

**A DISCUSSION PAPER ON DEVELOPING A
WESTERN AUSTRALIAN REGIONALISATION STRATEGY**



Western Australian
Regional Capitals Alliance

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Copies of this document are available online and from all member local governments.

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Background

The Western Australian Regional Capitals Alliance represents the major regional centre city local governments in Western Australia.

Our purpose is:

WARCA will enable the 7 member regional capital communities to evolve into fully-fledged alternatives to the Perth metropolitan area with populations of at least 50,000 by 2026.

The Alliance Members have the following objectives:-

1. will work to develop a collaborative framework to engage with and partner with both the Western Australian and Australian Governments;
2. will work collaboratively to achieve the future sustainable development of the State of Western Australia;
3. will work towards being accepted as a legitimate and respected grouping within the arrangements resulting from the current Local Government Structural Reform process;
4. will ensure that the emergence of the Alliance occurs in a balanced fashion, recognising the infrastructure needs and associated funding requirements of sub-regional centres in their hinterlands;
5. will work towards a framework to evolve into fully fledged alternatives to the Perth metropolitan area as locations for the growing population of the State;
6. will actively participate in State Population Policy development to ensure the State's future population growth and its associated demands for social, economic and environmental amenity are distributed in a sustainable fashion. The Alliance believes that the realistic target is for 50% of projected population growth to occur in regional areas, with 25% to be located in regional cities; and
7. are positioned and resourced to represent the interests of its members and to enable synergies at operational and strategic levels.

The WA Regional Capitals Alliance is committed to delivering results and action. To meet this aim the Alliance is focused on key priorities that include:-

- ✓ ***Establish common platform to seek support from the State Government.***
This initiative is already progressing and should continue to build on the momentum by seeking agreement from the State government.
- ✓ ***Drive results from the UWA Partnership.***
The Cooperation Agreement with UWA was executed in December 2011 and should be driven to deliver results in the immediate future.
- ✓ ***Develop regional growth plans for each member.***
To ensure consistency across the regional cities, a framework for the development of regional growth plans needs to be established.

The purpose of this paper is to drive debate and discussion on the development of a policy-based approach to significantly changing and developing the regional framework for Western Australia.

Western Australian Regionalisation Policy

The Western Australian Regional Capitals Alliance is a proactive Alliance of the key regional centres of Western Australia.

The aim of the Alliance is to progress the development of the key regional centres as alternate economic, social and community hubs as alternatives to metropolitan Perth and the east coast capital cities.

It is recognised that much of Australia's natural resource wealth comes out of Western Australia's regions. Historically this natural advantage and wealth generation has not been effectively utilised to create major new communities. The Alliance seeks to change that historical context.

The policy paper seeks to provide a framework of key policy initiatives which can be supported and implemented by the Commonwealth and State Government in order to drive substantial economic and population growth in the Alliance centres.

It is a vision of a positive, progressive and collaborative future.

Regional Living Pathways

Vision

A series of strong vibrant young and growing regional city (capitals) centres.

Mission

To facilitate the relocation and migration to regional centres by providing support to new families to live and work in regional city (capitals) centres.

Background

Historically the cost of moving away from a major metropolitan centre has provided a major disincentive to new families and workers relocating to regional areas.

It is acknowledged that Perth is struggling to meet the needs of families given its rapid growth and continuing unsustainable urban sprawl. Current policies subsidise and facilitate additional growth in the metropolitan area, even though this is adversely impacting on lifestyle.

It is also noted that demographically the greatest age bracket that most significantly influences demand on services (such as schooling, medical, culture and recreation) is the new family or first time home buyer. This is a 'growth demographic' noting that a couple can potentially become a family of five over the space of a decade.

By targeting this demographic sector a policy can see a transformational change in a community with rapid growth and substantial drivers of services which create a multiplier effective on jobs growth and economic impact.

Policy RLP1: That the WA State Government Introduce an \$11,000 Regional First Home Owners Grant for building new homes to ensure regional growth, providing a \$4,000 boost to the existing First Home Owners Grant and phasing out the equivalent program in Perth. The Regional First Home Owners Grant applies to contracts entered into on or after 1 June 2012 and is aligned to the Western Australian Regionalisation Strategy.

Regional Devolution Strategy

Vision

A series of strong regional city (capitals) centres with capacity and decision makers living, working and supporting the regions in the regions.

Mission

To facilitate the devolution of capacity, authority and autonomy to regional (capitals) centres through placement of government capacity and services in the regions.

Background

Historically Western Australia has run a centralised public service model. The current model sees the bulk of all executive, administrative and in many cases service provision capacity and support based in Perth and regional areas services through outreach services. The model has created a dysfunctional approach to servicing regional communities with many of the people directly responsible for certain areas never having been (let alone lived) in the community they are responsible for. This creates a significant disconnect and lack of empathy, understanding or responsibility.

A second issue relates to departments as a whole where they are based in Perth, for historical reasons. Given modern technology and scale of regional cities opportunities abound for departments and agencies to relocate to regional areas.

The ultimate example of decentralisation was the decision of the Californian Legislature to shift their capital to Sacramento. California is the equivalent of the world's 7th largest economy and represents one of the most decentralised jurisdictions in the world.

Policy RDS 1: That the Western Australian Government relocate government agencies currently based in Perth as the next step in the decentralisation agenda which will include shifting certain State Government Departments, Agencies and Authorities to Albany, Bunbury, Geraldton and Kalgoorlie to progress the regionalisation agenda.

