallel

The majority of mountain biking trail infrastructure in WA is concentrated in the south-west, which provides a significant opportunity to capitalise on the winter tourist market. According to Trailforks, a prominent trail website, only Karratha, Exmouth, Derby and Fitzroy Crossing have recognised mountain bike infrastructure north of the 26th Parallel. Whilst these trails exist, only Karratha features in the top 10 WA Mountain Bike Trails according to the RAC ([Best mountain bike trails in WA | RAC WA](#)).

Winter in the Pilbara is perfect for outdoor adventure sports. The average daytime temperature in Tom Price during winter is between 23 – 25.5 degrees and the mean rainfall for the month between 10mm and 25mm (Monthly Climate Statistics, Tom Price, BOM). During the same period, Perth's average daytime temperature during winter is between 18.5 – 19.5 degrees and the mean rainfall for the month between 124mm and 147mm (Monthly Climate Statistics, Perth, BOM).



(Western Australia Mountain Biking Trails: Trailforks)

<https://www.trailforks.com/region/western-australia/?activitytype=1&z=4.2&lat=-24.36823&lon=107.52221>

The Opportunity: Tom Price and Paraburdoo Elevation

Fundamentally, Tom Price and Paraburdoo are naturally gifted with several peaks that offer the competitive advantage of significant elevation. Mountain bike trail development areas should provide the maximum possible elevation opportunity (Whitsunday Trails Concept Plan, Dirt Art 2020).

Complimentary Market – Capitalising on Karijini National Park

Mountain bike riding as a complementary activity has risen dramatically in popularity in recent years, as the sport has moved beyond the 'extreme sport' image of the past, and more towards the accurate perception of the sport as a safe, inclusive and fun 'adventure' activity.

Complementary visitation is a key component of a successful government-backed mountain bike destination as it allows the capture of a much larger target audience, and promotes longer stays, and increased travel party size. Complementary tourists include valuable family markets, who will often stay longer and spend more than solo and small group tourists (Whitsunday Trails Concept Plan, Dirt Art 2020).

Comments

The Shire of Ashburton continues to be a driving force of the Pilbara region and the Western Australian economy. Our Shire delivered 12% or \$38.6M of WA's Gross Regional Product and 1.9% of Australia's Gross Domestic Product. This contribution is dominated by the mining and resources sector.

Developing a visitor economy in Tom Price and Paraburdoo is recognised as an alternative industry for employment that adds to the liveability of the region. As noted above, mountain biking and hiking projects offer a viable tourism activity to drive demand into the town centres.

Why the visitor economy?

In 2018, the Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) completed an Economic Development Framework project to facilitate a strategic approach to economic development (ED) in the sector. This project found that whilst Economic Development doesn't have a consistent definition, local economic development usually focuses on building up the economic capacity of an area in order to improve quality of life. Economic development therefore focuses on quality outcomes while economic growth focuses on the quantity of outcomes.

THRIVE 2030 Strategy: <https://www.austrade.gov.au/news/publications/thrive-2030-strategy>

The Visitor Economy delivers quality outcomes for the community and industry

The term 'visitor economy' is used to reflect a more contemporary definition of tourism, that includes people traveling not just for leisure, but for business, work, education and visiting friends and relatives. It includes industries that directly service visitors, such as accommodation, transport, tours and attractions, as well as indirectly, such as retail, medical and food production.

The visitor economy is crucial for the Shire of Ashburton. The visitor economy does not occur in isolation, but rather strengthens resource investment by delivering long term liveable communities.

‘Australia’s visitor economy plays a critical role in driving our economy, wellbeing and sense of national identity. It generates jobs, trade, investment, and creates opportunities in cities and regions. It also contributes to communities by driving socioeconomic development and inclusive growth – providing diversity in employment, opportunities for innovation, supporting the arts, culture and sport, and delivering amenities that benefit local populations as well as visitors.’

The Regional Australia Institute’s ‘Understanding Regional Liveability Discussion Paper 2019’ highlighted that there are six indicators of liveability:

- Health services
- Education services
- Cost of living
- Amenity
- Connections to community, friends and place
- Lifestyle and opportunity

The Institute found that liveability plays an important role in the decision-making process to move to or to stay in regional Australia. The visitor economy is seen as a sustainable opportunity to deliver these long-term benefits to the community and to sustain a strong industry workforce.

