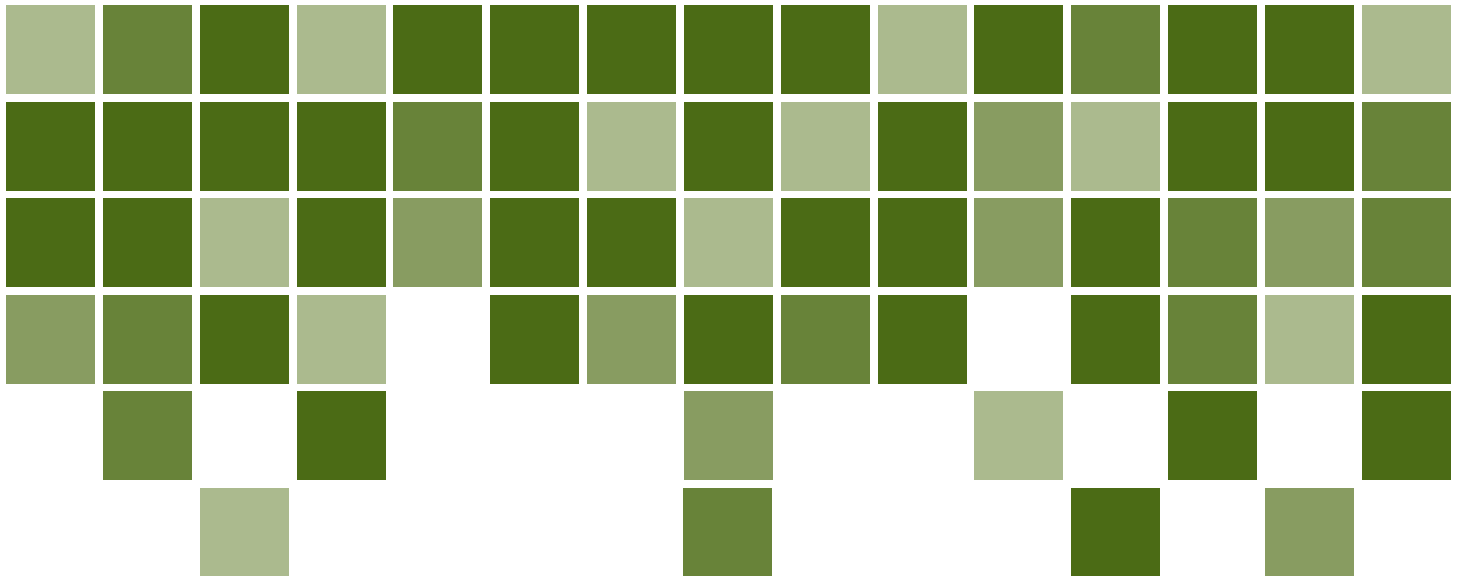




# Economic Development Strategy

## SHIRE OF MEEKATHARRA



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1 Council's Role in Economic Development.....	5
1.2 Council Objectives .....	5
1.3 Informing the Plan.....	6
<b>2 Strategy Vision and Guiding Themes.....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 Strategy Vision.....	7
2.2 Guiding Themes .....	7
<b>3 Spatial and Economic Context.....</b>	<b>8</b>
3.1 Location .....	8
3.2 Demographic Context.....	8
3.3 Economic Context.....	8
3.4 External Economic Trends and Influences.....	10
<b>4 Competitive Advantages of Meekatharra.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>5 Economic Development – Issues, Opportunities and Actions .....</b>	<b>14</b>
5.1 Physical: Enhance PUBLIC Realm .....	15
5.1.1 Existing Situation .....	15
5.1.2 Opportunities .....	15
5.1.3 Action Plan.....	16
5.2 Social: Promote a Strong, Liveable and Resilient Community.....	17
5.2.1 Existing Situation .....	17
5.2.2 Opportunities .....	17
5.2.3 Action Plan.....	19
5.3 Business: Promote a Diverse and Competitive Business Environment.....	20
5.3.1 Existing Situation .....	20
<b>5.3.2 Opportunities .....</b>	<b>21</b>
5.3.3 Action Plan.....	22
5.4 Tourism: Promote Regional Tourism Networks.....	23
5.4.1 Existing Situation .....	23
5.4.2 Opportunities .....	23
5.4.3 Action Plan.....	24
5.5 Governance/Organisational: Ensure Strong Economic Development Governance.....	25
5.5.1 Existing Situation .....	25
5.5.2 Opportunities .....	25
5.5.3 Action Plan.....	26
<b>6 Economic Development – Action Plan.....</b>	<b>27</b>
6.1 Strategy Action Plan .....	28
<b>7 Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation.....</b>	<b>33</b>
7.1 Implementing the Strategy.....	33
7.2 Monitoring and Evaluation .....	33

## Appendix A Economic Opportunity Assessment (May 2014)

# Executive Summary

The Shire of Meekatharra Economic Development Strategy (the Strategy) is regarded as a key strategic document by Council and is informed by statutory corporate documents such as the Council Plan and Strategic Community Plan 2012-2022. The Strategy has also been informed by considerable site and demographic analysis, and through consultation with the community and key stakeholders.

The purpose of the Strategy is to respond to the existing economic situation in Meekatharra and Council's vision by presenting a clear and achievable Strategy action plan for the next six (6) years. The Strategy will address the key challenges facing the Shire and leverage the competitive advantages of the town and broader region to capitalise on the identified growth and diversity opportunities.

## STRATEGY VISION AND GUIDING THEMES

Consistent with Council's economic growth objective as articulated in its Strategic Community Plan (2012-2022), the overarching vision for the future economic development of Meekatharra is as follows:

***'Meekatharra is a key strategic regional transport hub that benefits from its strong regional connections and leverages its local assets to promote economic growth, diversity and resilience. Taking advantage of its rich heritage and unique regional lifestyle, Meekatharra is an ideal location to stop, live, work and invest'.***

The following are the key guiding themes which will assist in achieving this vision:

- Theme 1 – Physical: Enhance the Public Realm.
- Theme 2 – Social: Promote a Strong, Liveable and Resilient Community.
- Theme 3 – Business: Promote a Diverse and Competitive Business Environment.
- Theme 4 – Tourism: Promote Regional Tourism Networks.
- Theme 5 – Governance/Organisation: Ensure Strong Economic Development Governance.

Prioritising where Council's resources can be best directed for the purpose of facilitating and promoting the economic development of Meekatharra is a key consideration of this Strategy.

## ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

Meekatharra's reported gross regional product (GRP) was \$1.42 billion in 2011-12; the single largest GRP of any local government in the Murchison sub-region (Regional Development Australia/MWDC 2013).

Mining, pastoralism and tourism are the Shire's mainstay industries. Mining is however the predominant and most valuable industry in Meekatharra, with 56% of local employment working in this sector.

## COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES

Meekatharra has several unique competitive advantages that serve to differentiate it from other towns and regions. These characteristics include its:

- Strategic Location.
- Regional Level Facilities.
- Natural Attractions and Heritage.
- True Outback Experience.
- Availability of Serviced Land for Industry.

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES
<p><b>Liveability Challenges</b></p> <p>Sustainable population growth will depend on enhancing liveability. This includes the provision of additional local economic opportunities (eg. retail, recreation), access to education and markets and improvements to public infrastructure.</p>	<p><b>Strategic Regional Location</b></p> <p>Meekatharra's strategic location on Great Northern Highway, between Perth and the Pilbara region, lends itself to its promotion as a key transport hub. Developing reciprocal connections with surrounding towns and key industries will be critical to expand the markets of local businesses, attract new business and create new local employment.</p>
<p><b>Low Levels of Economic Diversity</b></p> <p>Meekatharra will continue to benefit from a competitive mining industry, however too much dependence on mining will create further vulnerabilities in our economy. Industry diversification is a future challenge for Meekatharra's economy.</p>	<p><b>Industrial Growth and Development</b></p> <p>There are opportunities to expand Meekatharra's industrial offer, to position the town as a key transport and logistics hub. Through a broader strategic land use planning process, appropriately located and serviced land should be identified.</p>
<p><b>Lack of Business Leadership</b></p> <p>There is generally a lack of business leadership in town across all industry sectors. There is an opportunity for Council to support businesses to work together for the purposes of promotion and strategic planning, through establishment of a Local Chamber of Commerce/Business Association in town.</p>	<p><b>Catalytic Projects</b></p> <p>Implementing key priority projects will provide a catalyst for economic development in town. Projects will create local jobs, promote economic diversification and resilience, reduce leakage and increase local skills and liveability. Council's attention should be directed at 'low hanging fruit' in the immediate to short term.</p>
<p><b>Regional Economic Vulnerabilities</b></p> <p>The future of Meekatharra's economy is uncertain. There is a need to consider the resilience of the town and community in the face of regional or industry changes.</p>	<p><b>Regional Tourism Opportunities</b></p> <p>A regionally based tourism network will assist in dispersing tourists throughout the region through cross-promotion and increased awareness of the regions. This broader regional approach is considered critical.</p>
<p><b>Population Decline</b></p> <p>A declining population presents significant challenges for Meekatharra in terms of reduced employment, decreased expenditure for local businesses and a lower rates base which can impact on service provision and place a greater reliance on grants and other funding sources for Council income.</p>	<p><b>Arts and Culture</b></p> <p>The promotion of increased arts and culture through appropriate infrastructure, services and events is considered critical in encouraging liveability and boosting tourism in the town. There are opportunities to exploit the town's rich Indigenous and European heritage.</p>

<p><b>Tourism Seasonality</b></p> <p>There is a significant degree of seasonality in the local tourism market which detracts from the region's ability to become a year-round destination.</p>	<p><b>Mining Supply Chain</b></p> <p>Enhancing and servicing mine supply chains has been recognised as a key opportunity at the sub-regional level.</p>
<p><b>Transient Population</b></p> <p>Meekatharra is a highly transient community (Indigenous population, Government employees, FIFO workers). People therefore often live in town short term and are reluctant to invest in the town's future.</p>	<p><b>Partnerships</b></p> <p>There are opportunities to foster partnerships within town with business and industry networks, to assist in delivering on shared priorities. Examples include a Regional Partnership Agreement and a local Chamber of Commerce/ Business Association.</p>

## PRIORITY ACTIONS

Based on the actions outlined in this Strategy, the key priorities in the immediate to short term (2014-15) are as follows:

1. Prepare a business case for the development of a central retail/tourist/cultural facility in town, either as part of the Lloyds building or a new building on the corner of Main Street and Savage Street, opposite the Shire Offices.
2. Support the finalisation and implementation of the Town Revitalisation Strategy, with a focus on delivering improvements to Main Street and key entries into town.
3. Support a Local Chamber of Commerce/Business Association, to provide a one-stop-shop for business information and support services and referrals to other agencies and organisations.
4. Consult with the Federal Department of Social Services in relation to forming a Regional Partnership Agreement in Meekatharra.
5. Actively participate in a regional tourism network with other local governments in the Murchison sub-region, in consultant with the Mid-West Development Commission.

# 1 Introduction

The Shire of Meekatharra has adopted this Economic Development Strategy (the Strategy) to guide Council's work on economic development over the next six (6) years – 2014 to 2019, with specific attention placed upon delivering key priority projects in the immediate to short term. This Strategy provides:

- A discussion on Council's role in economic development.
- Identification of the Strategy vision and guiding themes for economic development which are aligned with Council's overall goals.
- Existing issues and opportunities for local economic development.
- Short, medium and longer term actions that are necessary to deliver economic development, including key priority projects.
- Guidance on implementation and ongoing monitoring/reporting.

This Strategy was preceded by an economic profile and an assessment of opportunities for economic development (Phase 1 report), which is provided as at **Appendix A**.

## 1.1 COUNCIL'S ROLE IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Shire of Meekatharra Council contributes to local economic development in three (3) key ways:

1. Connecting the economy.
2. Facilitating business and employment.
3. Enhancing liveability.

Council recognises that it directly influences the way in which the local and regional economy will develop into the future, and therefore must play a leadership role in facilitating successful outcomes. The Shire Council and its Officers recognise that it is a key stakeholder in the local community through a number of everyday activities and processes, including:

- The provision of community services that support economic activity and promote the health and well-being of the local community, a role which tends to be more prominent in smaller regional communities.
- In Meekatharra, Council is key landowner in town and a key partner in the early stages of developments (through planning, building, health approvals). It is important these decisions and outcomes are guided by an overall strategic and longer term economic vision for the town.
- Council is often the first point of contact for local businesses and the community in relation to day-to-day concerns that affect the immediate environment for business production.

Specifically, the Shire of Meekatharra Council can have an effective impact on local economic development through specific actions recommended through this Strategy, including (but not limited to) reviewing/amending its Local Planning Scheme to reflect strategic economic objectives, undertaking or collaborating on specific infrastructure/development proposals, providing economic/business information, facilitating regional partnerships, marketing/promotion or undertaking labour market or business incubator initiatives.

## 1.2 COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

The Shire of Meekatharra has prepared a Strategic Community Plan 2012-2022 (the Plan), the aim of which is as follows:

*'To build a united and cohesive community by improving safety and security and developing a sense of culture, vibrancy and energy by strengthening community development'*.

From an economic perspective, Council's Plan aims to 'maximise business and employment opportunities' through taking advantage of the towns strategic transport position and ability to attract industrial and employment development opportunities. This Strategy is aligned with this aim.

### 1.3 INFORMING THE PLAN

The Strategy has been informed by an Economic Opportunity Assessment (forming Phase 1 of the project, attached at **Appendix A**). Phase 1 assesses the current socio-economic situation in Meekatharra and identified potential opportunities for stimulating economic development in the future.

As part of this work, stakeholder consultation was undertaken comprising one-on-one and telephone interviews with individuals and business owners. Engagement with the community was also undertaken as part of a 'Welcome to Meeka' night held on the 21<sup>st</sup> March 2014.



## 2 Strategy Vision and Guiding Themes

### 2.1 STRATEGY VISION

Consistent with Council's economic growth objective articulated in its Strategy Community Plan (2012-2022), the strategic vision for the future economic development of Meekatharra is as follows:

***'Meekatharra is a key strategic regional transport hub that benefits from its strong regional connections and leverages its local assets to promote economic growth, diversity and resilience. Taking advantage of its rich heritage and unique regional lifestyle, Meekatharra is an ideal location to stop, live, work and invest'.***

### 2.2 GUIDING THEMES

The following are the key guiding themes which will assist in achieving this vision:

- Theme 1 – Physical: Enhance Public Realm.
- Theme 2 – Social: Promote a Strong, Sustainable and Resilient Community.
- Theme 3 – Business: Promote a Diverse and Competitive Business Environment.
- Theme 4 – Tourism: Promote a Regional Tourism Network.
- Theme 5 – Governance/Organisation: Ensure strong Economic Development Governance and Leadership.

These above guiding themes reflect the Federal Government Regional Economic Development Guide and will provide the framework for Council's economic development activities, articulating the core areas for Council to focus its resources in its role as a promoter and facilitator of economic development. These themes are described in more detail in the following sections of this Strategy. Each theme has a set of actions for Council and others involved in the economic development of Meekatharra.

Prioritising where Council's resources can be best directed for the purpose of facilitating and promoting the economic development of Meekatharra is a key consideration of this Strategy. It is acknowledged that aiming to 'do too much' at once will have implications around funding and resourcing, therefore a strong focus on realistic and catalytic projects, in particular 'low hanging fruits', is considered the key to success in the short term.

## 3 Spatial and Economic Context

### 3.1 LOCATION

This Strategy is focused on the local government area of Meekatharra (refer **Map 1**). Meekatharra is located within the Mid-West Development Commission (MWDC) area, along with 18 other local government areas. The administrative centre for the Mid-West region is Geraldton.

The Shire of Meekatharra covers an area of approximately 100,800sqm and is a major service centre for the mining and pastoral industries in the Murchison region. The Shire comprises 3 localities, being Meekatharra, Peak Hill and Nannine, as well as several Aboriginal communities; Yulga Jinna and Buttah Windee, and the Aboriginal education centre of Karalundi.

The town of Meekatharra is the major service centre of the Shire and contains a majority of the population. Major centres surrounding Meekatharra are Cue (110km south-west), Mount Magnet (180km south), Wiluna (182 km east), Newman (420 km north) and Geraldton (500 km south-west).

### 3.2 DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

The Shire of Meekatharra has a resident population of 1,377 persons as of the 2011 Census, representing a 21% increase since 2006, largely associated with a spike in employment relating to the surrounding resource sector. The population of the township of Meekatharra itself is however somewhat less, at 812 people.

Like many regional towns in WA, Meekatharra exhibits the demographic challenges of an ageing population, youth migration and gender imbalance. The Shire also comprises a large proportion of Indigenous persons (33%), the largest percentage of any local government in the Murchison sub-region.

Meekatharra experiences an overrepresentation of people of working age (between 20 and 49 years) and an underrepresentation of children, teenager and young adults, particularly those aged between 15-19 years. The transient nature of the population is evident from the fact that 42% of the population lived elsewhere at the time of the previous Census.

In terms of socio-economic wellbeing, Meekatharra is ranked within the first decile, meaning that it sits within the 10% most disadvantaged communities nationally. This ranking is consistent with other demographic characteristics, including a comparatively low household income, low median rent and a high percentage of people employed in low skilled occupations. This delivers challenges in local economic development.

### 3.3 ECONOMIC CONTEXT

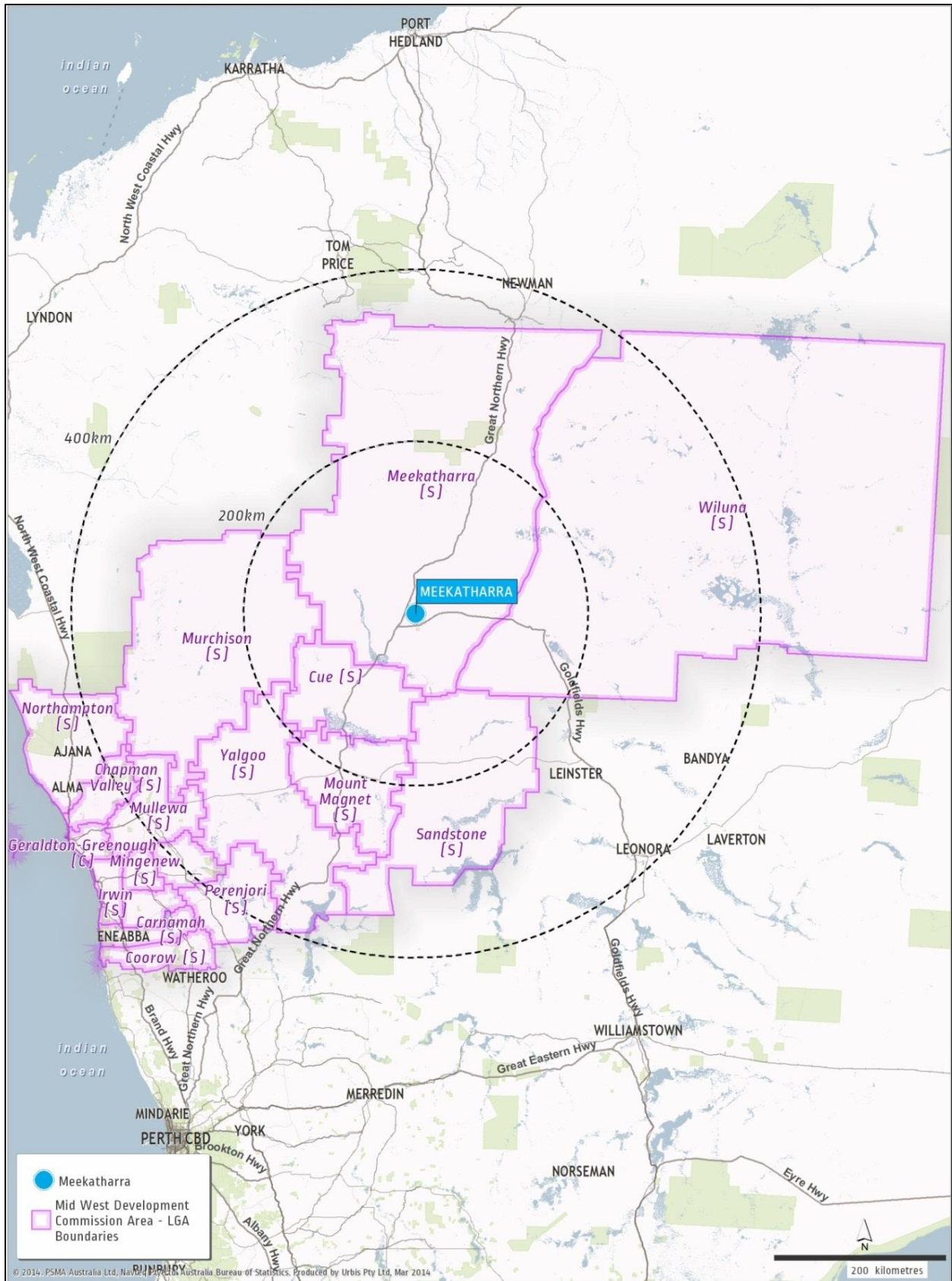
The Shire of Meekatharra had a gross regional product (GRP) of \$1.42 billion in 2011-12, which was the single largest GRP of any local government within the Murchison sub-region (35% share). Mining, pastoralism and tourism are the Shire's mainstay industries. Mining is however the predominant and most valuable industry in Meekatharra, with 56% of local employment working in this sector.

The Mid-West region boasts significant gold, iron ore, nickel, lead and uranium mineralisation. The discovery of gold in the late nineteenth century spurred a wave of development within the Murchison region, and today gold and other minerals are being actively pursued (refer **Map 2**).