Policy RDS 2: That the Western Australian Government substantially reinforces the resources, capacity and authority of regional offices (and staff) of existing State Government Departments and Agencies in the regions.

Commitment is required that each major Department and Agency has a regional office in Albany, Broome, Bunbury, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Karratha and Port Hedland staffed and lead on site by a [SES¹] Regional Director and supported by appropriate (and empowered) key staff.

¹ Senior Executive Services as defined in the Public Services of Western Australia.

Strengthening Regional Business

Vision

A strong, vibrant and diverse regional business community driving economic and social growth.

Mission

To provide support for regional business in providing data to assist in business planning and assistance in obtaining skilled and unskilled workers in their own communities.

Background

The most effective tool in driving employment and population growth is through supporting and developing small to medium business enterprises (SMEs). These businesses by sheer number have the opportunity to provide significant multipliers of employment. Another significant advantage is that SMEs have the capacity to be diverse and adaptable to various market opportunities or constraints – as opposed to large single purpose businesses such as major resource or manufacturing facilities. That is not to say large businesses are not to be attracted to the regions – but rather that a more effective strategy is to target small investment with a focus on innovation and diversity.

Policy SRB 1: The Western Australian Government support the expansion of employment in regional areas by offering a targeted bounty or direct financial payment of \$5,000 per full time equivalent job (must be in place for at least 12 months) for any firm that relocates operations to regional Western Australia from interstate or 50% (\$2,500) for every job relocated from the Perth metropolitan area.

Policy SRB 2: That the Australian Government support the extension of skilled and unskilled migration to regional city centres by specifying and mandating a prescribed number of places for regional city centres, as a priority, where any business (or Government agency) can identify a job opportunity which has a minimum commitment of two years.

Policy SRB 3: That the Western Australian Government, in collaboration with the Western Australian Regional Capitals Alliance, develop and include employment projections in all regional plans to support more jobs closer to where people live as part of the preparation of regional plans across Western Australia with a specific focus on key regional cities. Further to assist the expansion and development of small to medium enterprises (SMEs) in regional areas to achieve sustainability and capacity to employ more people.

Planning Regional Capital Cities

Vision

Well planned regional (capital) cities with the capacity, infrastructure and services to attract and sustain substantial economic and population growth

Mission

Implementation of Regional (Capitals) Centre Growth Plans (functioning as Local Planning Strategies) and Regional City Plans (consistent and contemporary performance based town planning schemes) which link to Regional Strategies (developed by WAPC) and Regional Investment Plans (developed by relevant Development Commissions).

Background

Planning in Western Australia has been under a well-structured and centralist approach. This structured approach has led to positive planning outcomes and some level of consistency – however it has also created a significant bureaucracy and a cumbersome planning process which regularly sees the development of new town planning schemes take decades, notwithstanding these relatively simple documents have a statutory requirement to be reviewed every five years.

Given the significant growth and demand associated with the resources sector developments, there is a clear and urgent need to fast-track and facilitate new planning schemes for all the regional (capital) centres. Such new schemes need to be consistent, but more importantly as a means to provide flexibility whilst enhancing investor certainty. New models incorporating performance-based mechanisms need to be considered in developing these new schemes. Also these schemes require overarching strategies (fulfilling the requirement of local planning strategies) which go beyond the standard planning requirements and pick up extensive social and economic drivers and needs.

Policy PRC 1: *The Western Australian Government develops Regional Cities Plans to support regional growth and economic development in Albany, Bunbury, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Broome and the Pilbara cities' communities of Karratha and Port Hedland in partnership with respective local governments and other local stakeholders. This plan will aim to position these cities as the key centres for their regions as part of a State network by aligning the Regional City Plans to achieve consistency and synergies.*

Policy PRC 2: *The Commonwealth Government prioritises the funding of key infrastructure and services in the regional centres of Western Australia, through programs such as Building Better regional Cities, with the intent of stimulating economic and population growth in the Western Australian regional centres in recognition of the natural resource wealth and opportunities in regional Western Australia.*

Building Regional Industry

Vision

Strong industrial precincts creating jobs and economic growth throughout regional Western Australia

Mission

The creation and development, with supporting infrastructure and services, of major industrial precincts and hubs associated with each of the regional (capital) centres.

Background

There are currently a series of industry precincts identified throughout Western Australia. These include:-

- Albany: Mirrambena;
- Bunbury: Kemerton and Shotts;
- Geraldton: Narngulu and Oakajee; and
- Kalgoorlie: Mungari

Whilst identified these entire industry precincts suffer from a lack of planning and provision of key infrastructure and services. The Western Australian Government has relied on current policy making the 'pioneer' industry (first to establish in a precinct) responsible for developing key infrastructure and services. This policy has been not successful and has meant potential industries have located interstate or worse, internationally. It is clear that to ensure the attraction of industry that industry precincts must be serviced by appropriate infrastructure and services.

Policy BRI1: *That the Western Australian Government support the development of the key industry precincts at each of the regional centres by ensuring that the land is zoned and properly serviced through connection to power, water, communication and gas and also has suitable access by road and rail.*

Policy BRI2: *That the Western Australian Government facilitates and funds the development of each of the key industry precincts through a staged process of infrastructure and service development.*

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