Ashburton Ranges Trail Park – Preliminary Concept

The Shire of Ashburton endorsed the development of the Pilbara Trails network as a Priority Project in 2022. Financial Support for Stage 2 of the Pilbara Trails Masterplan was endorsed by Council on 9 June 2020. Stage 1 of the Masterplan recognised that the development of Mountain Bike Trails in Tom Price could turn the Pilbara into a Mountain Bike Destination.

The Ashburton Ranges Trail Park is a preliminary concept for further development. Detailed concept planning will enable the project to be put forward for grant funding submission, partnership investment and Shire budget submission.

Consultation

Chief Executive Officer

Community Lifestyle Infrastructure Plan Technical Advisory Group

Strategic Community Plan

Shire of Ashburton Strategic Community Plan 2022-2032

Strategic Objective	3. Prosperity - We will advocate and drive opportunities for the community to be economically desirable, resilient, and prosperous.
Strategic Outcome	3.4 Sustainable commerce and tourism opportunities
Strategy	4 Partner with the Pilbara Development Commission, key resource industry partners and State Government to target investment opportunities designed at stimulating more diversified business and economic development to benefit the community.

Council Policy

Council Policy – Tourism Support and Promotion

The Shire recognises that tourism will continue to be a major employer and contributor to the economy within the Shire of Ashburton, and that it needs to play an active role to facilitate the growth and development of tourism in Ashburton.

Financial Implications

Current Financial Year

\$95,000 (excl. GST) has been set aside in the 2022/2023 Annual Budget under Job J3159 Consultancy – Business and Economic Development which must be committed prior to 30 June 2023.

Future Financial Year(s)

Early estimates have indicated that the project will cost approximately \$4 million. Detailed concept designs will be prepared to provide project costing for future budget submissions.

Legislative Implications

Nil

Risk Management

Risk has been assessed against the Shire of Ashburton Risk Management Framework.

Theme	Risk	Likelihood	Consequence	Inherent Risk Rating	Risk Treatment
Reputation (social/community)	Trails experiences have been identified as a Priority Project for the Shire of Ashburton.	Possible (3)	Minor (2)	Moderate (5-9)	By following the officer's recommendation, the risk will be mitigated as the project will be endorsed for further development which will enable the project to be put forward for funding consideration.

Based on the inherent risk rating and risk treatments, the residual risk to the Shire is considered to be low.

Voting Requirements

Simple Majority

Officer Recommendation

The with respect to the Ashburton Ranges Trail Park Preliminary Concept, the Ashburton Economic and Tourism Development Committee recommends that Council,

1. Endorses the concept as a key tourism project for the Shire of Ashburton,
2. Endorses the Ashburton Economic and Tourism Development Committee to be on the project working group,
3. Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to commence detailed concept planning and development with an update report to be presented to the Committee for consideration its the November 2023 meeting.



Ashburton Ranges

TRAIL PARK

Preliminary Concept



JULY 2023





opportunity *to community*

We will be a welcoming, sustainable, and socially active district, offering a variety of opportunities to community.

At the Shire of Ashburton, we are dedicated to developing vibrant, active, and connected communities through our Strategic Community Plan's focus on People, Place, Prosperity and Performance

Our focus on developing the visitor economy delivers on a number of the outcomes under our strategic plan. Tourism Australia's Thrive 2030 Strategy highlights that the visitor economy 'generates jobs, trade, investment, and creates opportunities in cities and regions. It also contributes to communities by driving socioeconomic development and inclusive growth – providing diversity in employment, opportunities for innovation, supporting the arts, culture and sport, and delivering amenities that benefit local populations as well as visitors.'

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References

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Bourne, K. (2019). Understanding Regional Liveability: Discussion Paper. Canberra, The Regional Australia Institute.

Photo Credit

Pexels.com, Shire of Ashburton, L&Es Photography, Cakewalk Media, Ronny Dahl



Mountain Bike Tourism

Mountain bike (MTB) tourism is one of the fastest growing adventure based activities in the world and is increasing in popularity throughout Australia.

According to the Western Australian Mountain Bike Strategy 2022-2032, mountain bikers are typically high yield, and willing to travel domestically and internationally to experience new trails and participate in events.