Pastoral activity (principally small stock) is the traditional base of the broader Murchison economy, with stations covering much of the Shire. However, in terms of employment, the industry is declining and currently accounts for only 3.7% of the sub-regions employment (5% of Meekatharra population employed). Pastoralists throughout the Shire will continue to face considerable threats to production including attacks of livestock by feral dogs and the federal freeze on livestock exports to Indonesia<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Murchison Economic Development Strategy – Regional Development Australia*

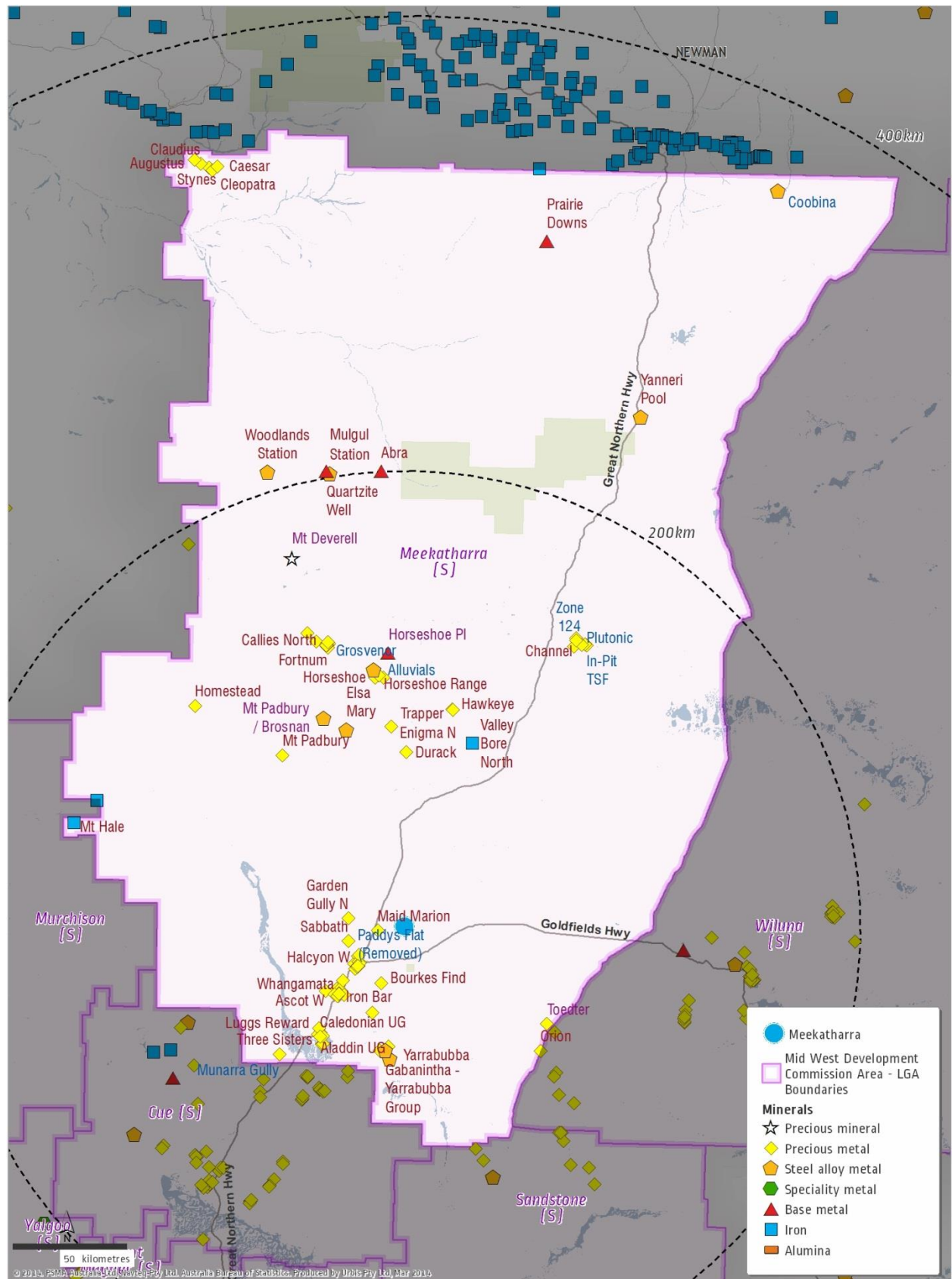


The Shire currently has a limited tourism industry. Whilst measures have been implemented in recent years to boost visitation in the area (ie. the Meeka Discovery Trail), visitor levels remain low given the limited retail offer available. Whilst the Shire (and to an extent the Community Resource Centre) effectively acts as the tourist information centre in town, information is limited and dated.

### 3.4 EXTERNAL ECONOMIC TRENDS AND INFLUENCES

A summary of the key external economic trends and influences impacting on Meekatharra's economic development is provided below.

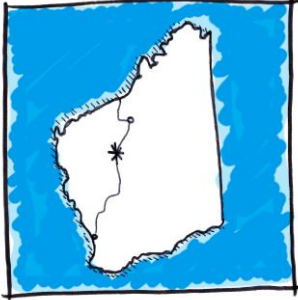

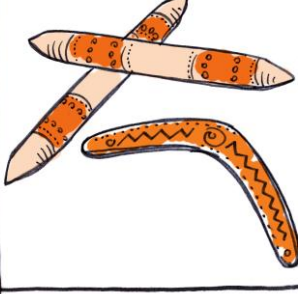

- **Economic Policies** – the Australian and Western Australian Governments work in an open and free trading economy which is subjected to world pricing for products.
- **Policy and Regulations** – the introduction of new or revised policies or regulations will have an impact on Meekatharra's economy in some form, particularly given the controversial nature of matters such as live exports. For example, the 2011 temporary ban on live exports to Indonesia and the introduction of Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System regulations which prevented sales to small, unlicensed abattoirs, as well as direct sales to the Middle East, had a considerable impact on the local pastoral industry. Similarly, the mining industry is subject to changes in policy and regulations which will have flow on effects to the local economy.
- **Climate Change** – the impact of climate change will have a future impact on economic development at all levels (community, business, Government). The impacts of climate change will include a range of physical issues such as temperature and rainfall changes, which will have flow on effects to the pastoral and tourism industries, particularly in the wet season.
- **Mining Vulnerabilities** – the decisions of individual mining companies will have a direct and real impact on the future of Meekatharra. Not only do these decisions affect the town from an employment perspective, however these decisions flow on to service industries and overall visitation levels. Given the Shire does not have the support or commitment from major mining companies (eg. BHP Billiton, Rio Tinto), the local mining industry is considered to be more conducive to the volatility of local operators, including exploration companies.
- **Remoteness and Tyranny of distance** – Similar to other regional inland towns, Meekatharra is economically disadvantaged from a locational perspective. It must cope with the additional costs for goods, services and other products, and experiences significant limitations in terms of its retail offer. The towns remoteness also has implications in promoting tourism, particularly due to the lower levels of amenity which come with being located a significant distance from the coast.
- **Global Environmental Change** – the condition of the natural environment and its capacity to support significant pastoral activity, as well as total grazing pressure, are also important considerations which will impact on the local pastoral sector.



## 4 Competitive Advantages of Meekatharra

A region or town has a **competitive advantage** when it can produce a product, good or service at a lower opportunity cost than other regions or towns. This will lead to **business competitiveness**, which is the ability of a business to sell or supply goods or services compared to a competitor, and which cannot be duplicated. This should be delivered through a strategic process, to capitalise on new opportunities, including identifying the skills, infrastructure or stakeholder involvement required.

Meekatharra has several unique competitive advantages that serve to differentiate it from other towns and regions. In order for Meekatharra to achieve the Strategy vision, it will need to capitalise on its 'unique selling point'. These unique characteristics are as follows:

<p><b>STRATEGIC LOCATION</b></p> <p>Meekatharra's strategic position on Great Northern Highway, in proximity to the Pilbara region, makes it an ideal location to attract transport, freight and logistics businesses. It is also an ideal 'stopping place' for truck drivers and tourists to stop and rest. The closest rest spots for travellers include Cue (100km south-west), Mount Magnet (200km south) and Newman (420km north) and accordingly, the town has significant strategic potential to capitalise on this unique characteristic.</p>	
<p><b>REGIONAL LEVEL FACILITIES</b></p> <p>Meekatharra provides a well-established service sector to support the local population, acting as the major supply centre for pastoral stations and established mines/exploration groups in the Murchison sub-region. The town comprises a number of Government services and education and health facilities as well as a District Hospital and Regional Airport, which acts as the regional base for the Royal Flying Doctor Service.</p>	
<p><b>NATURAL ATTRACTIONS AND HERITAGE</b></p> <p>Meekatharra is home to a wide range of natural and heritage attractions including rock formations and mineral attractions (such as Peace Gorge and former super-pit mines), native animals/birdlife and seasonal wildflowers. The Shire also comprises scenic station country. These features serve to attract retirees/grey nomads and tourists during peak season.</p> <p>The towns' remoteness, expansive setting and natural environment make it a unique place to visit and explore.</p>	
<p><b>TRUE 'OUTBACK' EXPERIENCE</b></p> <p>The Murchison sub-region is increasingly being marketed for its iconic outback landscapes, history and culture. Meekatharra provides a simple, peaceful and relaxed environment, with opportunities to promote activities and services unique to the area, such as mineral prospecting and geocaching.</p>	

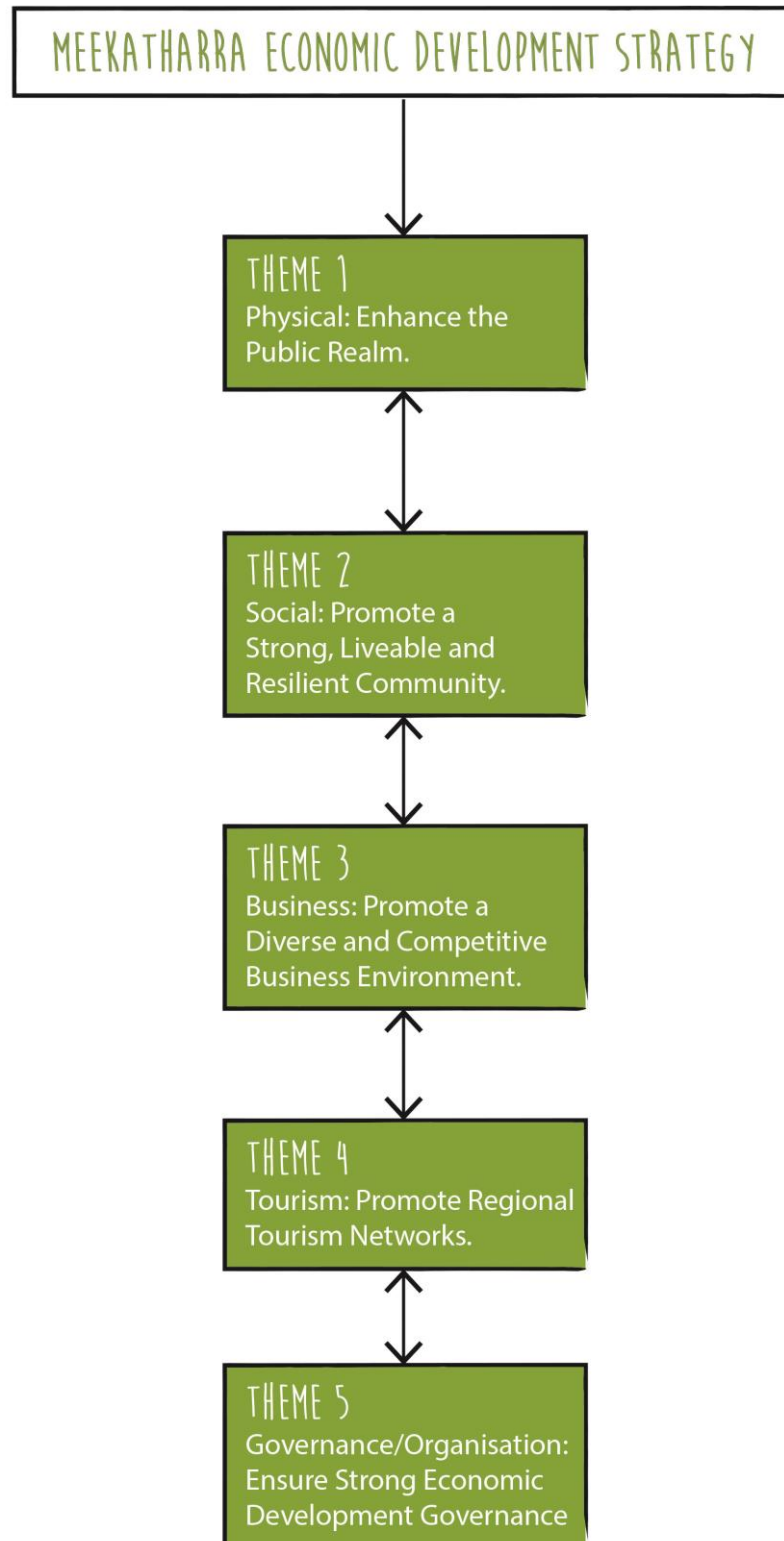
#### AVAILABILITY OF SERVICED LAND FOR INDUSTRY

Meekatharra comprises a fully-serviced industrial estate, catering for a range of light and service industries, which have been critical in attracting and maintaining local industry. Given the towns' location on Great Northern Highway and the local pastoral and resource sector, there is an opportunity to expand this offer.



## 5 Economic Development – Issues, Opportunities and Actions

This section of the Strategy provides an overview of the key existing issues, opportunities and actions proposed in order to achieve the vision and guiding themes for local economic development in Meekatharra. The flow chart below summarises the key themes forming part of this Strategy.





## 5.1 PHYSICAL: ENHANCE PUBLIC REALM

### 5.1.1 EXISTING SITUATION

Meekatharra provides a low density, dispersed urban form, which detracts from the town's ability to create a strong sense of place and core of activation. There is no noticeable cluster of activity or key meeting place which brings the community together or entices visitors/passing trade to stop and rest.

It is also apparent that existing entry statements or community spaces in town are not suitable from a usability, climate and cultural perspective and are therefore underutilised. An example of this is 'Welcome Park' which is a gated space, with large areas of hardstand and a lack of shaded spaces.

Stakeholders also commented that the youth generally do not take pride in the town. For example, streetscape improvements along Main Street in the past were removed/vandalised by children almost immediately. Streetscape improvements have now been discontinued, which has contributed to an overall decline in the town's amenity. Many stakeholders commented that they would like to see Main Street revitalised in order to promote the town as an attractive and inviting place to stop.

PICTURE 1 – MAIN STREET AND WELCOME PARK (SOURCE: URBIS 2014)



### 5.1.2 OPPORTUNITIES

#### Town Revitalisation, Land Use Planning and Legibility

There are significant opportunities in Meekatharra to revitalise the town, primarily Main Street, to provide a more attractive and community-friendly place for local residents and to entice tourists and passing trade to stop. Council is currently finalising a Town Revitalisation Strategy, with its implementation a key priority in the short term.

Through its implementation, there will be a focus on revitalising Main Street as well as key entries to town, to promote a positive sense of arrival that is reflective of its rich history, culture and heritage significance. Creating a strong sense of public amenity and safety will also be important in order to develop Meekatharra into a place where people want to live, do business and visit.

Notwithstanding recent improvements, legibility around the town is an issue. In particular, there are few reference points which provide a map of the town and its key features. Further, the small sign identifying the location of the tourist information centre within the Community Resource Centre is obscured by a tree.

From a broader land use planning perspective, there is a need to review the town from a spatial perspective and develop a blueprint for how the town should grow and develop over the next 10-15 years. Given the Shire currently does not have a Local Planning Strategy to guide growth, development and investment and its Town Planning Scheme was gazetted in 1993, this is considered a priority action.

Key opportunities and considerations include consolidating the Main Street commercial precinct, addressing land use conflicts with industrial uses and ensuring an appropriate supply of industrial land to cater for projected growth in this sector, the identification of strategic development sites, housing diversity and supply and community/recreational needs. There will also be a need to consider whether there is merit in extending the Scheme area to include the balance of the Shire (not just Meekatharra town), to guide development in other areas.

#### Agglomeration and Co-location of Uses

The agglomeration of uses and facilities around a central node will assist in creating a small hub of activity in town, and a key identifiable place for visitors to stop. The co-location of a new café facility (with alfresco dining) with tourist uses and facilities (including shower, coffee etc) will deliver a one-stop-shop for tourists and visitors as well as a key meeting place for the local community. Involvement from the community (Indigenous artists, school children) in relation to the design of the building would also be beneficial, to enable a sense of community ownership and involvement.

The economic benefits that could be generated by establishing a concentrated hub of commercial activity are considered significant, and will reinforce the character and commercial function of the town.

### 5.1.3 ACTION PLAN

#### PHYSICAL - ACTION PLAN

- Prepare a business case for the development of a central retail/tourist/cultural facility in town, either as part of the Lloyds building or a new building on the corner of Main Street and Savage Street, opposite the Shire Offices.
- Facilitate community involvement in the design of the building (ie. incorporation of Indigenous art, school).
- Pursue funding under the Northern Regions Planning Fund (or other relevant fund) to prepare a Local Planning Strategy and undertake a Local Planning Scheme review to establish a land use planning framework for the town.
- Support the finalisation and implementation of the Town Revitalisation Strategy, with a focus on delivering improvements to Main Street and key entries to town on Great Northern Highway/Main Street.
- As part of the Town Revitalisation Strategy, explore the potential for improved signage and maps through the town to improve legibility.

## 5.2 SOCIAL: PROMOTE A STRONG, LIVEABLE AND RESILIENT COMMUNITY

### 5.2.1 EXISTING SITUATION

There is a need to enhance liveability and create more opportunities for community interaction and tourism/population growth. There are significant opportunities to promote local facilities and services within town (both Government and private) to enhance local liveability, which in turn will assist in attracting and retaining the population. The towns' unique laid-back lifestyle and heritage should be embraced and enhanced.

Overall, there is a strong sense of community among residents, and a core group of people generally have a desire to be involved and have a say in Meekatharra's future. Based on consultation undertaken, there appeared to be a number of prominent and dedicated community members within town who have the desire, skills and expertise to drive innovative businesses and programs to stimulate economic development, however currently there is a perception that there are barriers to achieving such goals.

A common issue experienced by highly transient communities, where people live in town short term, is the reluctance of individuals to invest in the town's long term future. This requires initiatives to be coalesced around the capacity and passion of key individuals. Policies and actions relying on third party intervention for their success can be expected to be more difficult to achieve.

Attracting and retaining staff, particularly in Government services positions, is a critical issue in town. The Police, School, Hospital and Community Resource Centre experience significant staff turnovers, with staff typically relocating to larger centres once their contract is complete. A key issue in this regard is the current lack of any consistent official welcoming for new community members when they arrive in town, or ongoing engagement. It was commented by stakeholder that Government employees often arrive from urban areas and take a while to adjust to the remoteness of the town and limited services on offer, which can often be a daunting experience.

In terms of community safety, it was apparent that whilst residents do not consider the town to be unsafe, there are considerable issues regarding anti-social behaviour, particularly involving youth. Key issues identified by the community that has led to this include the limited role models in the community, boredom, minimal organised recreational/sporting opportunities, low participation at school and children at risk.

A number of community groups and events used to operate in town (Bundi Arts Club, Country Women Association, Lions Club, speedway, picture gardens) however a majority no longer operate for various reasons. There is a need to promote regular community/sporting and town events, to increase the level of community interaction and 'put the town on the map'. Regional events have the ability to appeal to a broader regional or sub-regional market, which can have flow on effects to the tourism and branding profile of the town.

Despite the town's appeal in attracting those who are after a laid-back, regional lifestyle, there is still a desire by people to remain 'connected' to the outside world. Given the remoteness of the town, the ability for Meekatharra to be able to access information and encourage social connectedness, is critical to the towns future economic development.

### 5.2.2 OPPORTUNITIES

#### Community Capacity Building

Strong local communities depend on key infrastructure and services however they also need enthusiastic and motivated people, community organisations that work well and a long term vision for the community, with a strong focus on practical action. Key measures for success include:

- Having local people who are willing to 'drive' action.
- Developing key relationships with people or organisations that can assist, perhaps at a regional level.
- Utilising the existing assets of the community.

- Having small, visible success within 6 months.
- Having access to some resources.
- Celebrating success.<sup>2</sup>

In Meekatharra, it was commented that there is a desire to pursue eco-ventures such as a market garden and potentially horticultural businesses, in order to produce affordable and organic fruit and vegetables, promote healthy living and create a point of difference for the town. Facilitating new retail businesses and community ventures in town and encouraging 'out of the box' initiatives will assist in giving the town a competitive and unique advantage.

### Community Events and Communication

Facilitating regular community events to maintain a level of communication and interaction between the local community, including new and existing residents, is a key focus of Council. There should also be an emphasis on marketing one annual event, with a regional drawing power (it is understood the Shire is doing this to an extent). Based on experiences in other local governments, such events can put towns 'on the map', generating significant interest at a regional level.

From a communication perspective, local economic development is highly dependent upon its access to market, suppliers and works. As technological changes and global exchanges continue to drive future economic growth, the strength of an economy's connections will be reliant on its level of communication and 'connectedness' to the outside world. The provision of a free internet wi-fi in certain areas of town has the ability to achieve a more 'connected' community, which is important given the isolation of the town.

### Increased Engagement with Industry and Indigenous Participation

To encourage structured and consistent engagement with local industry, it is considered that Meekatharra would strongly benefit from the establishment of a Regional Partnership Agreement (RPA). An RPA is a commitment by local Indigenous communities and their representative organisations, local councils, State/Territory Governments and the Australian Government to work together to address locally identified priorities and achieve sustainable improvements for Indigenous people living in a specific region. RPA's are a product of a 2005 Memorandum of Understanding between the Minerals Council of Australia and the Australian Government.

An example is the Wiluna RPA, which brings together the Shire of Wiluna, Aboriginal community representatives, delegated Shire Councillors, Federal and State Government representatives, Wiluna based agencies and mining/industry representatives, and is convened by a coordinator and Management Committee. The Wiluna RPA maintains a consistent level of communication between key members and appropriately channels investment and grants into key community infrastructure and programs.

It is considered that such an agreement would be beneficial within Meekatharra, and will have the potential to facilitate ongoing engagement between the community, Government and mining companies, aiming to address a wide scope of social, economic and cultural development needs. Together with the work of the Yulella Aboriginal Corporation, the RPA can also further target the economic participation of local Indigenous people in the surrounding mining sector.

### Arts and Culture

Arts and culture are intrinsically valuable to a local regional community and an important asset to the local economy. A creative environment attracts highly skilled residents, and art on show attracts visitors, with flow on effects to other service providers and retailers in town.

A number of local residents made the observation that there is no permanent showcase or gallery for the work of local artists (some art is sold in Perth but not in Meekatharra), despite there being considerable talent within town. This is a missing link in a region which has a reputation as a place of credible Indigenous art and culture. There is an opportunity for a permanent gallery space to be incorporated into a larger retail/cultural facility, with links to key tourism services (eg. Indigenous experience tours).

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<sup>2</sup> *Community Capacity Building Toolkit for Rural and Regional Communities – Department of Communities (Queensland Government)*

## 5.2.3 ACTION PLAN

### SOCIAL - ACTION PLAN

- In partnership with the Meekatharra Chamber of Commerce (to be formed), prepare and advertise an annual calendar of events within town.
- Consult with the Federal Department of Social Services in relation to forming a Regional Partnership Agreement in Meekatharra.
- Continue to generate a 'welcome pack' for new residents.
- Explore opportunities to promote the commercial development of Indigenous cultural tourism businesses in the Murchison sub-region, including Meekatharra, in line with industry best-practice (through the Indigenous Tourism Champions Program, Tourism Australia).
- Lobby for investment in technology and infrastructure that supports the ability of local business to succeed, improves community access to information and resources, including a feasibility study to provide a free wi-fi internet service within key areas of the town.

## 5.3 BUSINESS: PROMOTE A DIVERSE AND COMPETITIVE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

### 5.3.1 EXISTING SITUATION

The extent of retail goods in Meekatharra is limited and reflective of its low population base. This has resulted in higher prices for goods due to limited business competitiveness. The town has also seen some retail outlets close down over the past decade (eg. Lloyds building comprising a second supermarket, café, second-hand clothing store). The exception to this is the towns' entertainment offer, with 3 hotels located on Main Street, including the Commercial Hotel, Royal Mail Hotel and Meekatharra Hotel.

Based on consultation, it was evident that some local business owners did not see merit in creating a competitive business environment, with some concerned about the relative impacts on individual business productivity. Conversely, residents generally commented that they would like to see a greater diversity of retail services, such as a permanent café with alfresco dining, clothing retail and additional healthy food options.

Enhancing and servicing mine supply chains has also been recognised as a key opportunity at the sub-regional level<sup>3</sup>. In Meekatharra, the Shire and the community currently has little interaction with local mining operators, and there is a general perception there is limited opportunity for businesses to assist with the provision of everyday services to these companies, given national (or international) contractual obligations (eg. catering, dry-cleaning and other).

In the past, large settlements and towns, such as Meekatharra, developed from local enterprises servicing the gold mines in the area, however FIFO work and technology has reduced the need for workers on the ground. This has had a significant impact on the presence of local businesses within small regional communities. Key barriers to small businesses participating in mining supply chains include:

- The information gap that exists between small and large companies.
- The perceived lack of capacity in small businesses.
- Disincentives created by global supply chain management trends.
- Barriers arising from corporate policies and systems.

Notwithstanding the above, it is understood however that many local contractors currently service the mining and pastoral industries (ie. mechanical and electrical repair, building contracting and other services).

In terms of industrial development, Council has received some interest from a prominent logistics company to locating an operation in town, however due to perceived land use constraints and land availability, this did not eventuate. Given the potential benefits in attracting industry, there is a critical need to identify and safeguard appropriately located industrial land in order to facilitate Council's vision, and provide an appropriate response to future private sector opportunities.

The pastoral industry, whilst one of the traditional industries of the Murchison region, is currently facing a number of challenges, including tenure security, regulatory pressures, environmental change, stable markets, wild dogs and total grazing pressure affecting the land. At a sub-regional level, it has been documented that there is a critical need to investigate the long-term economic and environmental viability of the pastoral industry.

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<sup>3</sup> *Regional Development Australia Gascoyne and Mid-West Development Commission – Draft Murchison Economic Development Strategy – September 2013*

Overall, there is little economic diversity in the Murchison sub-region, including Meekatharra, with the mining sector being the major component of the sub-regions output. Investment in alternative industries will bolster sub-regional resilience<sup>4</sup>. In Meekatharra, this highlights opportunities to strengthen its tourism industry, through regional connections and affiliations, and target alternative and new industries (eg. eco-ventures/development).

### 5.3.2 OPPORTUNITIES

#### Local Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Encouraging small business and retail activity in town to grow is important. Within the Meekatharra community, there is a need for a small business organisation (such as a local Chamber of Commerce and Industry) to create a vibrant business community and support business growth. Specifically, the key aims of such an organisation would be to:

- Support business development that enables Meekatharra to grow and develop.
- Provide opportunities for networking involving the local business community, through organising events.
- Support new business establishment.
- Identify gaps in services to small business and seek opportunities to supply those services.
- Advocate and develop models to build a range of small business initiatives to encourage business and enterprise growth and competition within the Meekatharra community.
- Interact with business activities in surrounding towns.

Ideally, the organisation would form a partnership of local business managers, owners and professionals, and be managed by a Committee. The organisation would work closely with the Shire and act as a representative body for the business community of Meekatharra, facilitating ongoing engagement with State Government agencies and regional bodies to strengthen key relationships, and facilitating events in town.

#### Mining Supply Contracts

Greater access to the resource sector will provide local businesses with opportunities to grow by trading more goods and services, as well as provide opportunities for the introduction of new business within town. Meekatharra residents expressed a desire to generate more local employment and take advantage of potential services the town could provide mining operators within the Shire.

Through an RPA (or similar community partnership), as discussed in Section 4.2, there is scope to explore potential opportunities for joint ventures between small businesses to supply certain services and goods to mining operators in the Shire (eg. dry-cleaning, catering). In order to achieve this, there will be a need to advocate for changed policies within mining companies, to enable small businesses to service the mine's needs. This can be facilitated by an RPA, with attendance by members of Council/Shire staff and Chamber of Commerce representatives, to establish an ongoing dialogue and build relationships.

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<sup>4</sup> *Regional Development Australia Gascoyne and Mid-West Development Commission – Draft Murchison Economic Development Strategy – September 2013*

## Industrial Growth

Through a broader strategic land use planning process, Council should seek to allocate suitable sites for additional small-medium scale light industrial development or service businesses. Preferred characteristics for future sites are as follows (subject to further investigations):

- Close to Great Northern Highway.
- Within the existing industrial area, although having regard for land use conflicts with sensitive uses.
- Should there be significant demand, a new industrial estate which is sufficiently removed from housing to reduce amenity issues.
- A diversity of lots to accommodate several businesses.

### 5.3.3 ACTION PLAN

#### BUSINESS - ACTION PLAN

- Through a land use planning process, identify suitable land for retail and industrial expansion in town.
- Deliver comprehensive local business information, advisory and referral services through the establishment and operation of a Meekatharra Chamber of Commerce - a one-stop-shop for business information and support services and referrals to other agencies and organisations.
- Engage with and seek to influence corporate policies within mining companies, with promotion of how local small businesses can better service the mine's needs.
- Support and build the capacity of local businesses in the Shire, and promote home-based and alternative business ideas.
- Through the RPA, investigate opportunities to facilitate mining supply chain contracts with local mining companies
- Keep well-informed of sub-regional investigations regarding the viability of the pastoral industry.



## 5.4 TOURISM: PROMOTE REGIONAL TOURISM NETWORKS.

### 5.4.1 EXISTING SITUATION

The Shire has a limited tourism industry. Key tourist attractions within the town and surrounds include the Meeka Rangelands Discovery Trail (Town Heritage Walk and Creek Trail), Museum, State Battery, 25 Mile Well, Peace Gorge, the ghost towns of Peak Hill and Nannine and wildflowers/wildlife in areas. Whilst measures have been implemented in recent years to boost visitation in the area (ie. the Meeka Discovery Trail), visitor levels remain low partially due to the limited retail offer available in town.

The extent of accommodation in town is also limited, however potentially reflective of visitation levels. Accommodation options include the Meekatharra Accommodation Centre (Caravan Park), the Auski Inland Motel and some limited accommodation at the Commercial Hotel, Meekatharra Hotel and the Royal Mail Hotel. Other types of accommodation are not currently present in town such as backpacker's facilities and camping facilities etc. Whilst the level of accommodation provided in town is sufficient to an extent, there have been some concerns regarding the level of safety and cleanliness associated with some of these facilities.

In town, food and beverage options for tourists are limited to the 4 hotel/motel establishments, as well as a mobile food cart which currently operates on the corner of Main Street and Savage Street. Convenience food and beverage is also available at the Coles Express Roadhouse and BP Corner Store. Expanding the local food and beverage offer to appropriately cater for tourists and passing traffic is crucial in enticing people to stop.

In terms of tourist information, there is no obvious or quality tourist bureau or information centre in town which provides visitors with information regarding tourist attractions within the Shire. Whilst the Shire and Community Resource Centre effectively acts as the tourist information centre in town, information is limited and dated. Further, the tourism information sign on Main Street is largely hidden by vegetation.

Despite the accommodation options and tourist attractions, the Shire is not as successful as some of its peers in attracting tourists to the area. This is potentially a function of:

- The image and perception of Meekatharra as not a particularly nice place to stop or visit.
- The lack of marketing of the town in a regional context.
- The lack of facilities for tourists (clean toilets, showers, coffee etc).

### 5.4.2 OPPORTUNITIES

#### Regional Tourism Alliances and Markets

Meekatharra has clear commonalities with neighbouring local governments in the Murchison sub-region and to an extent, the broader Mid-West region. The unique sub-regional tourism offer is a combination of the true outback tourist experience, nature and history. Selling the unique natural capital of the sub-region through a regional tourism network is considered critical to attract and promote tourism in town. This includes a focus on emerging activities and services unique to Meekatharra and the broader region, including mineral prospecting and geocaching.

Coordination of the tourism industry at a regional level will bring considerable benefits and potential cost-savings, such as a common funding pool, cross promotion at individual tourist centres and regionally-based tourist information packages. The initiative would also benefit from a network manager who oversees the network at a regional level.

The Shire can then focus its contribution to areas which are of direct relevance –for example - nature-based tourism and mineral related activities (prospecting). The Shire should also continue to promote Meekatharra as part of the Gascoyne Murchison Outback Pathways Trail.

### Tourist/Cultural Centre

The town currently lacks a central retail/tourist/cultural facility. The agglomeration of uses and facilities around a central node will assist in creating a small hub of activity an attractive and noticeable focal point for tourists and visitors passing through town. Such facility should include a café, with alfresco dining, as well as be co-located with appropriately managed facilities for tourists and truck drivers (eg. showers, coffee and key services).

Council's role in such facility would need to be clearly defined and could involve, for example, a role in promoting the establishment to suitable landholders/tourism operators.

The presence of such a facility could also support a range of external activities and service providers such as cultural and Indigenous tours, outdoor pursuits such as geocaching and prospecting and help to underpin, by example, increasing awareness of the local environmental and sustainable development and practices. Given there is a growing 'green shift' towards environmentally aware services and products, an environmental focus would also generate tourism publicity for the Shire and its other attractions.

### Tourist Accommodation

Clean, safe and simple accommodation with the provision of simple and well-prepared meals is crucial to enticing tourists to visit, stop and spend money in Meekatharra and explore the broader Shire. Recognising the local context, opportunities exist to diversify the accommodation offer by facilitating the establishment of the following:

- High quality tourist park, including camping and ablution/shower facilities.
- Bed and breakfast accommodation, catering for overnight visitors.
- Backpacker's accommodation.
- Eco-tourism/self-contained cabins.
- Station stays.

## 5.4.3 ACTION PLAN

### TOURISM - ACTION PLAN

- Complete works on the Meeka Rangelands Discovery Trail.
- Actively participate in a Regional Tourism Network with other local governments in the Murchison sub-region, to promote outback tourism in the region.
- Identify and market a slogan – 'Meeka – a good place to stop'
- Engagement in tourism conferences and actively promote Meekatharra with tourism operators.
- Consider inclusion of tourist facilities within Lloyds Building (ie. prospecting).
- Investigate opportunities for unique tourism services to be offered in Meekatharra – ie. mineral prospecting, geocaching.

## 5.5 GOVERNANCE/ORGANISATIONAL: ENSURE STRONG ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOVERNANCE

### 5.5.1 EXISTING SITUATION

There is a general perception in the community that the Shire suffers from a degree of apathy and procrastination, particularly in relation to key projects in town. It is understood a number of projects have been commenced, however have stalled for various reasons. The transient nature of the residents (both as a result of the large Indigenous population, the FIFO workforce and Government contracts) as well as the small population base give rise to a number of issues which are perceived to impact economic growth including:

- A focus on the long term issues facing the town is difficult where over half the population are unlikely to be there in 5 years' time.
- The pool of potential sponsors of any initiative is more limited than it might first appear leading to delays in implementation of initiatives.
- There are competing views and aspirations on the best way to direct public funds depending on an individual's status as a long term or recent resident.
- With such a small population, and an even smaller proportion actively involved in Council affairs, investment decisions are interpreted by some as not being made in the best long term interests of all residents.

A key theme to emerge from the consultation was the apparent level of tension between some community members and the Shire Council. Several comments were made in relation to the level of Government procrastination regarding the completion of projects, as well as the level of transparency in local government decision-making. These issues are not unique to Meekatharra and in part relate to individual and personal disagreements which are magnified by the small population of a town.

### 5.5.2 OPPORTUNITIES

#### Council and Business Leadership

The Shire recognises the importance of working collaboratively with its stakeholders to achieve local economic development and provide appropriate support to its local business community. The Shire Council is committed to continually improving and developing economic development-related partnerships and working relationships. It is also committed to increasing the level of support and communication provided to the local business community and will continue to adopt a primary leadership role in local economic development activities.

A key priority action for the Shire in the short term should be to assist in the establishment of a Local Chamber of Commerce in town, in order to provide ongoing business support and promotion.

#### Transparency in Decision-Making

Council is committed to providing a level of openness and transparency in Council decision-making, and will involve the community and key stakeholders in key matters in order to make an informed decision.

### 5.5.3 ACTION PLAN

#### GOVERNANCE/ORGANISATIONAL ACTION PLAN

- Provide advocacy, resources and leadership to achieve Council's vision for economic development.
- Support the establishment of a Local Chamber of Commerce and Industry or Business Association in town.
- Facilitate ongoing discussions with neighbouring local governments in the sub-region (in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry) regarding the cross-promotion of local business and services.
- Implement the key priority actions of this Strategy and regularly update the community on its progress.

# 6 Economic Development – Action Plan

The following table provides a consolidated list of actions to assist in delivering Council’s vision and guiding themes of this Strategy. Each action related to a guiding theme discussed in the previous section of this document. The actions have been developed based on a detailed understanding of Council’s role in economic development, demographic and economic analysis and through consultation with key stakeholders and the community.

The list of actions marked with a ‘★’ are deemed to be of high priority.

## 6.1 STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

OBJECTIVE	ACTION NO.	ACTIONS	TIMEFRAME			INDICATIVE BUDGETARY IMPACTS	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY	PARTNERS
			2014-15	2016-17	2018-19			
<b>Theme 1</b>  <b>Physical: Enhance Public Infrastructure and Amenity</b>	1 ★	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepare a business case for the development of a central retail/tourist/cultural facility in town, either as part of the Lloyds building or a new building on the corner of Main Street and Savage Street, opposite the Shire Offices.</li> </ul>	✓			\$\$\$	Shire of Meekatharra	MWDC
	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate community involvement in the design of the building (ie. incorporation of Indigenous art, school).</li> </ul>		✓		\$	Shire of Meekatharra	Meekatharra Community
	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pursue funding under the Northern Regions Planning Fund to prepare a Local Planning Strategy and undertake a Planning Scheme review to establish a land use planning framework for the town.</li> </ul>	✓			\$\$\$	Shire of Meekatharra	Department of Planning
	4 ★	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support the finalisation and implementation of the Town Revitalisation Strategy, with a focus on delivering improvements to Main Street and key entries to town on Great Northern Highway/Main Street.</li> </ul>	✓	✓		\$\$	Shire of Meekatharra	
	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As part of the Town Revitalisation Strategy, explore the potential for improved signage and maps through the map to improve legibility.</li> </ul>	✓	✓		\$	Shire of Meekatharra	

OBJECTIVE	ACTION NO.	ACTIONS	TIMEFRAME			INDICATIVE BUDGETARY IMPACTS	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY	PARTNERS
			2014-15	2016-17	2018-19			
<b>Theme 2</b> <b>Social: Promote a Strong, Liveable and Resilient Community</b>	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepare and advertise an annual calendar of events within town.</li> </ul>	✓				Meekatharra Chamber of Commerce/ Business Association	Shire of Meekatharra
	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a 'welcome pack' of information for new residents.</li> </ul>	✓			\$	Shire of Meekatharra	Meekatharra Chamber of Commerce
	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore opportunities to promote the commercial development of Indigenous cultural tourism businesses in the Murchison sub-region, including Meekatharra, in line with industry best-practice (through the Indigenous Tourism Champions Program, Tourism Australia).</li> </ul>		✓	✓	\$\$	Shire of Meekatharra Federal and State Government	Yulella Aboriginal Corporation Tourism Australia Department of Aboriginal Affairs MWDC
	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lobby for investment in technology and infrastructure that supports the ability of local business to succeed, improves community access to information and resources, including a feasibility study to provide a free wi-fi internet service within key areas of the town.</li> </ul>		✓		\$\$\$	Shire of Meekatharra	Chamber of Commerce
	11 ★	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consult with the Federal Department of Social Services in relation to forming a Regional Partnership Agreement in Meekatharra.</li> </ul>		✓		\$\$	Shire of Meekatharra Council	Federal Government of Social Services Local Industry

OBJECTIVE	ACTION NO.	ACTIONS	TIMEFRAME			INDICATIVE BUDGETARY IMPACTS	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY	PARTNERS
			2014-15	2016-17	2018-19			
								<b>Chamber of Commerce</b>
<u>Theme 3</u> <b>Business: Promote a Diverse and Competitive Business Environment</b>	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Through a land use planning process, identify suitable land for retail and industrial expansion in town.</li> </ul>	✓			\$	Shire of Meekatharra Council	Department of Planning
	13 ★	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Deliver comprehensive local business information, advisory and referral services through supporting a Meekatharra Chamber of Commerce - a one-stop-shop for business information and support services and referrals to other agencies and organisations.</b></li> </ul>	✓			\$\$	<b>Shire of Meekatharra and Chamber of Commerce/ Business Association</b>	<b>MWDC</b>
	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Through the RPA, advocate for changed corporate policies within mining companies, with promotion of how local small businesses can better service the mine's needs.</li> </ul>		✓	✓	\$	Shire of Meekatharra	MWDC  Meekatharra Regional Partnership Agreement (when established)
	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support and build the capacity of local businesses in the Shire, and promote home-based businesses.</li> </ul>	✓			\$	Meekatharra Chamber of Commerce/ Business Association	Shire of Meekatharra
	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Through the RPA, investigate opportunities to facilitate mining supply chain contracts with local mining companies</li> </ul>		✓	✓	\$	Meekatharra Regional Partnership Agreement	Shire of Meekatharra



OBJECTIVE	ACTION NO.	ACTIONS	TIMEFRAME			INDICATIVE BUDGETARY IMPACTS	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY	PARTNERS
			2014-15	2016-17	2018-19			
	17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keep well-informed of sub-regional investigations into the long-term viability of the pastoral industry, and input where appropriate.</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓	\$	Shire of Meekatharra	MWDC
<u>Theme 4</u> <b>Tourism: Promote Regional Tourism Networks</b>	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete works on the Meeka Rangelands Discovery Trail.</li> </ul>	✓			\$\$	Shire of Meekatharra	
	19 ★	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Actively participate in a Regional Tourism Network with other local governments in the Murchison sub-region, to promote outback tourism in the region.</b></li> </ul>	✓			\$\$	Shire of Meekatharra	
	20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and market a slogan – eg. ‘Meeka – a good place to stop’.</li> </ul>	✓	✓		\$-\$\$	Shire of Meekatharra	Meekatharra Chamber of Commerce
	21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage in tourism conferences and actively promote Meekatharra with tourism operators.</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓	\$\$	Shire of Meekatharra	MWDC
	22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate opportunities for unique tourism services to be offered in Meekatharra – ie. mineral prospecting, geocaching.</li> </ul>	✓	✓		\$\$	Shire of Meekatharra	Future tourism operator in town
<u>Theme 5</u> <b>Governance/Organisation: Ensure Strong Economic Development Governance</b>	23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide advocacy, resources and leadership to achieve Council’s vision for economic development.</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓	\$\$	Shire of Meekatharra	

OBJECTIVE	ACTION NO.	ACTIONS	TIMEFRAME			INDICATIVE BUDGETARY IMPACTS	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY	PARTNERS
			2014-15	2016-17	2018-19			
	24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement the key priority actions of this Strategy.</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓	\$\$\$	Shire of Meekatharra	Various.
	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate ongoing discussions with neighbouring local governments in the sub-region (in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce) regarding the cross-promotion of local business and services.</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓	\$	Shire of Meekatharra	Meekatharra Chamber of Commerce

## 7 Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

### 7.1 IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

This Strategy provides a framework of actions for the next six (6) years. It is acknowledged that the facilitation and coordination of the Strategy Action Plan will require the dedication of sufficient human and financial resources, therefore a series of priority projects will be implemented in the short term (2014-15). These priority projects include:

1. Preparation of a business case for the development of a central retail/tourist/cultural facility in town, either as part of the Lloyds building or a new building on the corner of Main Street and Savage Street, opposite the Shire Offices.
2. Support the finalisation and implementation of the Town Revitalisation Strategy, with a focus on delivering improvements to Main Street and key entries to the town.
3. Support the establishment of a Local Chamber of Commerce and Industry/Business Association, to provide a one-stop-shop for business information and support services and referrals to other agencies and organisations.
4. Consultation with the Federal Department of Social Services in relation to forming a Regional Partnership Agreement in Meekatharra.
5. Active participation in a regional tourism network with other local governments in the Murchison sub-region, in consultation with the MWDC.

The Shire Council is committed to continually improving and developing economic development-related partnerships and working relationships. The Shire is also committed to increasing the level of support and communication provided to the local business community and will continue to adopt a primary leadership role in local economic development activities.

Importantly, Council will allocate resources to developing the town's tourist industry. As identified in the Strategy, Council will pro-actively work closely with the Mid-West Development Commission and other Murchison sub-region local government authorities to establish a regional approach to tourism, through a Murchison sub-region tourism network.

### 7.2 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Strategy provides a framework of actions of the next six (6) years. In order for this Strategy to remain relevant to the Shire's business planning, it is recommended that the implementation of the Strategy is monitored by the Shire's Community Development Officer, by undertaking the following:

- Conduct twice yearly reviews on the success of the Strategy and the status of actions by assessing against the measures of success contained within the Strategy Action Plan. A report is to be tabled to Council in this regard, to provide a sufficient update, which is then available to the public through publication of Council minutes.
- Provide bi-monthly updates to the community on the Shire's progress with the Strategy Action Plan, through a notice on the Shire's website. This will increase transparency and encourage community involvement in the process.
- Provide annual progress reports to Council on the Strategy's implementation, including the identification of any barriers to achieving any actions.