Internationally, cycling and particularly mountain biking is increasing in popularity as an activity for tourism, recreation, sport and commuting. In the four years prior to COVID-19 in 2020, the total number of people travelling for cycling had increased each year with the total number of visitors in Western Australia cycling as part of a trip reaching 680,000.

Mountain bike infrastructure also provides an opportunity to host significant events. The Strategy recognises that events provide a useful way to highlight and promote a region, attracting domestic (local and interstate) or international participants depending on the nature and profile of the event. WA has unique landscapes and can provide a range of different event experiences. A Pilbara based event would provide a genuinely unique experience for participants.

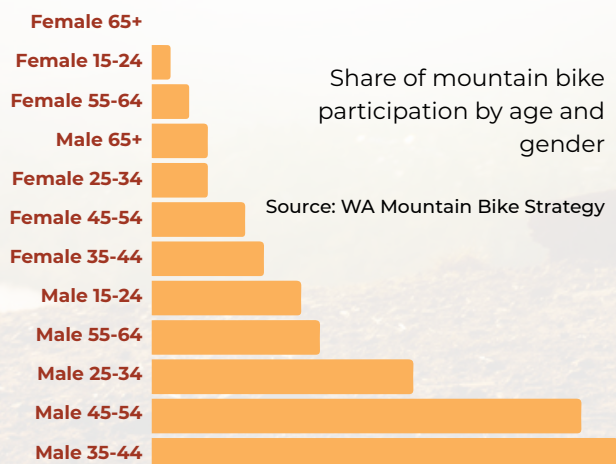
The Ashburton Ranges topography, terrain, existing infrastructure and services have the potential to create demand for mountain biking and yield significant economic benefits.

Participation Profile

While the popularity and participation in mountain biking has continued to grow, rates of participation are highly skewed to certain segments of the community.

AusPlay data shows that participation is highly skewed to middle aged males between the ages of 35-54

This is consistent with the community survey conducted with 78% of respondents identifying as male and 64% of all respondents between the age of 35-54. AusPlay reports that only 6% of participants are 15 years and under and only 17% of participants are female.



The Opportunity

Western Australia has benefited from record investment into major trail developments in recent years, with prominent new mountain bike trail networks in Collie, Dwellingup, Margaret River, Nannup, and Perth Hills. Additionally trails in Walpole, Mt Barker and Albany are in the planning and development stages. However, the majority of WA trail experiences are in the South West of the state which presents a great opportunity for the Shire of Ashburton.

North of the 26th Parallel

The majority of mountain biking trail infrastructure in Western Australia is concentrated in the South-West, which provides a significant opportunity to capitalise on the winter tourist market. According to Trailforks, a prominent trail website, only Karratha, Exmouth, Derby and Fitzroy Crossing have recognised mountain bike infrastructure north of the 26th Parallel. Whilst these trails exist, only Karratha features in the top 10 Western Australian Mountain Bike Trails according to the RAC (Best mountain bike trails in WA | RAC WA).

Winter in the Pilbara is perfect for outdoor adventure sports. The average daytime temperature in Tom Price during winter is between 23 – 25.5 degrees and the mean rainfall for the month between 10mm and 25mm (Monthly Climate Statistics, Tom Price, BOM). During the same period, Perth's average daytime temperature during winter is between 18.5 – 19.5 degrees and the mean rainfall for the month between 124mm and 147mm (Monthly Climate Statistics, Perth, BOM).

Top 10 Mountain Bike Trails in WA by RAC



Winter in the Pilbara is perfect for outdoor adventure sports.