Appendix A

Economic Opportunity Assessment  
(May 2014)



# Phase 1: Economic Opportunity Analysis Report

## SHIRE OF MEEKATHARRA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1 Meekatharra Overview</b> .....	<b>4</b>
1.1 History.....	4
1.2 Regional Context.....	4
1.3 Local Context .....	5
1.4 Town Services.....	5
1.5 Transport Infrastructure .....	5
<b>2 Meekatharra Demographic and Economic Profile</b> .....	<b>8</b>
2.1 Population, Age and Migration .....	8
2.2 Education .....	10
2.3 Community Services and Facilities .....	10
2.4 Housing.....	11
2.5 Economic Profile .....	12
2.6 Tourism Profile .....	15
2.6.1 Pastoral Activity .....	17
2.6.2 Mining Operations .....	17
2.7 Social Capital .....	19
2.7.1 Socio-Economic (SEIFA) Index.....	19
2.7.2 RJCP and Income Support .....	19
2.7.3 Community Participation and Crime.....	19
2.8 Retail and Services Expenditure .....	19
2.9 Demographic Summary .....	20
<b>3 Meekatharra Situation Analysis</b> .....	<b>22</b>
3.1 Themes from Literature Review .....	22
3.2 Themes from Stakeholder Consultations.....	23
3.3 Human Capital.....	24
3.3.1 Knowledge and Expertise of Community.....	24
3.3.2 Education and Training.....	24
3.3.3 Population Thresholds .....	24
3.4 Access to Markets .....	25
3.4.1 Mining Opportunities.....	25
3.4.2 Tourism Opportunities .....	25
3.4.3 Community Events and Communication.....	27
3.5 Social and Environmental Sustainability .....	28
3.5.1 Governance.....	28
3.5.2 Community Engagement .....	28
3.5.3 Sense of Place and Community Pride.....	29
3.5.4 Land and Housing Challenge.....	29
3.5.5 Future of the Youth.....	30
3.6 Comparative Advantage and Business Competitiveness.....	31
3.6.1 Regional Positioning and Branding .....	31
3.6.2 Limited Retail Amenities .....	31
3.6.3 Community Capacity Building .....	32
3.7 Partnerships and Integrated Regional Planning.....	33
3.7.1 Engagement with Local Business .....	33
3.7.2 Industry Engagement.....	33

3.8	SWOT Analysis for Meekatharra.....	34
<b>4</b>	<b>Future Economic Opportunities for Meekatharra .....</b>	<b>35</b>
4.1	Physical.....	35
4.2	Social .....	35
4.3	Governance/Organisational .....	35
4.4	Tourism .....	36
<b>5</b>	<b>Conclusion and Next Steps.....</b>	<b>37</b>
	<b>Disclaimer .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Appendix A</b>	<b>Background Literature Review</b>	
<b>Appendix B</b>	<b>Audit of Commercial Activity (March 2014)</b>	



# Executive Summary

## STUDY PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to assess the current socio-economic situation in Meekatharra and to identify potential opportunities for stimulating economic development in the future.

This assessment forms Phase 1 of a 2-stage process of preparing an Economic Development Strategy for the Shire of Meekatharra. The Strategy (Phase 2) will provide a strategic framework for local business and Government to pursue opportunities for economic growth.

## STUDY AREA

The Shire of Meekatharra is located within the Murchison sub-region of the Mid-West region of Western Australia, and covers approximately 100,800sqm of land. The town of Meekatharra is located approximately 670 km from north-east of Perth and 390 km south of Newman, on the Great Northern Highway.

## MEEKATHARRA DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC PROFILE

A demographic analysis of Meekatharra was undertaken, based on information sourced through the 2011 ABS Census data. A summary of this analysis is provided below:

- The resident population of the Shire of Meekatharra is estimated to be in order of 1,377 people as of the 2011 Census; a 21% increase since 2006. This population can however fluctuate given the highly transient nature of the town. The population of the township of Meekatharra itself is somewhat less, at 812 people.
- Like many regional towns in WA, Meekatharra exhibits the demographic challenges of an ageing population, youth migration and gender imbalance.
- Approximately 33% of the Shire's population is Indigenous.
- Meekatharra experiences an overrepresentation of people of working age (between 20 and 49 years) and an underrepresentation of children, teenager and young adults, particular those aged between 15-19 years.
- A large proportion of dwellings in Meekatharra are identified social housing or Government subsidised housing provided by the Department of Housing for Government employees.
- The transient nature of the population is evident from the fact that 42% of the population lived elsewhere at the time of the previous Census.
- There is a high level of migrants living in Meekatharra, with approximately 42% moving to Meekatharra from 2006-2011.
- There are approximately 397 businesses (including pastoral stations) active in Meekatharra, which mostly employ between 1 and 4 people.
- The Shire of Meekatharra had a gross regional product of \$1.42 billion in 2011-12, which was the single largest GRP of any local government within the Murchison sub-region.
- Mining is the predominant industry within the Shire, accounting for approximately 41% of all employed persons.
- Employment self-sufficiency in Meekatharra is high and complicated by the higher number of jobs than the resident workforce. This reflects the fact that residents of mining camps are employed in Meekatharra but record their place of residence as elsewhere.
- The retail offer in Meekatharra is limited, however reflective of the low population base.

Overall, the demographic characteristics of Meekatharra are common to many regional towns with high ethnicity, a transient population, few teenagers and an economy dominated by the mining industry.

## KEY THEMES FROM STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

The following key opportunities and challenges for Meekatharra were identified during stakeholder consultation conducted in Meekatharra in March 2014:

- Governance and community engagement.
- Regional positioning and branding.
- Sense of place and community pride for the town.
- Potential for a regional tourism network.
- Quality of the urban environment and physical buildings (eg. Lloyds building).
- Consolidation of the Main Street commercial precinct.
- Mining opportunities.
- Future of the youth.
- Education and training.

## ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ASSESSMENT

A range of economic development opportunities were identified as part of this Assessment, as summarised below. These opportunities will form the basis for further investigation and testing as part of Phase 2 of this project:

- Physical
  - Implement the key recommendations of Meekatharra Revitalisation Project, with a focus on enhancing the amenity of Main Street.
  - Actively pursue funding under the Northern Regions Planning Fund to prepare a Local Planning Strategy and undertake a Planning Scheme review process to establish a land use planning framework for the Shire.
  - Revitalisation and improvement to key community spaces (e.g. Welcome Park) through incorporation of public art, shaded areas to eat lunch, grassed areas to sit).
  - Improvement to town entry statements to signal the arrival into town.
  - Consolidation of the town core.
- Social
  - Prepare a business case for the establishment of a central retail/tourist/cultural centre in town.
  - Regular community events to maintain a level of communication/interaction.
  - In partnership with local business groups, develop a 'welcome pack' for new residents.
  - Encourage and promote community ventures such as eco-development and eco-tourism.
  - Through an RPA (or similar), explore potential opportunities for joint ventures between small businesses to supply certain services and goods to mines.

- Support mainstream work readiness programs undertaken by the Yulella Aboriginal Corporation (e.g. Government Agency cadetship and local training programs with mining companies).
- Governance/Organisational
  - Lobby the establishment of a Meekatharra Regional Partnership Agreement (RPA) in order to encourage a level of engagement between the local Aboriginal community and all levels of community, as well as the wider community.
  - Establish a local Chamber of Commerce to encourage communication between local business groups and facilitate local employment in the town and consider expanding relationships with surrounding towns.
  - Establish regular communication with mining companies.
  - Prepare a skills or business audit in partnership with surrounding townships.
  - Establish a dialogue with mining businesses in the area to explore opportunities to better service their operational needs with local business.
- Tourism
  - Participate in a regional or sub-regional tourism network, to promote outback tourism in the region.
  - Identify and market a slogan – eg. ‘Meeka – a great place to stop’.
  - Facilitate a strategic positioning process (ie. strategic regional location – transport hub).
  - Support new retail business in town and encourage ‘blue sky’ and ‘out of the box’ initiatives.
  - Prepare and circulate tourism information and commit to updating periodically.



# Introduction

## STUDY PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to assess the current socio-economic situation in Meekatharra and to identify potential opportunities to support and promote economic activity. This assessment is the first stage of a two-stage process of preparing an Economic Development Strategy for the Shire. The Strategy (Phase 2) will provide a strategic framework for local business and Government to pursue opportunities for economic growth in the town and broader Shire.

It is understood the Strategy will assist in informing the preparation of a Local Planning Strategy, which will provide the planning direction for the sustainable growth and development of the Shire for the next 15 years. It will apply State and Regional planning policies and provides the rationale for land use planning and development within the town and broader Shire, and will inform a review of the Shire's Town Planning Scheme No.3.

## METHODOLOGY

This Assessment is based on information obtained through desktop investigations and stakeholder and community consultation undertaken in Meekatharra and Perth in March 2014, and secondary research obtained through desktop investigations.

The community consultation process was undertaken in Meekatharra on the 21<sup>st</sup> March 2014 as part of a 'Welcome to Meeka' night held at the Shire Hall, which welcomed new residents to the town. A series of one-on-one consultations were also undertaken on the 10-11<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> March with key local businesses, Government and community group representatives, which focused on further exploring the key ideas and themes that were generated during the initial investigations.

Information has also been obtained from the following secondary sources to compile this assessment:

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011).
- Mid-West Development Commission.
- Main Roads Western Australia.
- Tourism WA and Tourism Research Australia.
- Mining Company Annual Reports and Environmental Assessment Reports.
- Department of Education and Training.
- Western Australian Planning Commission.
- Australian Government of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport.

The key themes and sentiments to emerge from the stakeholder consultations and literature review have been categorised into five (5) key determinants for long-term regional economic development activities, based on the Australian Government Regional Economic Development Guide<sup>1</sup>. These include:

- Human Capital.
- Social and Environmental Sustainability.
- Access to Markets.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Government – Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport – Regional Economic Development Guide.

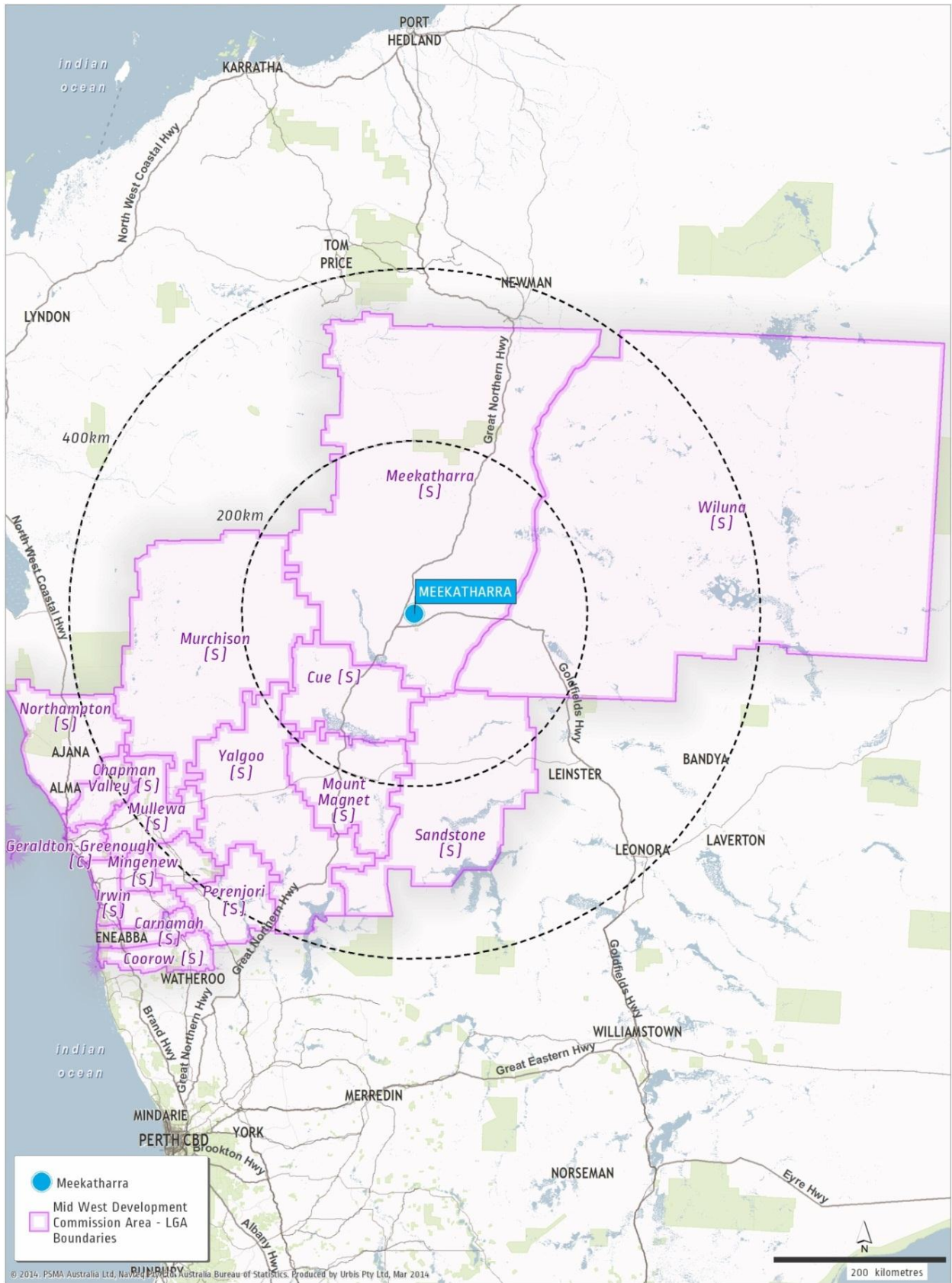
- Comparative Advantage and Business Competitiveness.
- Partnerships and Integrated Planning.

## STUDY AREA

The Shire of Meekatharra covers an area of approximately 100,800sqm and is a major service centre for the mining and pastoral industries in the Murchison sub-region. The Shire comprises 3 localities, being Meekatharra, Peak Hill and Nannine, as well as several Aboriginal communities; Yulga Jinna and Buttah Windee, and the Aboriginal education centre of Karalundi.

The town of Meekatharra is the major service centre of the Shire and contains a majority of the population. Major centres surrounding Meekatharra are Wiluna (182 km east), Newman (360 km north) and Kalgoorlie (550 km south-west).

Meekatharra is located within the Mid-West Development Commission (MWDC) area, along with 18 other local government areas (as shown on **Map 1**). The administrative centre for the Mid-West region is Geraldton. Meekatharra is predominantly a mining town (with a rich gold mining history), however also comprises a number of large pastoral leases.



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# 1 Meekatharra Overview

## 1.1 HISTORY

The township of Meekatharra was gazetted in 1903, however the town came into existence in the 1890's when gold was discovered in the East Murchison area. By 1891, gold was being mined at both Nannine and Annean Station. The Peak Hill goldfield opened up in 1892 and by 1894, a ten-head battery had been built to crush and process ore at Garden Gully.

In 1908, the Canning Stock Route from the East Kimberly region to Murchison was completed and when the railway arrived in Meekatharra in 1910, the town became the railhead at the end of the route. In 1901 the town's population was recorded at 75 people, however by 1911 this had grown to 2,404 and by 1914 it had become the largest town in the Murchison sub-region.

The first Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) base was established in Port Hedland in 1935, and opened up in Meekatharra soon after, with the town's regional airport still used as an RFDS base today. In 1940, Meekatharra began a period of decline when some of the larger mines started to close, however the Shire experienced a resurgence of the gold rush during the mining boom of the 1980s at the Bluebird Gold Mine. This period continued through the 1990s as another substantial gold deposit just south of the town was discovered, in the Paddy's Flat area.

Meekatharra was the first town in Australia powered by solar energy. When a solar diesel power station was built near the town in 1982 it was the largest of its kind in the world and responsible for bringing recognition to the town. It has since been decommissioned<sup>2</sup>.

## 1.2 REGIONAL CONTEXT

The Shire Meekatharra is located within the Murchison sub-region of the Mid-West Development Commission (MWDC) area, along with 18 other local government areas (as shown on **Map 1**). The administrative centre for the broader Mid-West region is Geraldton.

The Murchison sub-region is located to the east of the Batavia Coast and North Midlands sub-regions, sharing borders with the Gascoyne region to the west, the Pilbara region to the north and the Goldfields-Esperance and Wheatbelt region to the south. The Murchison sub-region covers a total area of approximately 423,000sqm, and comprises the Shire's of Murchison, Yalgoo, Mount Magnet, Cue, Sandstone, Wiluna and Meekatharra. Meekatharra is the largest and most populous centre in the Murchison sub-region.

The town's position on Great Northern Highway provides a strategic position on a key highway connecting Perth to Newman and beyond to Port Hedland. The town also sits at the junction of the Great Northern Highway with the Goldfields Highway, which provides the east-west route between Meekatharra and Wiluna.

Traffic Volumes on Great Northern Highway through Meekatharra (between Norie Road and the Goldfields Highway) were recorded in 2006/07 to be 450 vehicles per day, of which 47.8% are heavy vehicles (Source: Main Roads 2006-07 – latest available data).

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<sup>2</sup> Source – Sydney Morning Herald, Flying Doctor Organisation, Reed Resources.

### 1.3 LOCAL CONTEXT

The town of Meekatharra is located on the Great Northern Highway and is the major service centre for numerous pastoral stations, established mines and exploration companies within the Shire.

Main Street is the primary focus for commercial and entertainment activity in town, and comprises a majority of Government services. Main Street is incorporated within the Great Northern Highway itself and extends approximately 1.35km in length and is up to 30m wide in some areas, resulting in a dispersed town, lacking a central core of activity. There are also significant gaps in development along the Main Street frontage. Given Main Street comprises a portion of Great Northern Highway, the town also regularly experiences large road trains travelling through the centre of town.

The width of the Main Street and nature of traffic (frequent heavy road trains) presents challenges and opportunities for Meekatharra.

A light/service industrial precinct is located within the eastern portion of town, comprising a number of contractors and service industries. An educational/health/recreational precinct is also located to the west of town, comprising the high school, hospital and some sporting facilities.

A local context plan (**Map 2**) has been prepared which illustrates the existing spatial and land use configuration of the town and key land uses.

### 1.4 TOWN SERVICES

The town offers the following services in the town of Meekatharra:

- Retail – retail services in town are limited, however reflective of the low population base. Key retail services include 1 supermarket, 2 convenience store/service stations, a mobile food cart/café, 3 hotels and some limited specialty retail. Whilst the town provides an adequate level of retail services for everyday and convenience purposes, higher order goods are required to be purchased from larger urban centres (eg. Geraldton, Perth).
- Health – the Meekatharra District Hospital provides emergency healthcare facilities, as well as a mental clinic, community health centre and an aged hostel. The hospital however doesn't provide several healthcare services such as physiotherapy, podiatry, paediatrics, dietetics etc., which rely on visits from healthcare professionals, which can be as infrequent as once a month.
- Education and Training – the Meekatharra District High School caters for students from Year 1 to 12. There are limited further education and tertiary opportunities within Meekatharra, with people having to relocate to centres such as Geraldton or Perth to participate in university or TAFE courses. The Community Resource Centre however facilitates some limited courses (eg. computer and Internet courses).
- Government – the town of Meekatharra comprises the Shire Offices and some limited State Government services, including the Departments of Child Protection, Mines and Petroleum, Housing and Corrections, however a majority of Government services are operated either from Perth or regional offices in Geraldton.

### 1.5 TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

The transport infrastructure context of the Shire is summarised below:

- Meekatharra Regional Airport - the town of Meekatharra comprises a regional airport, which comprises a 2181m runway, which was built by the American Air Force during World War II. The runway still services an important diversion airport for inbound and transcontinental flights to Australia, and serves as a regional base for the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

As of April 2014, Skippers Aviation operates four (4) flights per week (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday) to Meekatharra, providing multiple stop flights which service either Mount Magnet or Wiluna also, depending on the particular day.

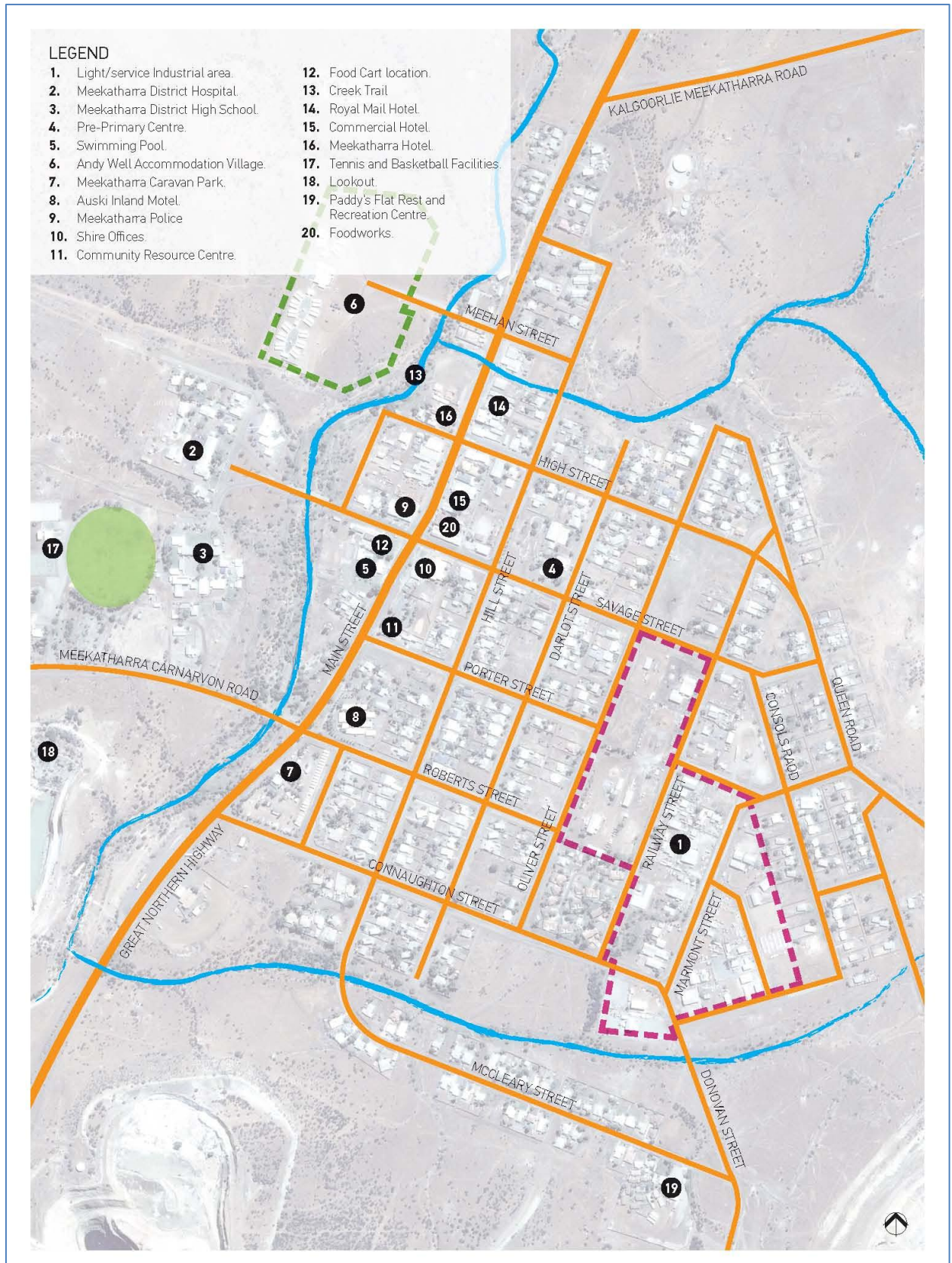


- Great Northern Highway - Great Northern Highway is a State Highway and Primary Distributor Road. Great Northern Highway is a major freight route that links Perth with the State's most northern port in Wyndham and through to Darwin, passing directly through Meekatharra. The highway is constructed as a sealed, predominantly 2-lane single carriageway.
- Main Street - Main Street is a north-south road located to the west of the town and is the primary focus for commercial, community and Government activity in town. Main Street forms part of Great Northern Highway, which extends north to Newman and south to Perth. Given its highway status, Main Street comprises large volumes of heavy vehicles which can detract from the street environment.
- Goldfields Highway - the Goldfields Highway is a State Highway that extends almost 800km from south of Kambalda in the Goldfields, to Meekatharra. It is a Primary Distributor Road and carries a significant proportion of freight and commuter traffic associated with mining and pastoral activities. In its current unsealed form, the section of Goldfields Highway between Wiluna and Meekatharra is subject to regular closures due to rainfall. There is also significant commuting between Wiluna and Meekatharra for socio-cultural reasons as well as for accessing higher order retail, medical and social services.

According to Main Roads WA (2014), the State Government has committed \$10 million of Royalties for Regions funding (matched by Main Roads WA) to commence immediate upgrades to this link, over a 3 year period between 2012/13 and 2014/15. It is anticipated that up to 25km of road will be fully reconstructed and sealed between Wiluna and Meekatharra, which will include a number of new floodways which will reduce the time the road is closed by minor rainfall events<sup>3</sup>. The eventual extent of sealing is believed to be in the order of 100km.

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<sup>3</sup> *Goldfields Highway Upgrade – Main Roads WA (2014)*



## 2 Meekatharra Demographic and Economic Profile

The following section provides a demographic and economic profile of Meekatharra. It should be noted that the ABS 2011 Census data available for Meekatharra is complicated by the small population base and presence of a large FIFO workforce. It nonetheless remains useful in understanding the current demographic characteristics.

### 2.1 POPULATION, AGE AND MIGRATION

There were 1,377 persons living in the Shire of Meekatharra at the time of the 2011 Census, comprising 822 males and 555 females (refer Chart 2.1, below). This reflects a strong male dominated workforce present in Meekatharra associated with the surrounding mining and pastoral industries. The Shire population has increased by 21% from 2006 to 2011, reflecting the increase in mining activity throughout the region, over that period.

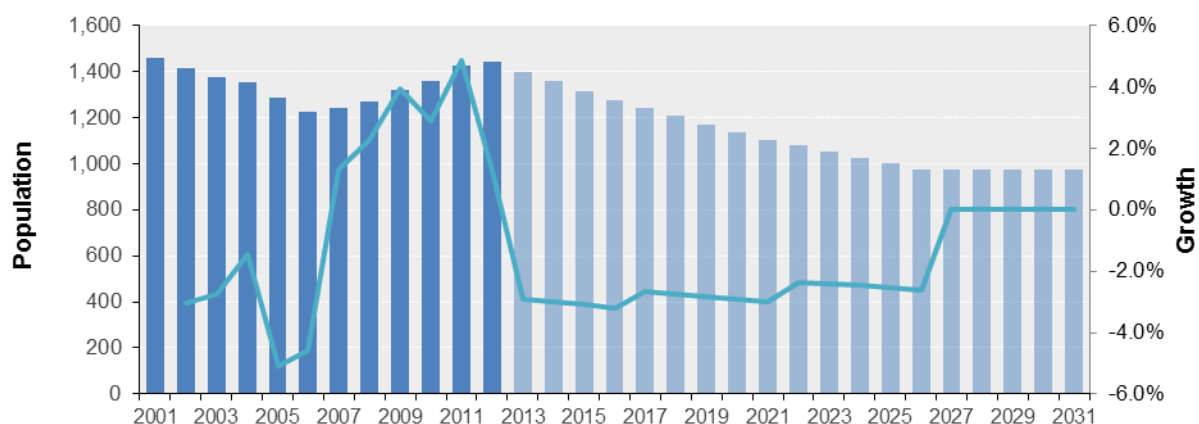
Of the total population, approximately 33% are Indigenous, compared to 3% of the total State population. According to the Department of Regional Development, over 10% of the population of the Mid-West region identify as being Indigenous, with over half living within the Shire of Meekatharra.

Meekatharra has a highly transient population due to its remoteness and the large population, as well as its high proportion of Indigenous residents. Further, Government agencies (Meekatharra Police, Council, Hospital) typically employ people on fixed term contracts (1 or 2 years), leading to a high turnover of staff,

#### Past and Future Population

MEEKATHARRA LGA, 2001 - 2031

CHART 2.1



1. Calendar Years

Source : ABS Census 2011; WAPC; Urbis

The Shire is located within the Department of Aboriginal Affairs Mid-West District, and comprises a number of Aboriginal settlements, including the Buttah Windee (Gidgee Gully) Community, Yulga Finna (Fraser Well) Community, the Madunka Ewurry community and the Karalundi Aboriginal Education Community.

The Ngoonooru Wadjari and Yugunga-Nya people are predominant among the residential Indigenous population in the Shire.

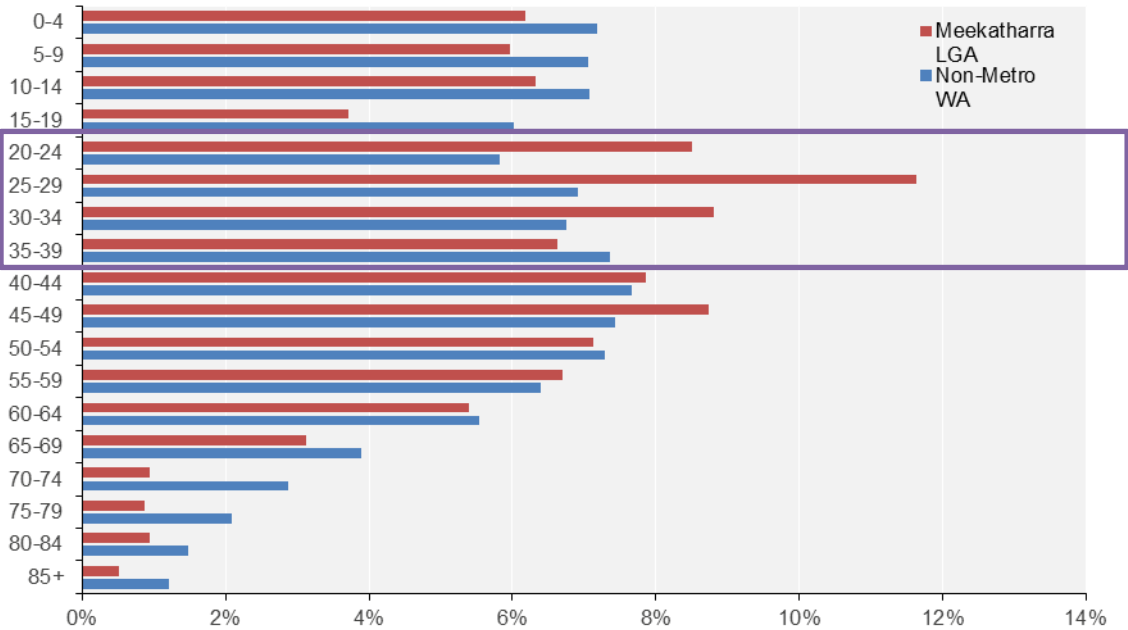
The Shire has an overrepresentation of people aged between 20 and 49 years compared to the non-metropolitan average, representing those of working age employed in the surrounding mining and pastoral industries. In comparison, a low percentage of residents are aged 0-19, reflecting the limited educational and recreational opportunities for youth in town (refer Chart 2.2).

The median age in the Shire is 35.1 years, compared to the non-Metropolitan average of 36.7 years.

Age (5 year band)

MEEKATHARRA LGA, 2011

CHART 2.2



Source : ABS Census 2011; Urbis

Table 2.1, below, indicates a high proportion of migrants that reside in the Shire, with approximately 42% new residents moving to Meekatharra within the year prior to the 2011 Census.

Immigration Statistics

MEEKATHARRA LGA, 2011

TABLE 2.1

	1 Year Change	5 Year change
Moved In	572	856
Moved within the area	57	78
Moved out	100	311
Non-movers	747	442
<b>Net migration</b>	<b>472</b>	<b>545</b>
<b>Total Population (2011)</b>	<b>1,376</b>	<b>1,376</b>
% New residents	42%	62%

Source : ABS Census 2011; Urbis

This analysis of recent migration highlights the significant population ‘churn’ evident in Meekatharra with almost two-thirds of the population at 2011 residing elsewhere 5 years ago. This high rate of movement is common in many similar regional towns and presents challenges in identifying and promoting actions and policies where any benefits accrue to future residents.

## 2.2 EDUCATION

The Meekatharra District High School caters for students from Kindergarten to Year 12, with a variety of specialist academic, cultural, sporting and social programs. The school also comprises a farm which is used as an alternative program for students as well as a library, administration block, oval facilities and access to the community swimming pool and other facilities in town. It is understood the school has been identified as a 'Difficult to Staff' school, due partly to its isolation from Perth which has resulted in a frequent turnover of staff.

The Meekatharra 'School of the Air' School previously operated in Meekatharra however now operates from Geraldton. The school allows students living on remote pastoral stations in Meekatharra to engage in education over live one-way video feeds, and clear two-way radio.

According to Department of Education and Training statistics, in Semester 2, 2013, there were a total of 161 students enrolled at the Meekatharra District High School, comprising 131 kindergarten, pre-primary and primary school students and 30 high school students. The total enrolments from 2012 to 2013 increased by just 4 students. The Meekatharra 'School of the Air' recorded 37 enrolments in Semester 2, 2013.

The Karalundi Aboriginal Education Community Inc. School is located 60km north of Meekatharra on the Great Northern Highway and is recognised as one of the leading schools in Aboriginals education in Western Australia. The school consists of a Kindergarten to Year 12 co-educational boarding school for Aboriginal students and is a mandated drug and alcohol free, Christian community school. Students are resident only in the school term and return to their communities for the holiday period.

The Yulga Jinna Remote Indigenous School also operates within Yulga Jinna; a small Aboriginal community located approximately 130km north-west of Meekatharra.

There are limited further education and tertiary opportunities within Meekatharra, with people having to relocate to centres such as Geraldton or Perth to participate in university or TAFE courses. The Community Resource Centre however facilitates some limited courses (eg. computer and Internet courses), which are available to the broader community.

## 2.3 COMMUNITY SERVICES AND FACILITIES

The provision of community services relating to health care and recreation is limited, with Meekatharra serving primarily as a service centre for the mining and pastoral sectors. The Meekatharra District Hospital provides emergency healthcare facilities and supplies the staff called upon for Royal Flying Doctor Service operations.

The hospital doesn't however provide any healthcare services such as physiotherapy, podiatry, paediatrics, dietetics etc., which rely on visits from healthcare professionals, which can be as infrequent as once a month.

In terms of recreational services and facilities in town, the following is provided:

- Youth and Sports Precinct, including a BMX track, squash courts, playground facilities, tennis courts.
- Gym facilities, Pool, Oval, Basketball, Netball, Hockey, Cricket, Soccer, Football, Competitive Darts.
- Golf Club, Rifle Club, Race Club.

Whilst the swimming pool is a well-used facility, we understand that the patronage of many other sporting facilities in town is modest at best, potentially highlighting the difficulty of identifying individuals to run sporting clubs.

A local community radio station (Meekatharra 98.3 FM) is also operated in town, which promotes local events and activities. The Shire also produces a local distributed magazine, 'The Golden Prospect', which concentrates on local community issues and events.

## 2.4 HOUSING

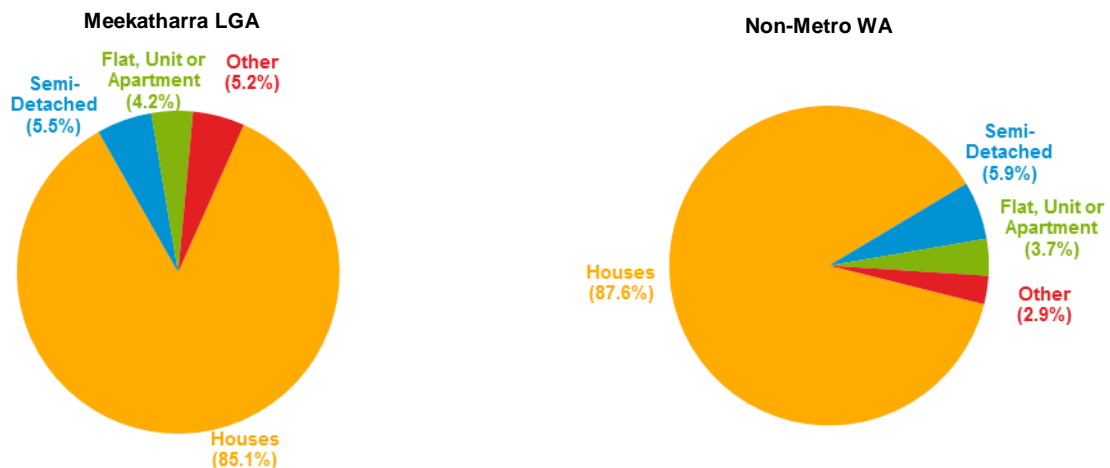
There are approximately 371 private dwellings in the Meekatharra LGA, of which about 290 are located within the town. Approximately 14 dwellings have been built within the past 10 years. Through consultation, it is understood some new house have been built recently within the town, and some refurbished by the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

The prevalent form of housing in the Shire is a single house (85.1%), which is comparable with the non-metropolitan WA trend. The housing stock is also indicative of a rural remote and largely Indigenous community.

### Dwelling Structure (%)

MEEKATHARRA LGA, 2011

CHART 2.3



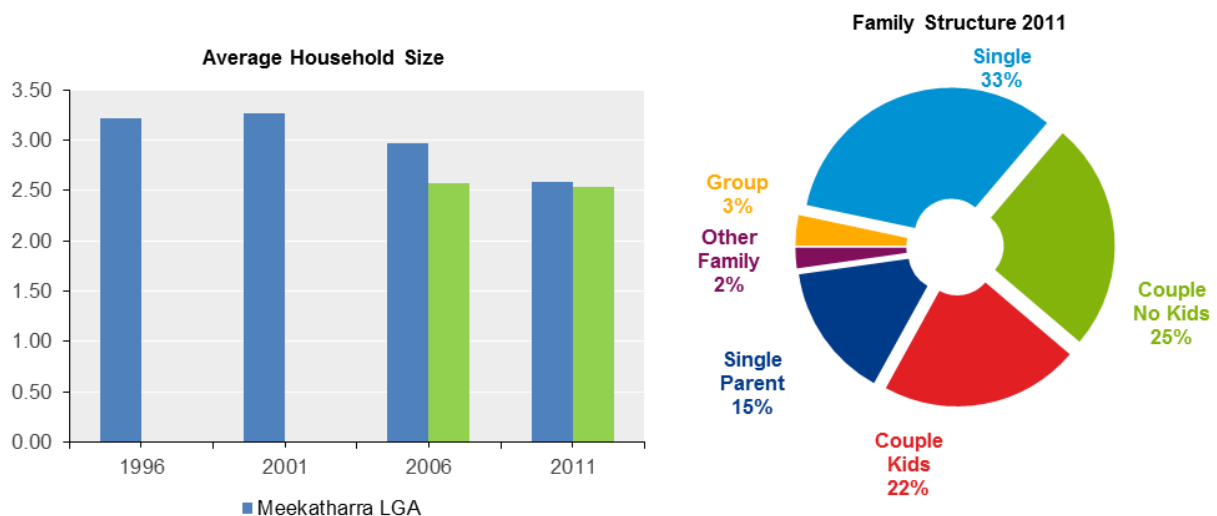
Source : ABS Census 2011; Urbis

The average household size in Meekatharra is 2.6, which is comparable with the non-metropolitan average of 2.5. As shown in Chart 2.4, below, the average household size has decreased since 2001, signalling the attraction of singles and couples employed in the surrounding mining industry and in Government employment. Single households still account for a majority of the population (33%), again indicative of a resource town.

### Household Characteristics

MEEKATHARRA LGA, 2011

CHART 2.4



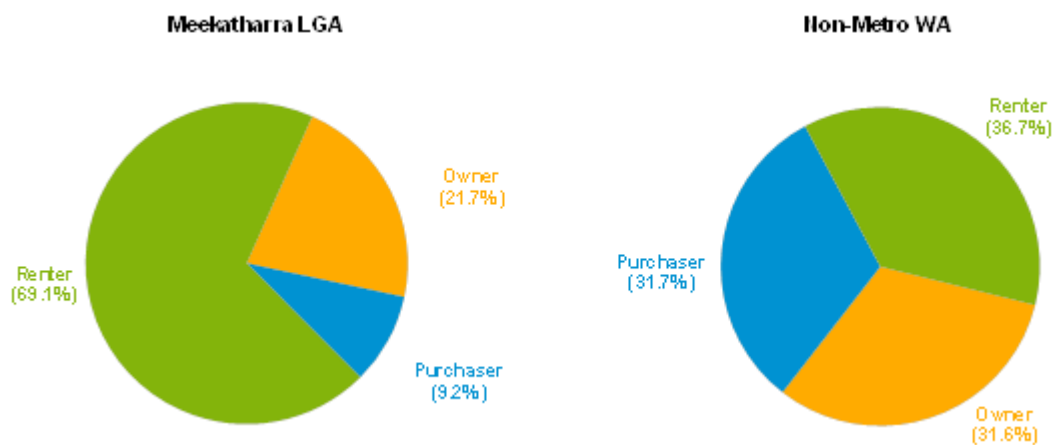
Source : ABS Census 2011; Urbis

Chart 2.5, below, illustrates that Meekatharra is characterised by a high proportion of renters (69.1%) compared to the non-Metropolitan average (36.7%), primarily as part of social/public or Government subsidised housing (provided by the Shire). The number of purchasers and owners of housing in Meekatharra is considerable lower than the non-Metropolitan average (30.9%, compared to 68.3%), which is typical of a remote and largely Indigenous town.

## Housing Tenure

MEEKATHARRA LGA, 2011

CHART 2.5



Source : ABS Census 2011; Urbis

With regard to building approvals, Meekatharra recorded the largest number of public housing dwellings in the Murchison sub-region from 2003-04 to 2008-09, with 78 in 2008-09. It is understood this was primarily due to the replacement of old housing stock, as transportable dwellings were sold and removed from the town (Regional Spotlights 2014). Meekatharra recorded 461 residential building approvals in March 2011, however it is assumed mining accommodation camp facilities accounted for a large majority of these.

The quality of housing in Meekatharra was identified during the stakeholder consultation as a key contributing factor for attracting and retaining staff.

## 2.5 ECONOMIC PROFILE

Overall, the Shire of Meekatharra had a gross regional product of \$1.42 billion in 2011-12, which was the single largest GRP of any local government within the Murchison sub-region of the Mid-West region, and equated to 35% of Murchison's total GRP.

As at June 2012, approximately 397 actively trading businesses that registered their principal place of operation as Meekatharra (referred to as 'local businesses'). The largest share of local businesses were in the agriculture, forestry and fishing industry (the pastoral stations), with 216 businesses. Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services, Construction and Finance and Insurance Services and Transport, Postal and Warehousing were the next prominent industries.

In terms of employee numbers, the largest share of businesses (55%) employ between 1 and 4 people. No local businesses in Meekatharra employ more than 200 people.

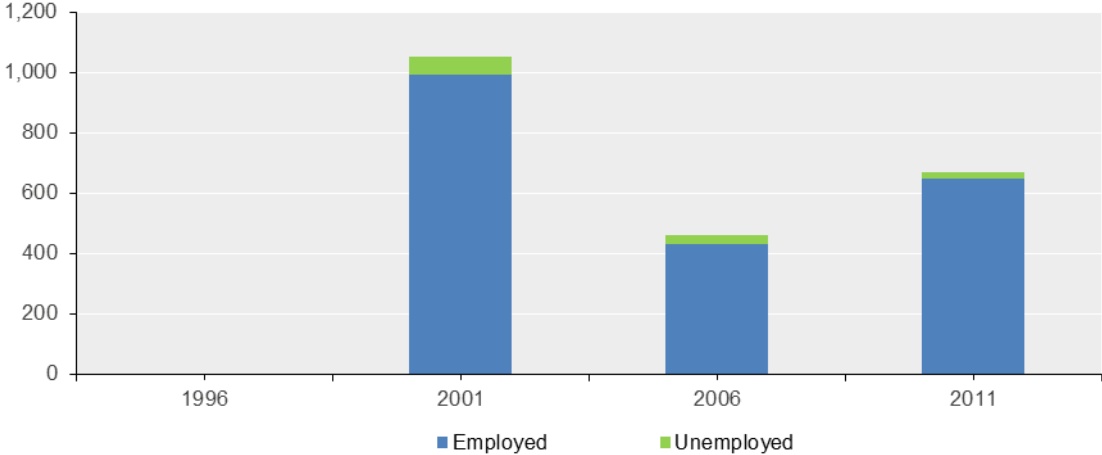
**Appendix B** provides an audit of all commercial activity in the town of Meekatharra as of March 2014.

According to 2011 ABS data, an estimated 650 residents were employed and 20 unemployed, resulting in an unemployment rate of approximately 3.1%. It should be noted that people participating in RJCP are classified as employed. The number of people employed through traditional channels (i.e. excluding RJCP) is estimated to be far less than this figure.

The mining sector showed the largest gain in employment numbers between 2006 and 2011, with the addition of 139 workers, up to a total of 627. Employment figures also grew in construction, retail services and accommodation and food services.

**Employment of Residents**  
MEEKATHARRA LGA, 2011

CHART 2.6



Source : ABS Census 2011; Urbis

Chart 2.7, below, illustrates that mining is the predominant industry within the Shire, accounting for approximately 41% of all residents. Approximately 53% of all workers (fly in, fly out) are also employed with the resource sector. This is largely through trade occupations, such a Machinery Operator and Driver (24% of population) followed by a Technician and Trade Worker (19%). Both occupations have attracted a significantly higher number of employees between 2001 and 2011, again reflective of the growth of the resource sector during this period.