Tom Price and Paraburdoo Elevation

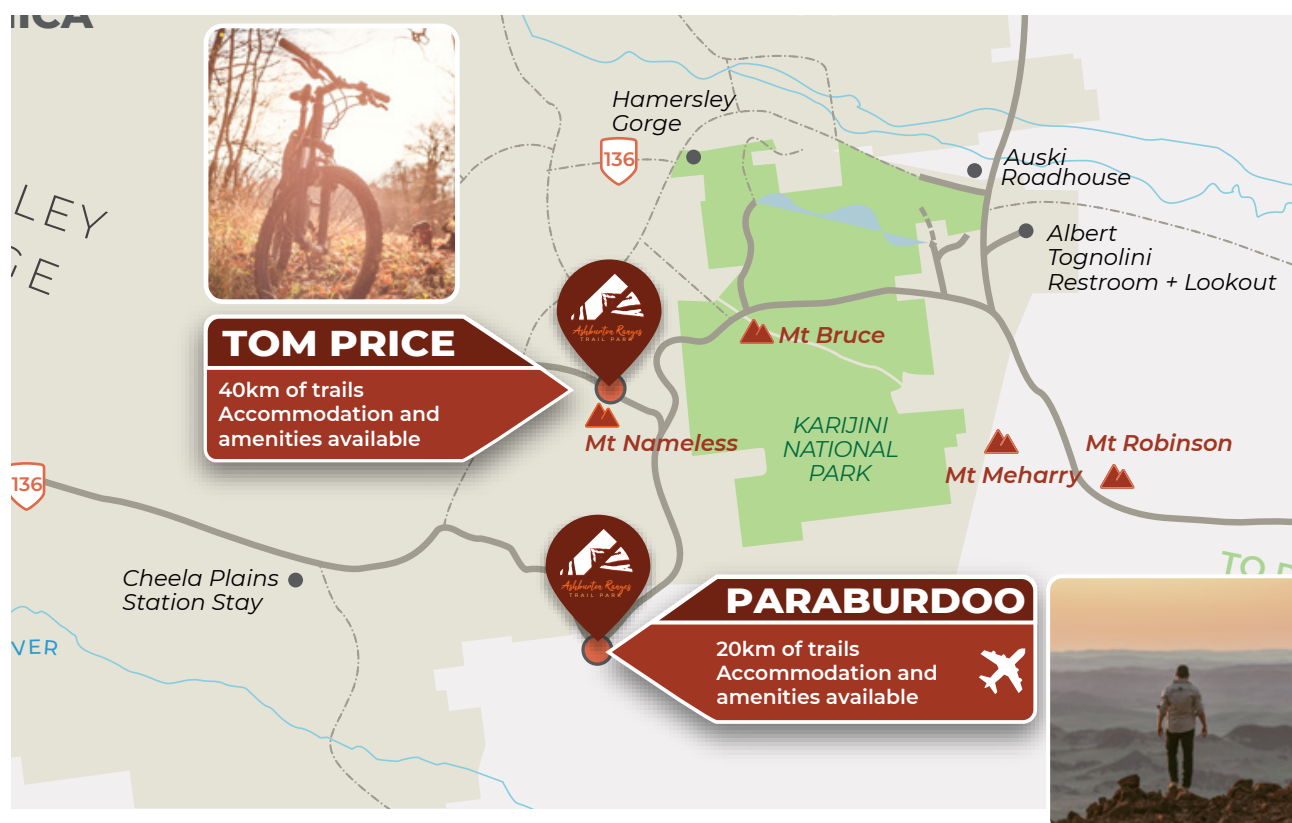
Fundamentally, Tom Price and Paraburdoo are naturally gifted with several peaks that offer the competitive advantage of significant elevation. Mountain bike trail development areas should provide the maximum possible elevation opportunity (Whitsunday Trails Concept Plan, Dirt Art 2020).

Complimentary Market – Capitalising on Karijini National Park

Mountain bike riding as a complementary activity has risen dramatically in popularity in recent years, as the sport has moved beyond the 'extreme sport' image of the past, and more towards the accurate perception of the sport as a safe, inclusive and fun 'adventure' activity.

Complementary visitation is a key component of a successful government-backed mountain bike destination as it allows the capture of a much larger target audience, and promotes longer stays, and increased travel party size. Complementary tourists include valuable family markets, who will often stay longer and spend more than solo and small group tourists (Whitsunday Trails Concept Plan, Dirt Art 2020).





The Project

The intent of the Ashburton Ranges Mountain Bike Park is to provide ~30-40km of gravity focused trails that will appeal to all user types. Tom Price has excellent mountain biking potential, with some of the best terrain in the Pilbara Region. Located close to Karijini National Park, the town is surrounded by Western Australia's highest peaks. There is potential for Tom Price to cater for the growing market seeking gravity oriented back-country experience. This type of mountain biking experience is unique in Western Australia. An accessible local scale network with potential to expand to a regionally level network, will encourage local community use and encourage visitors to the region.