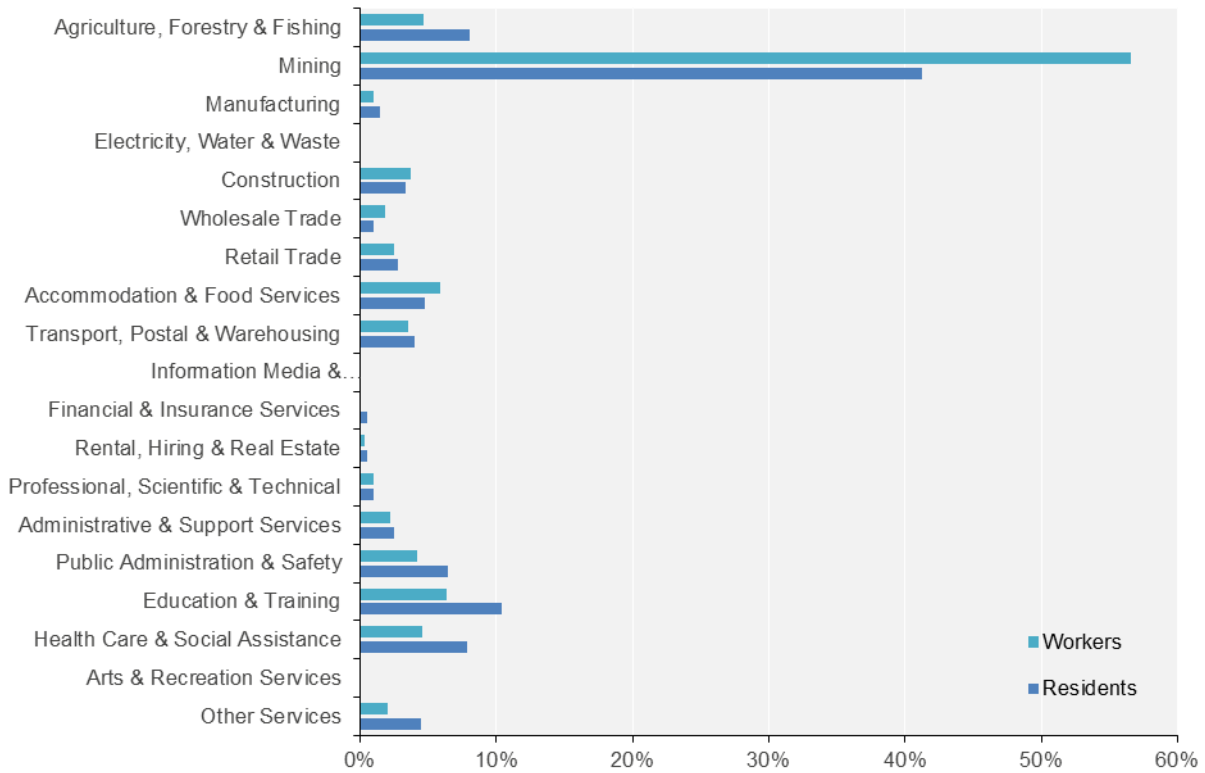
Other notable differences in occupation numbers between 2001 and 2011 include a Community and Personal Service Worker, which increased from 1% to 13% of the total population. Both Clerical and Administrative workers and Sales worker statistics significantly declined between this period.



## Industry of Workers vs. Residents

MEEKATHARRA LGA - 2011

CHART 2.7

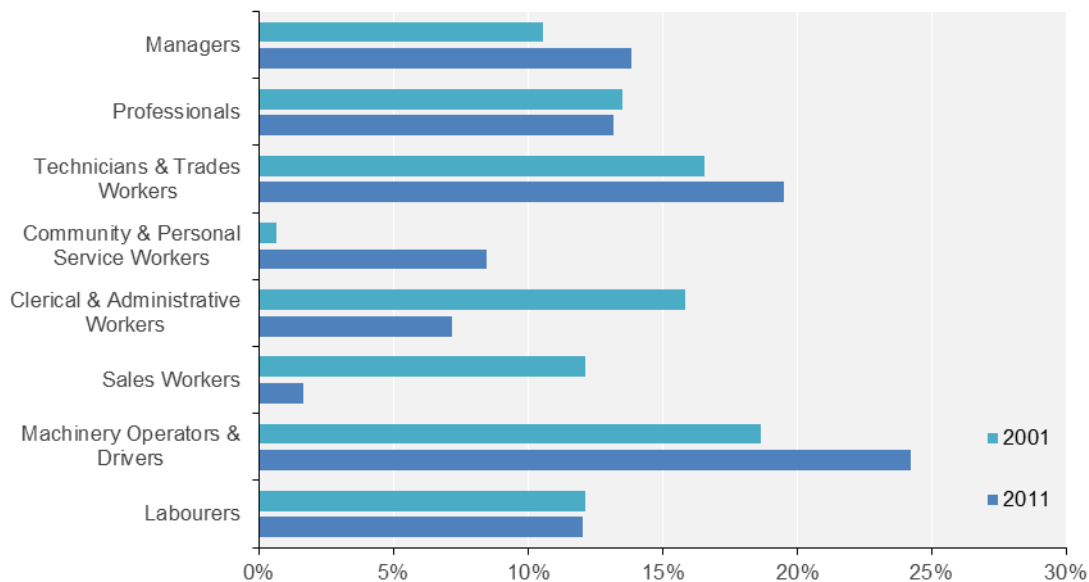


Source : ABS Census 2011; Urbis

## Occupation - Residents

MEEKATHARRA LGA, 2001- 2011

CHART 2.8



Source : ABS Census 2011; Urbis

Employment self-sufficiency in Meekatharra is relatively high, however decreased from 2006 and 2011. The table below shows the change in key employment figures between 2006 and 2011.<sup>4</sup>

## Employment Profile

MEEKATHARRA LGA, 2011

TABLE 2.2

	2006	2011
Labour Force Size	459	665
Usual Residents in Meekatharra employed (in Meekatharra or elsewhere)	426	647
Labour Force Participation (%)	71%	75%
Usual residents of Meekatharra currently unemployed	33	18
Unemployment Rate (%)	7%	3%
Total jobs available in Meekatharra	909	1,118
Employment self-containment	74%	79%
Employment self-sufficiency	198%	168%

Source : RDA/MWDC, ABS 2011

The employment self-sufficiency is high reflecting the fact that mining personnel report their place of work in the Census as being Meekatharra, however their place of residence is often reported outside of the Shire.

## 2.6 TOURISM PROFILE

Tourist statistics for the Shire of Meekatharra are not currently collected and therefore it is difficult to gauge the current tourism situation in Meekatharra.

In terms of regional tourism, in 2009, domestic and international visitors in the Mid-West region were estimated to have spent \$230 million in the region.

In the 3 years to December 2012, Table 2.3 illustrates that the total Mid-West Development Commission area received an average of 370,000 domestic tourists and 45,000 international tourists annually. In the 4 years to December 2007 (latest available statistics) Meekatharra received an average of 36,000 domestic tourists and 4,700 international tourists. This equates to approximately 10% of MWDC area tourists.

<sup>4</sup> *Regional Development Australia/MWDC – Draft Economic Development Strategy 2013, ABS 2011.*

	MWDC Area 3 Year Av. to 2012	Meekatharra 4 Year Av. to Dec 2007
<b>Estimated Visitors</b>		
Domestic	370,300	36,000
International	45,200	4,700
<i>Total</i>	<i>415,500</i>	<i>40,700</i>
<b>Visitor Nights</b>		
Domestic	1,648,300	112,000
International	467,800	28,000
<i>Total</i>	<i>2,116,100</i>	<i>140,000</i>
<b>Average Length of Stay</b>		
Domestic	4.8	3.1
International	10.3	6.7
<i>Overall average</i>	<i>7.55</i>	<i>4.9</i>

Source : Tourism WA

A number of tourist amenities are provided in Meekatharra, including a number of short term accommodation options in town. This includes the Meekatharra Accommodation Centre (Caravan Park), the Auski Inland Motel, Commercial Hotel, Meekatharra Hotel and the Royal Mail Hotel.

In town, food and beverage options for tourists are limited to the Commercial Hotel, Meekatharra Hotel and Royal Mail Hotel and the Auski Inland Motel, as well as a mobile food cart which currently operates on the corner of Main Street and Savage Street. Convenience food and beverage is also available at the Coles Express Roadhouse and BP Service Station.

A number of other food options previously operated in town (e.g. Rosie's Chicken, permanent Café) however are now closed. Whilst 3 Hotels for a population of the size is superfluous, the food options (particularly healthy food options) are limited.

Other key tourist attractions include the Meeka Rangelands Discovery Trail (Town Heritage Walk and Creek Trail), Museum, State Battery, 25 Mile Well, Peace Gorge, the Ghost towns of Peak Hill and Nannine and wildflowers/wildlife.

There is however no obvious or quality tourist bureau or information centre in town which provides visitors with information regarding tourist attractions within the Shire.

We note that, despite these tourism facilities and amenities, the Shire is not as successful as some of its peers in attracting tourists to the area. In our view, and informed by the consultation, this is a function of:

- The image and perception of Meekatharra as not a particularly nice place to stop or visit.
- The lack of marketing of the town in a regional context.
- The lack of facilities for tourists (clean toilets, showers, coffee etc).

## 2.6.1 PASTORAL ACTIVITY

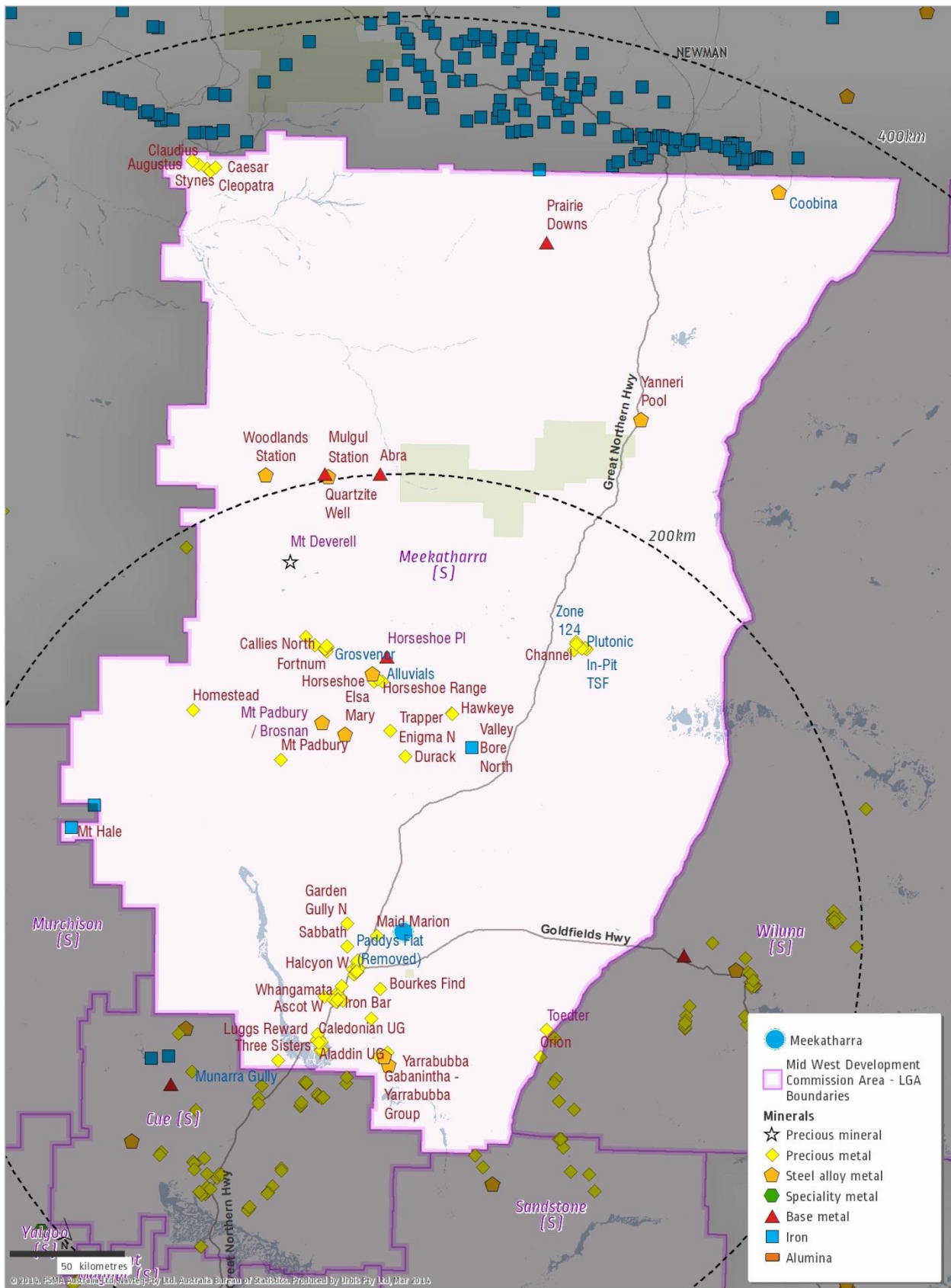
Pastoral activity is the traditional base of the broader Murchison economy, with stations covering much of the Shire. However, in terms of employment, the industry is declining and currently accounts for only 3.7% of the sub-regions employment (5% of Meekatharra population employed). Pastoralists throughout the Shire have and will continue to face considerable threats to production including attacks of livestock by feral dogs and the federal freeze on livestock exports to Indonesia.

## 2.6.2 MINING OPERATIONS

The Mid-West region boasts significant gold, iron ore, nickel, lead and uranium mineralisation. The discovery of gold in the late nineteenth century spurred a wave of development within the Murchison region, and today gold and other minerals are being actively pursued.

The Shire is located within the Mid-West Iron Ore Northern Group – an intensive and rich mineral deposit area. There are many producing and prospecting mining projects in the Shire as illustrated by Map 2.1, however the key mining operations include:

- Doray Minerals Limited – Andy Well Mine (45km north of Meekatharra).
- Sandfire Resources – DeGrussa (150 km north of Meekatharra).
- Kentor Gold - Burnakura Gold Project (50 km south of Meekatharra).
- Reed Resources – Meekatharra Gold (Meekatharra town).



## 2.7 SOCIAL CAPITAL

### 2.7.1 SOCIO-ECONOMIC (SEIFA) INDEX

In relation to socio-economic wellbeing, the Shire of Meekatharra ranks low compared with other local governments in Australia, according to SEIFA (Socio-Economic Indexes for Australia). The index is derived from attributes that reflect disadvantage such as low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment, and jobs in relatively unskilled occupations.

Table 2.4 presents the SEIFA for the Shire of Meekatharra and its composite Local Governments. The 2011 SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage for the Shire of Meekatharra is 851, ranking it within the first decile, meaning that it sits among the 10% most disadvantaged communities nationally.

#### Socio-Economic (SEIFA) Index

MEEKATHARRA LGA, 2001- 2011

TABLE 2.4

Local Government Area	Usual Resident Population 2011	Score	Rank (in Australia)
<b>Meekatharra</b>	<b>1374</b>	<b>857</b>	<b>38</b>
Wiluna	1154	814	35
Morawa	892	957	248
Yalgoo	402	928	128
Mount Magnet	643	862	40

Source : ABS 2011

### 2.7.2 RJCP AND INCOME SUPPORT

The Federal Government provides a Remote Jobs and Communities Programme (RJCP) to encourage employment, participation and community development services in 60 remote regions across Australia, including Meekatharra. This program replaced the former Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP). The Shire sits within the Mid-West – East Region WA of the RJCP and is run by Mission Australia.

### 2.7.3 COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND CRIME

The Shire of Meekatharra has a lower percentage of volunteers at 16%, compared to the State average of 19%.

According to Office of Crime Protection Statistics (2009-10 – latest available statistics), the Shire has a crime rate of 726 per 1,000 persons, which is considerably higher than the State average of 105.6. Key offences include property damage, other theft, non-aggravated assault and residential burglary.

## 2.8 RETAIL AND SERVICES EXPENDITURE

Table 2.5 presents estimates of the Shire of Meekatharra's retail spending market, demonstrating that food retail dominates the per capita spend in Meekatharra, similar to the non-Metropolitan average. The current retail provision in Meekatharra comprises the following:

- Foodworks (Farmer Jacks) – reasonable variety and offer in terms of packaged and fresh food.
- BP Service Station and Coles Express Meekatharra Roadhouse – convenience products and services.
- The Commercial Hotel, Royal Mail Hotel and Meekatharra Hotel – located on Main Street and offering alcohol, soft drinks and meals.

- Food Cart/Café – located across from the Police Station with a limited offer comprising of sandwiches, coffee, soft drinks and other take-away meals – a focus on healthier alternatives.
- Coles Express Roadhouse and BP – convenience food and beverage and supplies.
- Other retail – Meeka Meats, Meeka Thrifty Link, Midwest Ice, Meeka Bakery, Meekatharra Pharmacy, Julie’s Beauty.

In terms of retail expenditure, the key areas of spend include groceries (\$1,868 per capita), tobacco (\$909), take-away food (\$649) and takeaway liquor (\$605), as illustrated in Table 2.5, below. The table also forecasts that the total spend will decrease over the next 10 years, due to the decline in population.

## Meekatharra Retail Spending Total and Per Capital

PER CAPITA AND TOTAL SPENDING (2013\$ INC GST)

TABLE 2.5

	Per Capita 2013	Total (\$m) 2013	Total (\$m) 2023
Food Retail	5,782	8.2	6.8
Food Catering	1,146	1.6	1.4
Apparel	1,200	1.7	1.6
Homewares	797	1.1	1.1
Bulky Goods	1,092	1.6	1.4
Leisure	1,508	2.1	2.1
Services	367	0.5	0.5
<b>Total<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>11,894</b>	<b>16.9</b>	<b>14.9</b>

Source : ABS MarketInfo 2013

<sup>1</sup>Expressed in constant dollar terms (ie. excluding inflation)

## 2.9 DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

- The resident population of the Shire of Meekatharra is estimated to be in order of 1,400 people as of the 2011 Census; a 21% increase since 2006. This population can however fluctuate given the highly transient nature of the town. The population of the township of Meekatharra itself is somewhat less, at 812 people.
- Like many regional towns in WA, Meekatharra exhibits the demographic challenges of an ageing population, youth migration and gender imbalance.
- Approximately 33% of the Shire’s population is Indigenous.
- Meekatharra experiences an overrepresentation of people of working age (between 20 and 49 years) and an underrepresentation of children, teenager and young adults, particular those aged between 15-19 years.
- A large proportion of dwellings in Meekatharra are identified social housing or Government subsidised housing provided by the Department of Housing for Government employees.
- The transient nature of the population is evident from the fact that 42% of the population lived elsewhere at the time of the previous Census.
- There is a high level of migrants living in Meekatharra, with approximately 42% moving to Meekatharra from 2006-2011.

- There are approximately 397 businesses (including pastoral stations) active in Meekatharra, which mostly employ between 1 and 4 people.
- The Shire of Meekatharra had a gross regional product of \$1.42 billion in 2011-12, which was the single largest GRP of any local government within the Murchison sub-region.
- Mining is the predominant industry within the Shire, accounting for approximately 41% of all employed persons.
- Employment self-sufficiency in Meekatharra is high and complicated by the higher number of jobs than the resident workforce. This reflects the fact that residents of mining camps are employed in Meekatharra but record their place of residence as elsewhere.
- The retail offer in Meekatharra is limited, however reflective of the low population base.

Overall, the demographic characteristics of Meekatharra are common to many regional towns with high ethnicity, a transient population, few teenagers and an economy dominated by the mining industry.



## 3 Meekatharra Situation Analysis

This section describes the key themes and sentiments raised through initial investigations and stakeholder consultation undertaken in Meekatharra in March 2014. The section concludes with a SWOT analysis which summarises the key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for Meekatharra.

### 3.1 THEMES FROM LITERATURE REVIEW

A background literature review of all relevant Federal, State and local statutory and strategic documents was undertaken relevant to the Shire of Meekatharra and broader Mid-West region (attached at **Appendix A**). The key themes and findings to emerge from this review are listed below:

- State Context
  - Meekatharra is designated as a ‘sub-regional’ centre of the Mid-West region, supporting the mining and pastoral sectors through the provision of support and maintenance services.
- Regional Context
  - A key challenge for the Murchison region is its low and dispersed population over large distances.
  - Some of the key issues being experienced at a regional level include high unemployment rates, land use planning and infrastructure issues and a decreasing population. The MWDC also identifies the securing of additional community benefits from surrounding economic activity is critical.
  - There is a push to deliver more of a regional focus on the tourism and pastoral industries.
  - Key focus areas for sub-regional economic development are enhancing and servicing mine supply chains, focusing on a Murchison based tourism network, sustaining and developing the pastoral industry, and keeping a central register of blue sky initiatives.
- Local Context
  - Meekatharra provides for the day-to-day needs of the community and provides civic administrative, health and education functions, however also supports the mining and pastoral sectors through the provision of worker accommodation and support services/equipment maintenance.
  - The extent to which Meekatharra can grow its population from activity resulting from mining is largely dependent on influencing a change to the prevalent fly-in, fly-out workforce approach.
  - There is limited retail activity in town however the commercial base is stable.
  - The Bundi Club (arts and crafts) previously operated in Meekatharra, however has been discontinued.
  - The Shire does not have a Local Planning Strategy in place to guide future land use planning and its Planning Scheme is dated.
  - The Shire’s Planning Scheme covers the township of Meekatharra only. The town comprises predominately Residential zoned land, however also includes commercial, industrial and rural land, as well as special use areas.

## 3.2 THEMES FROM STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS

Urbis undertook a series of consultations with key stakeholders, including the Shire of Meekatharra, local business owners, community representatives and Government stakeholders, including:

- Shire of Meekatharra.
- Meekatharra Police.
- Meekatharra Community Resource Centre.
- Yulella Aboriginal Corporation.
- Local business owners (Café, Pharmacy, Coates Hire).
- Doray Minerals Limited (Andy Well Accommodation Village Operator).
- Mid-West Development Commission.
- Regional Development Australia (Mid-West Gascoyne)
- Community members.

Overall, the key themes and issues to emerge from the stakeholder consultations are not dissimilar to comparable regional, remote local governments, particularly in the Mid-West region. The following sentiments were expressed by the community and key stakeholders in relation to the future economic growth of the town:

1. Government transparency and community involvement in decision making.
2. Lack of central community facilities and meeting places.
3. Sense of place and community pride in the presentation of the town.
4. Limited Retail Amenities.
5. Reputation of Meekatharra and availability of marketing material.
6. Regional tourism opportunities.
7. Future of the youth.
8. Perceived decline in the mining industry and impacts on the town.
9. Opportunities from the mines – small business, industry and employment.

These issues are discussed further below and are based around the Federal Government's five (5) key regional economic development elements; Human Capital, Access to Markets, Social and Environmental Sustainability, Comparative Advantage and Business Competitiveness and Partnerships and Integrated Planning.

### 3.3 HUMAN CAPITAL

Human capital is the stock of knowledge, expertise and abilities of a population (Australian Government Regional Economic Development Guide).

#### 3.3.1 KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE OF COMMUNITY

Based on stakeholder consultations, it is evident that there are a number of prominent and dedicated community members who have the desire, skills and expertise to drive innovative businesses and programs to stimulate economic development within the town and broader Shire.

Many stakeholders stated that there needs to be a bottom up approach of fostering and retaining community members. This is a common issue experienced in highly transient communities where people who live in town short term are reluctant to invest in the town's long term future. This requires initiatives to be coalesced around the capacity and passion of key individuals.