The projects primary objectives are to:

- Create 40km of trails that will provide a unique drawcard in Tom Price;
- Create a smaller 20km network of trails at the Paraburdoo node to extend the length of stay in the Ashburton region;
- Cater to the wants and needs of local

riders, walkers, trail runners, dog friendly walkers, orienteering groups, schools and all abilities shared use;

- Consider the connection between the newly developed Tom Price Pump Track and existing Trail Network;
- Include a percentage of Adaptive Mountain Biking Trails which is focused on riders who have limitations riding a standard, up-right, leg powered mountain bike with guidance from Disability Sports Australia;
- Maximise economic development, business opportunities and events;
- Minimise implementation costs and complexity; and
- Minimise operational costs and complexity.



Project Key Features

- ▶ Provides experiential and branding connection between Tom Price and Paraburdoo
- ▶ Formalises existing trail experiences

**ESTIMATED
DURATION**

4 YEARS



**ESTIMATED
TOTAL COST**

\$4M



Economic Benefits & Strategic Outcomes

The *Rise of Blue Derby* case study shows the significant economic benefits that MTB tourism can have:

'The \$3.1 million, 80km network is reportedly attracting more than 30,000 visitors every year, who spend four to five nights in Derby then another five nights elsewhere in Tasmania'.

Cycle tourists typically stay longer, spend more and engage in a broader range of experiences than the average visitor

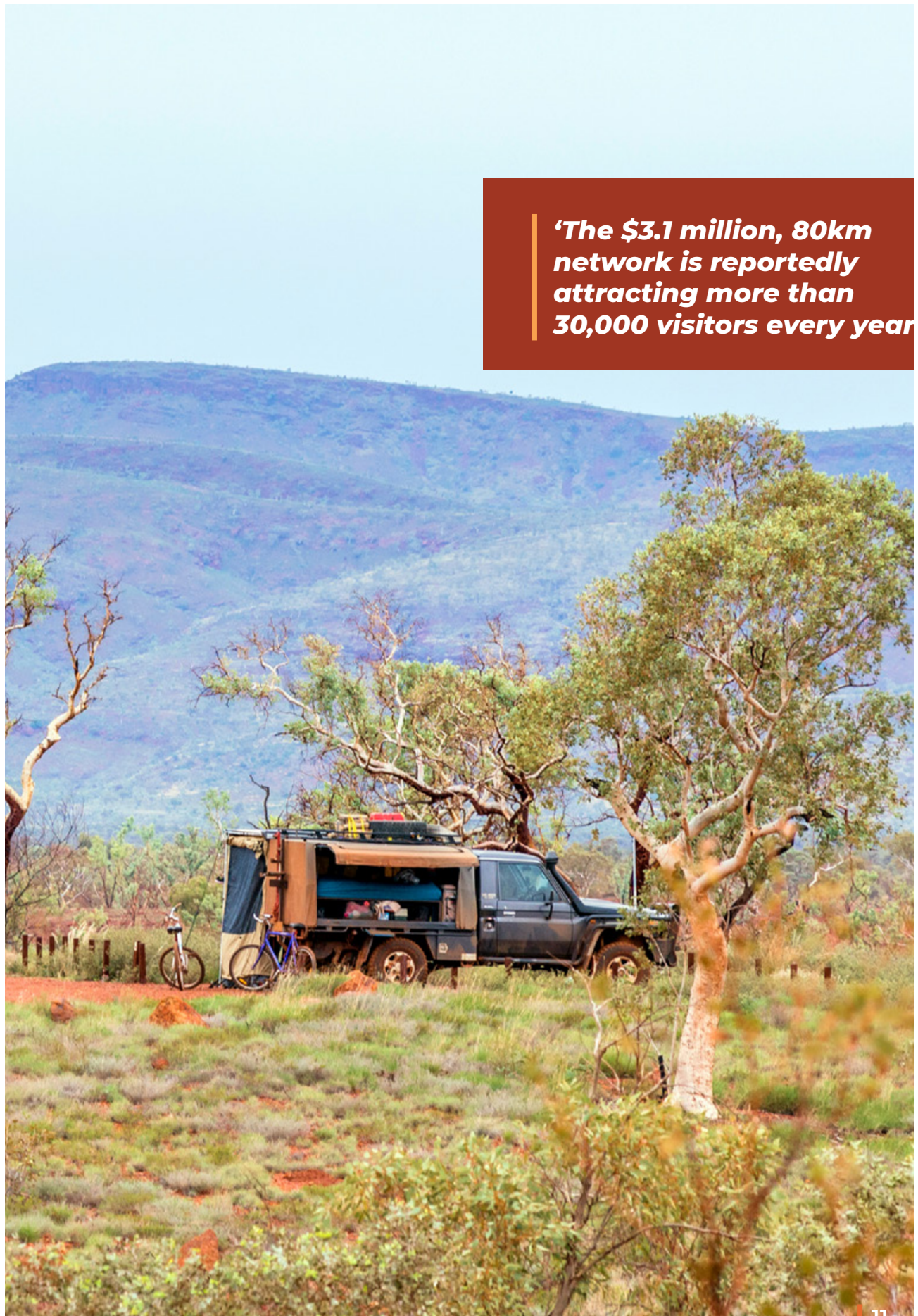
Trail networks have significant event potential