A key issue experienced by the town, like other regional remote towns, is the ability to attract and retain staff. The Police, School, Hospital and CRC experience significant staff turnovers, and typically relocate once their contract is complete.

In locations with a high transient population, building on the skills, engagement and passion of the community is an important tool. Policies and actions relying on third party intervention for their success can be expected to be more difficult to achieve.

#### 3.3.2 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Through stakeholder consultations, there were concerns raised by some regarding the quality of education, low participation rates and high dropout rates at the Meekatharra District High School. Like other regional remote areas, finding teachers experienced in regional remote areas is difficult and therefore staff turnover is high, with many teachers leaving at the end of their contract.

Further, there is also limited access to tertiary education in Meekatharra, which has led to an exodus of young people to Perth or larger regional centres such as Geraldton, seeking these opportunities, or they simply leave Meekatharra for good in search of a more promising economic future.

With regard to employment and training, Mission Australia provides Government funded programs, including the RJCP program in Meekatharra and operates an office in town.

The Yulella Aboriginal Corporation also plays a significant role in upskilling Aboriginal people within the community through mainstream work-readiness programs, such as 'Women on the Move'. It was commented that participation rates in these programs are relatively high and stable, with many transitioning into mainstream jobs, within and out of Meekatharra. Yulella also has aspirations to secure funding for a market garden in town and to establish a cadetship training program with Government agencies. Yulella operates a variety of businesses in town as well as a pastoral station.

Through consultations, it is understood the Federal Government has placed a focus on Indigenous education and employment within Meekatharra, through mechanisms such as the Truancy Programme.

#### 3.3.3 POPULATION THRESHOLDS

The size of Meekatharra's population makes it difficult to support certain functions, whether it is at a Council level (eg. Tourism Officer/Economic Development Officer) or at a private business level (eg. Information Technology services, Marketing, Accounting), resulting in a gap in services.

## HUMAN CAPITAL - CONSIDERATIONS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

- Support mainstream work readiness programs undertaken by the Yulella Aboriginal Corporation (eg. Government Agency cadetship and local training programs with mining companies).
- Actively support the development of a local Chamber of Commerce to provide a mechanism to facilitate local employment in the town.
- Engage with neighbouring local governments to explore skills sharing opportunities.

### 3.4 ACCESS TO MARKETS

Regional economic development is highly dependent upon access to market, suppliers and workers. Enhanced connections with the Shire, the Mid-West region and the global economy will improve access to new markets and increased business productivity within the town.

These connections include hard infrastructure (transport, telecommunications and utilities) and soft infrastructure and connections such as personal and business networks and regional tourism opportunities (Australian Government Regional Economic Development Guide).

#### 3.4.1 MINING OPPORTUNITIES

A majority of mining workers within the Shire are fly-in, fly-out, with facilities located remotely on-site, with little interaction with the town. The exception to this is Doray Minerals Limited, who operate the Andy Well mine 45km north of Meekatharra, however have an accommodation camp on the outskirts of town. The camp is however a gated, self-contained facility, with no opportunity for community members to access the camp (eg. for a meal).

There is a desire by the Shire to advocate for mining companies to construct accommodation facilities in or adjoining the town, however there is a sense that there is limited opportunity for the Shire or others to facilitate or encourage this. Others stakeholders commented that they are reluctant to encourage this to occur, believing additional mining workers will have a negative impact on the town.

It is evident that the Shire and community have little interaction with the mining industry, and there is a general perception that there is limited opportunity for the Shire to assist with the provision of everyday services to these companies, given these services typically form part of international contracts (eg. catering). It is understood however that many local contractors service the mining and pastoral industries, such as mechanical and electrical repairs, building contracting and other services, of which remains relatively stable.

Greater access to the resource sector will provide local businesses with opportunities to grow by trading more goods and services, and provide opportunity for new business. Meekatharra residents expressed a desire to generate more local employment, commenting that this was critical to ensure the long term sustainability of the town. It is recognised however that getting commitment from mining companies is difficult given the uncertainty about future prospects.

#### 3.4.2 TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES

The potential opportunities associated with local and regional tourism was a common theme in the consultations. The Murchison sub-region boasts scenic outback landscapes and seasonal wildflowers and has a high level of historical and heritage value.

Through stakeholder engagement and investigations, the following issues and opportunities in relation to tourism have been identified:

- Indigenous Tourism – there appear to be significant opportunities associated with the local Indigenous community, through promotion of Indigenous Art (it is understood an Indigenous Councillor resides in town and is a reputable artist) as well as sharing Indigenous culture and ‘way of life’ (i.e. guided tours).

It is understood the Bundi Club (Arts Group) used to operate in town and had a premise on Main Street, however the club no longer operates.

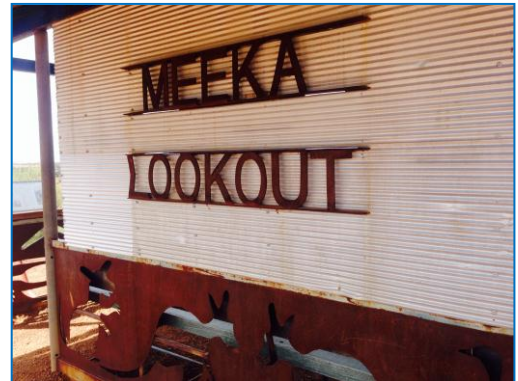
- Regional Tourism – there is a push at the regional level to promote a broader regional Murchison Tourism Network to take advantage of the regions natural capital, landscape and heritage. A key challenge identified for the sub-region (apart from the remoteness) is that tourists lack the necessary knowledge to take advantage of what is on offer.

It is understood a Regional Tourism Strategy for the Mid-West region is currently being prepared and will be released for public comment in mid-2014. A preliminary discussion paper has however indicated that key tourism opportunities for the Murchison sub-region include signage upgrades, tourism capacity of ex-pastoral sites, pastoral site accommodation, walk trail upgrades and facilitation of a regional tourism website. It is recommended the Shire remain closely engaged in this process, through to finalisation.

- Business Tourism – the town currently has limited facilities (eg. (clean toilets, showers, coffee etc) to entice truck drivers to stop in town, which has resulted in trucks simply passing through. Given the strategic location of Meekatharra from a transport perspective, capturing through traffic is critical.
- Local Tourism and Accommodation – the Shire has a limited tourism industry. Whilst measures have been implemented in recent years to boost visitation in the area (ie. the Meeka Discovery Trail), visitor levels remain low given the limited retail offer available. Whilst the Community Resource Centre effectively acts as the tourist information centre in town, information is limited and dated. Further, the tourism information sign on Main Street is largely hidden by vegetation (refer image below).

Clean, safe and simple accommodation with the provision of simple and well-prepared meals is crucial to enticing tourists to visit, stop and spend money in Meekatharra. The town currently offers several accommodation options including the Accommodation Centre (Caravan Park), Auski Inland Motel, Commercial Hotel, Meeka Hotel and the Royal Mail Hotel, however there have been some concerns regarding the level of safety and cleanliness associated with some of these facilities.

PICTURE 1 – TOURISM SITES (SOURCE: URBIS 2014)



### 3.4.3 COMMUNITY EVENTS AND COMMUNICATION

Through stakeholder consultations, it is understood community members have fond memories of a number of community and sporting events that run on an annual basis in the town, such as the Meekatharra Festival, which includes a race day and a rodeo over a long weekend in September.

It was apparent the community values such events and would like to see other closed events/facilities open and operational again (speedway, picture gardens). Regional events have the ability to appeal to a broader regional market, which can have flow on effects to the tourism and branding profile of the town.

Through stakeholder engagement, it was commented that there is a desire for a free Wi-Fi internet service in town, to enable residents (mostly youth) to be able to access information, encourage civic participation and social connectedness, particularly given the remoteness of the town. This would also allow residents to shop online for goods which are not sold in town.

### **ACCESS TO MARKETS - CONSIDERATIONS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

- Actively promote the inclusion of Meekatharra in regional tourism strategies through engagement with the MWDC and neighbouring local governments.
- Establish a free Internet Wi-Fi service in certain areas of town.
- Encourage and promote community ventures such as eco-development and eco-tourism.
- Prepare and circulate tourism information and commit to updating periodically.
- Prepare a business case to establish a retail/tourist/cultural centre on Main Street (opposite Shire offices).
- Through an RPA (or similar), explore potential opportunities for joint ventures between small businesses to supply certain services and goods to mines.

## **3.5 SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

A sustainable community refers to the ability of a town or region to endure in the long term – it has economic, environmental and social dimensions (Australian Government Regional Economic Development Guide).

### **3.5.1 GOVERNANCE**

There is a general perception in the community that the town suffers from a degree of apathy and procrastination. It is understood a number of projects have been commenced, however have stalled for different reasons. The transient nature of the residents (both as a result of the large Indigenous population, the FIFO workforce and Government contracts) and the small population base give rise to a number of issues which are perceived to impact economic growth including:

- A focus on the long term issues facing the town is difficult where over half the population are unlikely to be there in 5 years' time.
- The pool of potential sponsors of any initiative is more limited than it might first appear leading to delays in implementation of initiatives.
- There are competing views and aspirations on the best way to direct public funds depending on your status as a long term or recent resident.
- With such a small population, and an even smaller proportion actively involved in Council affairs, investment decisions are interpreted by some as not being made in the best long term interests of all residents.

A key theme to emerge from the consultation was the apparent level of tension between some community members and the Shire Council. Several comments were made in relation to the level of Government procrastination regarding the completion of projects, as well as the level transparency in local government decision-making. In our experience, these issues are not unique to Meekatharra and in part relate to individual and personal disagreements which are magnified by the small population of a town.

### **3.5.2 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Through stakeholder consultation, it was commented that a number of community groups used to operate in town (Bundi Arts Club, Country Women Association, Lions Club) however a majority no longer operate for various reasons.

It was commented that the Shire and Community Resource Centre often oversee and manage a lot of community events and projects, however given the capacity and resources of regional local governments are often stretched, it is not sustainable for this to be the case in the long term.

Notwithstanding this, there is a strong sense of community amongst residents, and people have a desire to be involved and have a say in Meekatharra's future. This was clearly evident during the consultation process.

A further point raised by the community was the lack of any official welcoming for new community members when they arrive in town. Many stakeholders comments that Government employees often arrive from urban areas and take a while to adjust to the remoteness of the town and limited services on offer. It was commented that there should be more regular community events to welcome these residents and encourage interaction, as well as distribute 'welcome packs' to new residents, which provide critical information about the town.

### 3.5.3 SENSE OF PLACE AND COMMUNITY PRIDE

Meekatharra requires a positive sense of arrival that is reflective of its rich history and culture and heritage significance. There is currently a poor sense of arrival into the town from both entries and the town also lacks a centralised community/retail/tourist hub as well as quality community spaces.

It is also apparent that existing entry statements or community spaces in town are not suitable from a usability, climate and cultural perspective and are therefore underutilised. An example of this is 'Welcome Park' which is a gated space, with large areas of hardstand and a lack of shaded spaces (refer images below).

PICTURE 2 – WELCOME PARK (SOURCE: URBIS 2014)



A second issue noted during the site visit and raised during consultation is the low density, spread out nature of the town, which detracts from the town's ability to create a strong sense of place and activation. The agglomeration of particular uses can assist in creating a sense of activation and interaction, like other small regional towns such as Sandstone and Cue.

Stakeholders also commented that the youth generally do not take pride in the town. For example, streetscape improvements have been undertaken along Main Street in the past, however were removed/vandalised by the children almost immediately. Streetscape improvements have now been discontinued, which has contributed to an overall decline in the town's amenity. Many stakeholders commented that they would like to see Main Street revitalised.

### 3.5.4 LAND AND HOUSING CHALLENGE

The overall quality of housing in town is considered poor, with many houses rundown and in need of repair. Vandalism and the distraction of properties is also prevalent in town, which has impacts on the overall presentation of the town to visitors and tourists.

There is also a lack of a private rental market in Meekatharra. A majority of houses in the town are run by the Department of Housing. The houses are either provided to the Shire and Government employees as part of their compensation package or provided to people through welfare benefits.



### 3.5.5 FUTURE OF THE YOUTH

There are strong concerns expressed by stakeholders regarding the youth of Meekatharra. Given a bottom up approach of fostering and retaining community members is a key desire, there are concerns that the town's youth will not fulfil this role.

Key issues identified by community members include:

- Limited role models in the community.
- Boredom, which leads to anti-social behaviour.
- Limited employment opportunities.
- Minimal organised recreational/sporting opportunities.
- Low participation rates at school.
- Children at risk.

It was further commented by stakeholders that the Youth Precinct, comprising a BMX track, new playground and other sporting facilities, is disjointed from the centre of town and is highly underutilised. Playground and sporting facilities are also unshaded, which is an issue given the climate. A community member commented that a skate park would be popular in town, as well as an indoor sports facility (similar to the 'rage cage' in Yalgoo). It was clear that residents believe that there should be additional and high quality facilities for the youth, to combat some of these issues.

It is understood however there are programmes being run in town for the youth; including Kid Zone (6-12 year olds), which operate up to 3 sessions a week, and a Youth Centre (12 to 18 year olds). Activities include pool competitions, dance classes, bike rides etc.

#### **SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY - CONSIDERATIONS FOR EDS**

- Implement key recommendations of Meekatharra Revitalisation Project.
- Prepare a business case for the establishment of a central retail/tourist/cultural centre in town.
- Actively pursue funding under the Northern Regions Planning Fund to prepare a Local Planning Strategy and undertake a Planning Scheme review process to establish a land use planning framework for the Shire.
- Regular community events to maintain a level of communication/interaction.
- Revitalisation and improvement to key community spaces (e.g. Welcome Park) through incorporation of public art, shaded areas to eat lunch, grassed areas to sit).
- Improvement to town entry statements to signal the arrival into town.
- In partnership with local business groups, develop a 'welcome pack' for new residents.
- Seek a broader representation of community members on Council.
- Increase awareness of Council affairs through town meetings, regularly publishing meeting agendas and displaying notices broadly around town.

## 3.6 COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE AND BUSINESS COMPETITIVENESS

In order for Meekatharra to have a comparative advantage, it needs to produce a unique product, good or service and offer it at a lower opportunity cost than other towns or regions. Business competitiveness is the ability of a business to sell and supply goods and services compared to a competitor (Australian Government Regional Economic Development Guide).

### 3.6.1 REGIONAL POSITIONING AND BRANDING

A key sentiment raised through the stakeholder consultations was the lack of the regional positioning, branding and marketing of Meekatharra. There is a need to consider the future position of Meekatharra and its role within the Mid-West region, to provide a strategic and attractive reason for both industry and tourists to stop and spend time in the town. At present, it is evident that many tourists simply pass through the town.

It is noted that the Shire's Strategic Community Plan (2012-2022) aims to 'take advantage of our strategic transport position'. Being ideally located on Great Northern Highway, a major transport and freight route, it was raised through stakeholder consultations that Meekatharra should position itself as a major transport and logistics hub, with opportunities to attract warehouse and transport operations to base their business in Meekatharra to service the surrounding resource sector.

It is understood the Shire is currently considering the potential of facilitating an 'Industrial/Logistics Park', however there is a perception that land supply is a critical issue.

### 3.6.2 LIMITED RETAIL AMENITIES

There are currently limited retail goods in Meekatharra, which has resulted in higher prices due to limited business competitiveness. The town has also seen some retail outlets close down in recent times (eg. Lloyds building comprising a second supermarket, Rosie's Chicken, Café, Second Hand store). The exception to this is the entertainment offer, with 3 hotels located within town; the Commercial Hotel, Royal Mail Hotel and Meekatharra Hotel.

Whilst the retail offer is limited, it is reflective of a low permanent population base. Residents would however like to see a greater diversity of retail products, such as a permanent café with alfresco dining and additional healthier eating options etc.

PICTURE 3 – RETAIL - FOOD CART, COMMERCIAL HOTEL AND LLOYDS BUILDING (NOW CLOSED)



### 3.6.3 COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

The Yulella Aboriginal Corporation has interest in pursuing eco-ventures such as a market garden in order to produce more affordable fruit and vegetables, promote healthy living and create a point of difference for the town. Such ventures should be encouraged by the Shire to promote organisation capacity building and sustainable practices.

There is also a desire for businesses to be operated privately within the town, to encourage a level of competitiveness.

#### COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE AND BUSINESS COMPETITIVENESS - CONSIDERATIONS FOR EDS

- Identify and market a slogan – eg. 'Meeka – a great place to stop'.
- Facilitate a strategic positioning process (i.e. Strategic regional location – transport hub).
- Support new retail business in town and encourage 'blue sky' and 'out of the box' initiatives.

## 3.7 PARTNERSHIPS AND INTEGRATED REGIONAL PLANNING

Effective cross-sectoral and intergovernmental partnerships are areas of formal and information cooperation between stakeholders which can help deliver on shared priorities. Integrated regional planning aligns the objectives of Government, businesses and the community to coordinate development efforts at different levels (Australian Government Regional Economic Development Guide).

### 3.7.1 ENGAGEMENT WITH LOCAL BUSINESS

There appears to be limited engagement between local business owners within the town of Meekatharra. This may partially be due to the high staff turnover, however potentially also due to the general lack of knowledge of mechanisms to facilitate this engagement.

There was also a sense in the community that the Shire and Community Resource Centre (run by the Shire) are responsible for the majority of events and initiatives within the town, and that perhaps there needs to be a separate group in town to facilitate such events.

### 3.7.2 INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

Through stakeholder consultation, it was apparent that consultation between the Shire and community, with the local mining industry is limited, with the exception of Doray Minerals who has a community development trust fund with the Shire to deliver community projects (eg. 'greening Meeka'). In this regard, it was commented that mining companies within the Shire are much smaller than larger, more profitable companies which operate in the Pilbara (eg. Rio Tinto and BHP), which typically have comprehensive community engagement programmes and funding mechanisms in place.

There was an overall perception that mining companies typically go ahead and pursue projects without consulting the Shire, and that the town has limited capacity to influence decisions.

Overall, there were disparate comments in relation to the town's relationship with the various mining exploration companies with some stating that because the Shire attracted smaller companies and given the uncertainty about future prospects, the level of engagement was much lower than other regional mining towns.

#### **CONSIDERATIONS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

- Lobby the establishment of a Meekatharra Regional Partnership Agreement (RPA) in order to encourage a level of engagement between the local Aboriginal community and all levels of community, as well as the wider community.
- Establish a local Chamber of Commerce to encourage communication between local business groups.

### 3.8 SWOT ANALYSIS FOR MEEKATHARRA

The table below summarises the key strengths that Meekatharra needs to leverage and weaknesses it needs to address in order to take advantage of opportunities and mitigate threats

<p><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Strategic regional location – transport hub.</li> <li>▪ Rich in natural minerals and resources.</li> <li>▪ Dedicated and knowledgeable people in the community.</li> <li>▪ Local Indigenous culture.</li> <li>▪ Availability of land.</li> <li>▪ Strong history – both Indigenous and European.</li> </ul>	<p><b>WEAKNESSES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of critical mass of facilities and activity in one place.</li> <li>▪ Lack of employment and further education opportunities.</li> <li>▪ Limited retail offer.</li> <li>▪ Lack of engagement with industry and between local business groups.</li> <li>▪ Lack of town positioning.</li> <li>▪ Welcome/entry statements into town, and community spaces.</li> </ul>
<p><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Regional tourism opportunities.</li> <li>▪ Regional transport opportunities.</li> <li>▪ Promoting and marketing the Shire and its businesses.</li> <li>▪ Organising events that facilitate trade and economic development in the Shire.</li> <li>▪ Potential for new industries.</li> <li>▪ Industry diversification.</li> <li>▪ Building the capacity of local business and employees.</li> <li>▪ Developing and supporting partnerships and networks.</li> <li>▪ Increased retention of economic activity, retail spending, jobs etc.</li> </ul>	<p><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ High transient population.</li> <li>▪ Vulnerability in the pastoral sector.</li> <li>▪ Liveability challenges.</li> <li>▪ Regional economic vulnerabilities (eg. mining, pastoral)</li> <li>▪ Low levels of economic diversity.</li> <li>▪ Infrastructure constraints.</li> <li>▪ Welfare dependence.</li> <li>▪ Drug and alcohol dependence.</li> </ul>

## 4 Future Economic Opportunities for Meekatharra

The following summarises the key physical, social, organisational and tourism economic opportunities identified in Section 2 of this Assessment. The merit of each opportunity will be explored as part of Phase 2 of this project, in formulating the Economic Development Strategy.

### 4.1 PHYSICAL

- Implement the key recommendations of Meekatharra Revitalisation Project, with a focus on enhancing the amenity of Main Street and consolidating the core.
- Actively pursue funding under the Northern Regions Planning Fund to prepare a Local Planning Strategy and undertake a Planning Scheme review process to establish a land use planning framework for the Shire.
- Revitalisation and improvement to key community spaces (e.g. Welcome Park) through incorporation of public art, shaded areas to eat lunch, grassed areas to sit).
- Improvement to town entry statements to signal the arrival into town.
- Facilities for tourists (maintain public facilities, showers, coffee, services etc).

### 4.2 SOCIAL

- Prepare a business case for the establishment of a central retail/tourist/cultural centre in town.
- Schedule regular community events to maintain a level of communication/interaction.
- In partnership with local business groups, develop a 'welcome pack' for new residents.
- Encourage and promote community ventures such as eco-development and eco-tourism.
- Through an RPA (or similar), explore potential opportunities for joint ventures between small businesses to supply certain services and goods to mines.
- Support mainstream work readiness programs undertaken by the Yulella Aboriginal Corporation (e.g. Government Agency cadetship and local training programs with mining companies).
- Establish a free Internet Wi-Fi service in certain areas of town.
- Promote grass-roots initiatives led by passionate locals (eg. permanent café, cultural centre).

### 4.3 GOVERNANCE/ORGANISATIONAL

- Lobby the establishment of a Meekatharra Regional Partnership Agreement (RPA) in order to encourage a level of engagement between the local Aboriginal community and all levels of community, as well as the wider community.
- Establish a local Chamber of Commerce to encourage communication between local business groups and facilitate local employment in the town and consider expanding relationships with surrounding towns.
- Establish regular communication with mining companies.
- Prepare a skills or business audit in partnership with surrounding townships.
- Establish a dialogue with mining businesses in the area to explore opportunities to better service their operational needs with local business.

#### 4.4 TOURISM

- Participate in a Regional Tourist Network, to promote outback tourism in the region.
- Identify and market a slogan – eg. 'Meeka – a great place to stop'.
- Facilitate a strategic positioning process (ie. Strategic regional location – transport hub.
- Support new retail business in town and encourage 'blue sky' and 'out of the box' initiatives.
- Prepare and circulate tourism information and commit to updating periodically.
- Engagement in tourism conferences and actively promote Meekatharra with tourism operators.