Diversifies the Tom Price and Paraburdoo adventure tourism industry capitalising on the popularity of Karijini National Park



The Western Australian Mountain Bike Strategy 2022-2032 identifies the following Economic Benefits:

- ▶ Reducing the cost and impact of poor health from physical inactivity
- ▶ For mountain bike holidays, expenditure per trip was \$1,707 for intrastate trips and \$2,485 for interstate trips.



Improving Liveability

The Regional Australia Institute states that 'livability is a critical driver of a persons decision to move to, stay in or move from a place in regional Australia.' Whilst livability means different things to different people, the institute claims that health services, amenity and lifestyle as well as connection to community are three of the five indicators of livability. Infrastructure Australia states that cities that have a high degree of liveability tend to have a high level of, and widespread accessibility to, amenity.

Amenity includes features such as:

- Open and green space; educational, social, cultural and recreational facilities;
- Opportunities to socialise with friends and family;
- Engagement in the community;
- Increased participation in a healthy outdoors activity; and
- Increased self-efficacy, risk evaluation and problem solving in children.

The Ashburton Ranges Trail Park seeks to add to the livability of the Ashburton region by providing an avenue for residents to engage with a community of like minded individuals in a healthy and free recreational activity.

Studies in other states identify that as well as providing economic benefits, mountain biking can also provide significant social and health benefits which can include:

Improving access to free outdoor recreational activities is an important outcome for the Shire of Ashburton as 74% of the population is between the ages of 10 - 59 and approximately 41% are within the core MTB age demographic of between 25-44 (Western Australian Mountain Bike Strategy).



Strategic Alignment

Shire of Ashburton

Prosperity is one of the four pillars included in the Shire of Ashburton Strategic Community Plan 2022-2032, which states that we will advocate and drive opportunities for the community to be economically desirable, resilient, and prosperous. Sustainable commerce and tourism opportunities is a key strategy adopted in the pursuit of this objective.

The Shire's Economic and Tourism Development Strategy 2019 was developed to compliment and assist with delivering outcomes aligned to the Strategic Community Plan.

The purpose of this new WA Mountain Bike Strategy is to provide an updated strategic direction for mountain biking in Western Australia.

It identifies the current and emerging key challenges and opportunities facing mountain biking and provides a series of strategies and supporting recommendations aimed at maximising the potential for social, cultural, economic, environmental, health and wellbeing outcomes for the State

Western Australian Mountain Bike Strategy

Mountain biking continues to grow in popularity globally making it one of the fastest growing sport, recreation and physical activities in the world. It has been a similar experience in Western Australia, with new people taking up the activity leading to record levels of participation across the State.¹





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6 New Business Of An Urgent Nature Introduced By Council Decision

7 Confidential Agenda Items

8 Next Meeting

The next Ashburton Economic And Tourism Development Committee will be held at 9:00am on Tuesday 8 August 2023 at Council Chambers, Onslow Shire Complex, Second Avenue, Onslow.

9 Closure Of Meeting

There being no further business, the Presiding Member closed the meeting at [enter time](#).