## 5 Conclusion and Next Steps

This report provides the foundation for the development of an Economic Development Strategy for the Shire, forming Phase 2 of this project. The analysis in this report demonstrates that Meekatharra has sound economic potential.

This report has sought to scope the social and economic situation in Meekatharra, through literature review, demographic analysis and stakeholder engagement, upon which economic development strategies can be formulated. These strategies will deliver a balance of 'low hanging fruit' strategies which can easily implemented without considerable resources or cost, with medium to longer term scenarios which will require further scoping, resources and funding strategies.

Based on the analysis presented in this report, the key matters that will be explored during Phase 2 of the project include:

- The potential for the agglomeration of uses and facilities within the Meekatharra town around a central retail/tourist/cultural node.
- The need for Government transparency and community involvement in decision making.
- Opportunities to explore and promote Indigenous art and culture.
- The potential for increased engagement between Government, Meekatharra business and agencies and industry.
- The potential for increased engagement between local business owners.
- Fostering community ventures which create a point of difference and assist in creating an identity for Meekatharra.
- A focus on the strategic position and identity of Meekatharra in the long term.
- Promoting and contributing towards a regional or sub-regional tourism network.
- Encouraging a sense of place and community pride in the overall presentation of the town.
- Encouraging private investment and business competitiveness.

Phase 2 will focus on the following aspects of the Meekatharra Economic Development Strategy:

- Developing a shared vision for Meekatharra.
- Defining the objectives for the Meekatharra Economic Development Strategy.
- Defining strategic priorities for Meekatharra.
- Undertaking case studies on successful remote towns and drawing key lessons.
- Developing a short term action plan for 'low hanging fruits'.
- Developing a medium to long term action plan, particularly where there are structural barriers to economic development, or where it relies on agreement for a multitude of other stakeholders.
- Assigning responsibilities for implementing various components of the short, medium and long term action plan.
- Identifying possible funding avenues to implement the Meekatharra Economic Development Strategy action plans.



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## Appendix A

## Background Literature Review

## FEDERAL PLANNING AND POLICY CONTEXT

### **Regional Economic Development Guide – Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport**

This guide has been prepared to apply a common approach to regional economic development strategies, recognising that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach is not always appropriate.

In terms of consultation, the Guide states that local government, business leaders and chambers of commerce and industry can provide information to feed into the Strategy, advising on the regional labour market, skills needs, economic and demographic trends and opportunities to build access to markets and comparative advantage. Local residents can then provide opinions and personal experiences to build a picture of the regional economy.

The key types of regional economic development activities, in which the Economic Development Strategy for Meekatharra will be based, are as follows:

- Human Capital
- Social and Environmental Sustainability
- Access to Markets
- Comparative Advantage and Business Competitiveness.
- Partnerships and Integrated Planning.

The Guide also outlines 6 steps in strengthening regional economic development, which will be investigated in the context of Meekatharra as part of the Economic Opportunity Assessment phase:

1. Identify the key elements of your regional economy.
2. Develop comparative advantages and areas of business competitiveness.
3. Support the development, attraction and retention of human capital.
4. Improve access to regional and international markets for industries with a comparative advantage.
5. Identify areas for cross sectoral cooperation.
6. Ensure development is economically, environmentally and socially sustainable.

## STATE PLANNING AND POLICY CONTEXT

### **Draft Mid-West Regional Planning and Infrastructure Framework**

This Draft Framework has been prepared to provide the regional context for future land use planning in the Mid-West region and provided the basis for decision making. From a broader regional perspective, the Framework identifies the Mid-West region as having a diverse economy built around mining, agriculture, fishing, tourism, retail and manufacturing. Overall, in 2009, the mining sector contributed 52 percent to the region's economy, followed by agriculture (16%).

The Shire of Meekatharra is located within the Murchison sub-region and is classified as of 4 'sub-regional' centres in the Mid-West region. As a sub-regional centre, Meekatharra provides for the day-to-day needs of the community, such as weekly food shopping. The centre also provides civic administrative functions and other functions including health and education, some retail and employment. The Framework identifies Meekatharra's supporting the mining and pastoral sectors through the provision of worker accommodation and support services/equipment maintenance.

The Framework identifies the following contextual matters, which will require consideration as part of the preparation of the Economic Development Strategy:

- Meekatharra has a regional airport that accommodates regular flights to and from Perth.
- The Meekatharra Plateau is a distinct landscape features with high natural and scenic quality.
- The Shires of Wiluna and Meekatharra have high prosperity for gold, iron, base metals, uranium and diamonds.
- The sealing of the portion of Goldfield Highway from Meekatharra to Wiluna was identified as a medium priority project in 2011.
- A key challenge for the broader Murchison region (encompassing Meekatharra) is its low and dispersed population over large distances (which is exacerbated by the unsealed state of the Goldfields Highway).
- The extent to which the Shire can grow their population from activity resulting from resources projects is largely dependent on influencing a change to the prevalent fly-in, fly-out workforce approach.
- Undeveloped zoned residential land within Meekatharra may be subject to the resolution of native title issues, as well as upgrades to infrastructure.

### **Mid-West Infrastructure Analysis**

This document was prepared in 2009 and provides government with recommendations to address the critical infrastructure issues currently facing the region, and issues that are anticipated by industry and local communities.

- Expansion of the iron ore industry is unlikely to affect the town of Meekatharra.
- TransWA has coach services connecting Geraldton to Meekatharra and return, twice per week.
- A concern for the Shire is the expense associated with the ongoing maintenance of their local road system as a result of mining activity.

## **REGIONAL PLANNING AND POLICY CONTEXT**

### **Draft Murchison Economic Development Strategy - September 2013**

A copy of the draft Murchison Economic Development Strategy (EDSM) was provided to Urbis by the MWDC in order to inform this current scope of work. The purpose of the EDSM is to outline a set of interventions that align the efforts and resources of stakeholders towards a common set of common goals. The EDSM is currently in draft form and is subject to public advertising.

In terms of the vision and goals for the sub-region, the EDSM identifies the following:

- Stabilise and normalise the sub-regional population and employment levels.
- Sustain employment in the pastoral sector.
- Create 110 new consumer service jobs and 40 new knowledge intensive consumer jobs by 2026.
- Grow local business.

In terms of economic 'interventions' or strategies, the EDSM recommends the following, as well as a series of key actions. A discussion on the relevance of each strategy to Meekatharra is also provided.

STRATEGY/ INTERVENTION	ACTIONS	RISK	RELEVANCE TO MEEKATHARRA EDS
Enhancing and Servicing Mine Supply Chains.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop a network map of a typical mine supply chain.</li> <li>▪ Address the information gap and perceived lack of capacity.</li> <li>▪ Advocate for changed corporate policies, with a focus on how local governments can better service the mine's needs.</li> <li>▪ Advocate for greater infrastructure funding.</li> <li>▪ Encourage Indigenous participation in mining service employment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Finance.</li> <li>▪ Project risk.</li> </ul>	<p>The Shire currently has little interaction with the mining sector and provides limited services given companies are subject to national/ international contracts (with the exception of specific trades).</p> <p>There is an opportunity for the Shire to advocate for the changed corporate policies in order to seek opportunity in this sector.</p>
Murchison Tourism Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Liaison with Shire's to determine interest.</li> <li>▪ Establish a common funding pool for regional branding.</li> <li>▪ Develop a comprehensive knowledge base of attractions.</li> <li>▪ Appoint one or more staff to establish and manage the new network.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fluctuations.</li> <li>▪ Competition from labour and other industries.</li> <li>▪ Insufficient interest in outback tourism.</li> <li>▪ Requirement for passionate and motivated individuals.</li> </ul>	<p>Meekatharra has a limited tourist industry and is left off many Mid-West tourist trails.</p> <p>It will important for the Shire to foster close working relationships with the MWDC and neighbouring local governments to market Meekatharra as part of a broader regional tourism network. It is considered there may be limited opportunities for the Shire to approach this individually given the low population base and remoteness from major service centres.</p>
Sustain and Develop the Pastoral Industry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Research potential vermin control solutions.</li> <li>▪ Develop a cost-benefit analysis of options.</li> <li>▪ Investigate economics of a meat or wool processing plant.</li> <li>▪ Investigate long term economic viability of the pastoral industry.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Industry is vulnerable to changes in regulations.</li> <li>▪ Condition of the natural environment and its capacity to support large numbers of animals.</li> </ul>	<p>It will important for the Shire to be abreast of the development of such strategies given the apparent decline in the pastoral sector.</p>
Keep a Central Register of Blue Sky Initiatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Create a website – online interface.</li> <li>▪ Appoint a register owner to fulfil promotion, liaison and maintenance functions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Low or no visitation.</li> <li>▪ Remoteness and low population will impact on serious economic development.</li> </ul>	<p>Whilst there is potential in developing 'blue sky' initiatives, it will be important for the Shire to maintain focus on the implementation of immediate and instrumental functions to improve economic development in the short term.</p>

## **Mid-West Investment Plan**

This Investment Plan was prepared by the MWDC in conjunction with the Department of Regional Development and outlines the regions 10 year blueprint for enabling economic and social development. The Plan identifies the key drivers for the area, which include:

- High jobless rate (unemployment rate 11.8% as of January 2010).
- Land use planning and infrastructure issues.
- Secure additional community benefits from surrounding economic activity.
- Decreasing population (average decrease of 1.5% pa from 2005 to 2010).
- High under 50 population.

The Plan also identifies that the Shire consider that existing mines in the area are reaching a phase of deceleration and are concerned regarding the expense associated with the ongoing maintenance of the local road system caused by mining may be unsustainable.

The key objectives and priorities in terms of investment in the Mid-West region to 2021 include:

- Substantial increase in population.
- Refreshed and revitalised Mid-West.
- Enhanced regional unity and promotion.
- Balanced urban and coastal development.
- Improved Government services.
- Effective health service delivery.
- A skilled and educated community.
- Positive outcomes for Aboriginal People.
- Improved Regional Infrastructure to Facilitate Coastal and Inland Development.
- Prosperous and diverse primary industries.
- Diversified and enhanced minerals and energy industries.
- Continued expansion of the tourism industry.
- Establishment of new and innovative industries and services.

## **Mid-West Region Infrastructure Overview (November 2012)**

This document provides a brief outline of key infrastructure projects currently being undertaken or proposed within the Mid-West Region. In Meekatharra, the document outlines that various industrial lots are for sale, which

## Mid-West Major Project Summary (December 2012)

This summary is prepared periodically by the MWDC to present an update on the level of development activity in the Mid-West region, and was most recently prepared in December 2012. Whilst somewhat dated, the following table outlines the status of the development projects occurring within the Shire of Meekatharra at December 2012.

The status of these projects and confirming of any new resource projects will need to be confirmed as part of future consultation with industry representatives:

TABLE 6 – MINING PROJECT SUMMARY

PROJECT	COMPANY	RESOURCE	LOCATION	STATUS (AT DEC 2012)	STATUS (2014)
Andy Well	Doray Minerals	Gold	45 km north of Meekatharra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Village construction in Meekatharra townsite (75% complete).</li> <li>▪ Open pit mining to commence Q4 2012, underground mining to commence Q1 2013.</li> <li>▪ Construction jobs – 85</li> <li>▪ Operational jobs – 90</li> <li>▪ Projected resource life – 3.7 years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Operational</li> </ul>
DeGrussa	Sandfire Resources	Copper/ Gold	150 km north of Meekatharra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Open pit mining commenced Feb 2012.</li> <li>▪ Project 95% complete, targeting an annual production rate of 77,000 tpa in Q1 2013.</li> <li>▪ Site comprises a 400-room mine village.</li> <li>▪ Construction jobs – 650</li> <li>▪ Operational jobs – 400</li> <li>▪ Projected resource life – 7 years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Operational</li> </ul>
Burnakura Gold Project	Kentor Gold	Gold	50 km south of Meekatharra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Underground mining to commence Nov 2012 with production start Q4 2013.</li> <li>▪ Construction jobs – 10</li> <li>▪ Operational jobs – 125 additional operators</li> <li>▪ Projected resource life – 4 years for heap leach.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Operational</li> </ul>
Meekatharra Gold	Reed Resource (subsidiary GMK Exploration Pty Ltd)	Gold	Meekatharra town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Production to commence Q4 2012.</li> <li>▪ Construction jobs – 50</li> <li>▪ Operational jobs – 180</li> <li>▪ Projected resource life – Stage 1 – 21 months</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Placed into voluntary administration in August 2013</li> </ul>

## Mid-West Indigenous Arts Industry Strategy

There are a number of recognised Indigenous arts activities across the Mid-West region that are generally under resourced, lack facilities, use poor quality materials and have little professional arts development support.

The Strategy was prepared by the MWDC to investigate the status of the arts industry in the Mid-West region and provide recommendations. The following provides a brief outline on the status of the Indigenous Arts industry in Meekatharra:

- The Bundi Club is the local Aboriginal Corporation in Meekatharra that supports art and craft activities. The opening of a shop/gallery on the main street would offer an identified Aboriginal art retail outlet in Meekatharra however the group needs to implement management structures, improve product quality and attract more artists to participate. The group would rely on CDEP to maintain a presence and require professional artists support. Based on stakeholder consultation however, it was confirmed that the Bundi Club no longer operates in Meekatharra.
- Local Meekatharra artists display paintings in the Meekatharra Telecentre (Community Resource Centre) as a sales outlet. The telecentre charges a small commission for retailing artwork.
- The Meekatharra Family and Domestic Violence Service supports female artists with painting materials and space to work.
- Yulella Aboriginal Corporation delivers CDEP (now RJCP) programs to Meekatharra and is providing assistance to the Bundi Club to establish a shopfront/gallery in the main street in town.
- The Auski Motel has purchased a number of local artists' works to sell to tourists.
- Resident senior custodians of the Yulga Jinna Community (north of Meekatharra) have significant knowledge of language, cultural sites and ceremony, with traditional song and dance practices here in recent years. There is no consistent arts practice in the community, however the community would like arts support.

To facilitate the above, the Strategy recommends a professional arts structure is adopted by developing 3 best practice arts organisations, with an 'Upper Murchison/Outback' arts centre initiative based in Cue to service the upper Murchison region, including Meekatharra. The Strategy the Mid-West Indigenous Arts Industry should broker funding relationships and engage an arts consultant to facilitate the start-up of this initiative.

The status of this recommendation and possible actions to implement this will be investigated as part of the preparation of the Economic Development Strategy.

## Mid-West Tourism Strategy – Discussion Paper (March 2014)

A discussion paper has been prepared to inform participants of the key issues that will be explored during sub-regional workshops during March-April 2014. This will result in the preparation of a Tourism Strategy for the Mid-West region which identifies the trends, gaps, priorities and opportunities and that will deliver meaningful tourism outcomes for the Mid-West to 2024. Key points relevant to the Meekatharra EDS include:

- Domestic overnight visitors comprise half of all Mid-West visitors between 2009 and 2012, a majority of which are male (63%).
- International visitors comprise 6% of overnight visitors, below the WA State average of 11%.
- Australia's caravan, campervan and RV ownership is increasing by around 20,000pa. Town Revitalisation Plans across the Mid-West are supporting upgrades that support towns becoming 'RV friendly' to accommodate this growth.
- There is a growing 'green shift' towards environmentally aware products and services.



- Australia is experiencing an ageing population.
- With rising aspirations and expectations, visitors increasingly expect and want premium service at affordable prices.
- Experience economy – people are valuing experiences over possessions and using experiences to express status.
- Mid-West tourism is essentially a ‘pop-up’ industry that comes and goes during holidays and peak periods.
- Mid-West towns are promoted as destinations, competing against neighbouring towns.
- The Murchison-Upper Gascoyne is predominantly a pastoral-mining area, with seasonal appeal to retirees and travellers.
- Holiday planners and tourism brochures are rich in detail about places/sites but generally provide poor way-finding tools for finding places of interest, do not promote half to full day itineraries and don’t adequately promote short stopovers.
- Mid-West signage is of varying standard/quality and is not ideal for way-finding.
- Tourism groups have had mixed results in bringing about change – constrained by limited budgets, resources and support and the occasional loss of ‘champions’.
- Key opportunity/priority areas for tourism in the Mid-West include:
  - Prospect, minerals, rocks and geology based tourism (largely undeveloped).
  - Nature based eco-tourism – conservation focused land.
  - Community events.
  - Large Indigenous population – visitor experiences.
  - Wildflower ‘hotspots’.
  - Pastoral stations with undeveloped nature-based tourism potentially gradually opening up.
  - Off-road 4WD tracks.
- Investment priorities specific to the Murchison region include:
  - Signage upgrades (directional, informational and interpretive).
  - Development of tourism capacity on DPAW’s ex-pastoral sites.
  - Support for pastoral properties wanting to establish accommodation-camping-day use facilities.
  - Upgrade existing walk trails by adding geocaching, bike access, interpretive panels, overnight camping facilities for hikers and picnic-rest areas.
  - Create a regional website covering each Shire/town.

## LOCAL PLANNING AND POLICY CONTEXT

### Shire of Meekatharra Strategic Community Plan 2012-2022

A Draft Strategic Community Plan was prepared by the Shire and released for comment in 2012. The Plan outlines a 10 year plan (2012-2022) for the Shire. The Plan identifies the local Meekatharra economy as being based on a mix of mining, retail, manufacturing and construction and pastoral farming. Overall, the Plan states that the future economic viability of Meekatharra is optimistic, however significantly dependent upon the local mining sector.

From an environmental perspective, the Plan aims to maintain and preserve the natural environment, enhancing the 'remote' experience of Meekatharra and promoting key tourist attractions. The Plan also places an emphasis on building sustainable communities and facilitating the upgrade and maintenance of local infrastructure, important community places and State Road infrastructure, to advocate the sealing of the Wiluna-Meekatharra section of the Goldfields Highway (now committed).

From an economic perspective, the Shire aims to 'build the economic base through diversification and actively supporting local business', and to take advantage of its strategic transport position. The preparation of an Economic Development Strategy for the Shire will assist in identifying strategies to guide this.

The following provides a summary of the key economic objectives and priorities identified in the Plan:

- Maximise business development opportunities.
  - Develop and implement landscaping/streetscaping plan.
  - Examine potential for horticulture farms and food forests as community based activities.
  - Encourage new business through information incentives and land use provision.
  - Advocate for mining companies to construct accommodation facilities adjoining the town.
- Upgrade and maintain local infrastructure.
  - Develop and implement asset management plans, including roads, footpaths and buildings/structures.
  - Provide facilities to support community needs.
- Create land use capacity for industry.
  - Review land use planning to ensure commercial and industrial opportunities are maximised.
  - Partner with LandCorp/Regional Development for the release of additional blocks of land.
- Facilitate affordable and diverse housing options.
  - Review land use planning to ensure housing and land size choices are available.
  - Partner with LandCorp/Regional Development for the release of additional blocks of land.
- Develop Tourism Industry.
  - Examine potential of establishing a Tourist/Museum/Cultural Centre.
  - Build tourism capability through events, arts, history and cultural experiences.

### **Shire of Meekatharra Town Planning Scheme No.3**

Town Planning Scheme No.3 (the Scheme) provides statutory basis for land use and development control within the Meekatharra townsite. Land outside of the Scheme Area (outside of the Meekatharra townsite) is not covered by the Scheme and is subject to building code compliance only.

The following zones are depicted on the Scheme Map:

- Residential.
- Commercial.
- Industrial.
- Special Use (Accommodation Village, Church, Caravan Park, Hospital, Motel and Supermarket).
- Rural.

## Appendix B

## Audit of Commercial Activity (March 2014)

TABLE 7 – MEEKATHARRA BUSINESS AUDIT

RETAIL	SERVICE/TRADE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Foodworks (Farmer Jacks)</li> <li>▪ Meekatharra Bakery</li> <li>▪ Shell/Coles Express Roadhouse</li> <li>▪ BP</li> <li>▪ Julie’s Beauty.</li> <li>▪ Meeka Meats.</li> <li>▪ Meeka Thrifty Link.</li> <li>▪ Midwest Ice.</li> <li>▪ Meeka Bakery.</li> <li>▪ Meekatharra Pharmacy.</li> <li>▪ Meeka Corner Store.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mark Smith Plumbing</li> <li>▪ Frig Tech Services</li> <li>▪ Coates Hire</li> <li>▪ Jags Floor Covering</li> <li>▪ Green Mining Freight and Crane Hire</li> <li>▪ Fencing Contractors.</li> <li>▪ Frigtech</li> <li>▪ Lacy Contracting</li> <li>▪ Murchison Carpentry</li> <li>▪ Neverfail Water</li> <li>▪ Nexus Freight</li> <li>▪ P&amp;R Contractors</li> <li>▪ Shane Petterson</li> <li>▪ Ripper Engines</li> <li>▪ S&amp;K Electrical</li> <li>▪ Skippers Aviation</li> <li>▪ TJ Crane Hire</li> <li>▪ Toll West</li> <li>▪ Toll Ipec</li> <li>▪ Trenfield Motors</li> <li>▪ Trenfield B&amp;E</li> <li>▪ Wellington Electrical</li> <li>▪ Westnet</li> <li>▪ Yulella Vision</li> </ul>
ENTERTAINMENT/HOSPITALITY	GOVERNMENT/EDUCATIONAL SERVICES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Commercial Hotel</li> <li>▪ Auski Motel</li> <li>▪ Royal Mail Hotel</li> <li>▪ Meekatharra Hotel</li> <li>▪ Food Cart (corner Main and Savage Street)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Shire of Meekatharra</li> <li>▪ Department of Child Protection</li> <li>▪ Bureau of Meteorology.</li> <li>▪ Department of Mines and Petroleum.</li> <li>▪ Centrelink</li> <li>▪ Meekatharra District High School.</li> <li>▪ Hospital.</li> <li>▪ Department of Corrections.</li> <li>▪ Meekatharra Police.</li> <li>▪ Royal Flying Doctor Service.</li> <li>▪ Telstra.</li> <li>▪ Water Corporation.</li> <li>▪ Australian Post.</li> </ul>

ACCOMMODATION	CHURCH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Commercial Hotel</li> <li>▪ Auski Motel</li> <li>▪ Royal Mail Hotel</li> <li>▪ Meekatharra Caravan Park</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Catholic Church.</li> <li>▪ Karalundi Seventh-day Adventist Church.</li> <li>▪ Seventh-day Adventist Church.</li> <li>▪ Uniting Church.</li> </ul>
RECREATIONAL	CHILD AND AGED SERVICES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Golf Club</li> <li>▪ Rifle Club</li> <li>▪ Race Club</li> <li>▪ Gymkhana</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Murchison Aged Hostel</li> <li>▪ Community Health Service</li> <li>▪ Youth Centre</li> <li>▪ Junja Mudar Mia Playgroup</li> </ul>

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