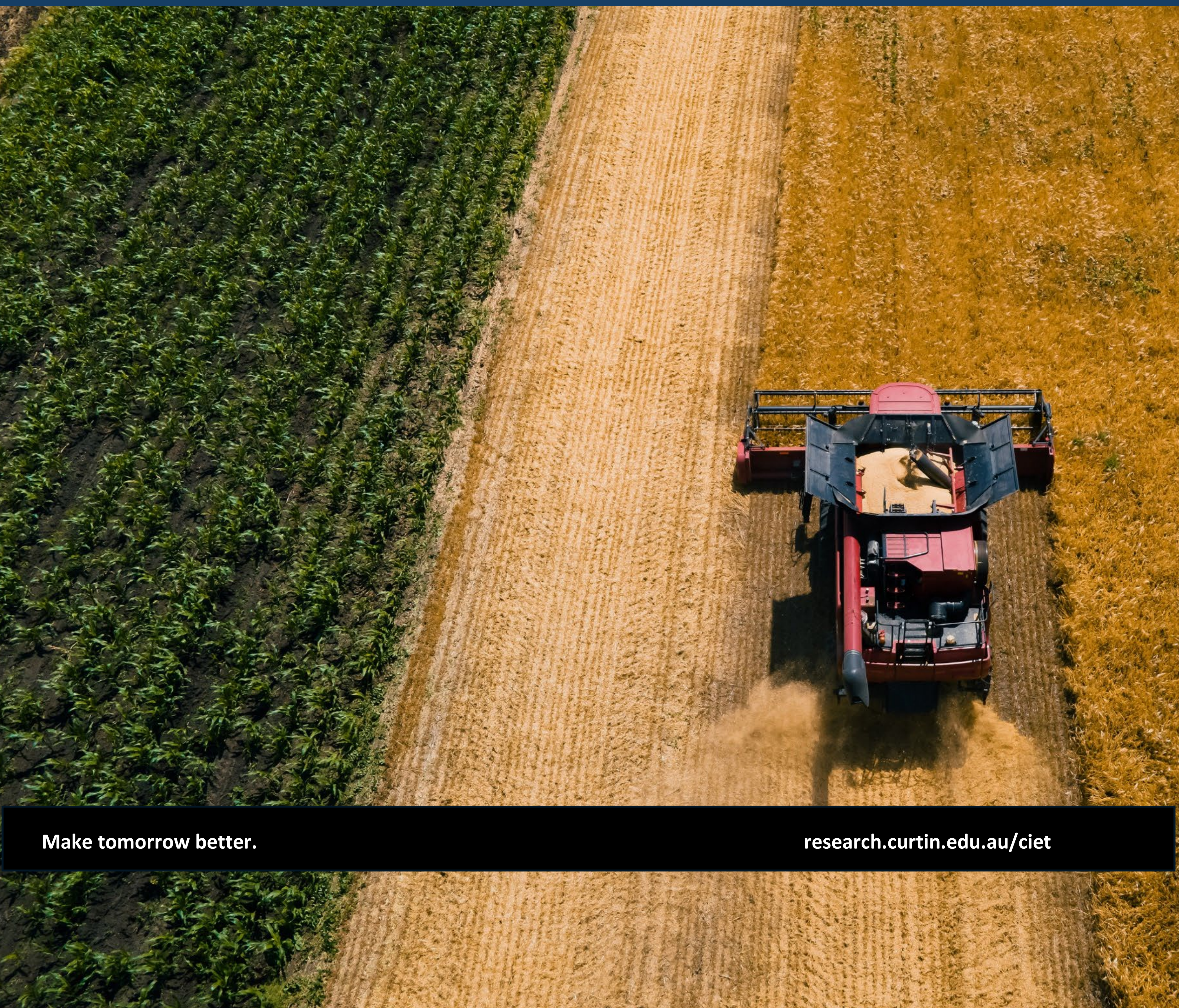
Community wellbeing and attitudes to the energy transition including onshore gas development in the North Perth Basin

November 2025

Curtin Institute for Energy Transition



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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Yamatji Peoples who are the Traditional Owners of the Mid West region where this research was conducted and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and future.

We also respectfully acknowledge and recognise the Whadjuk Elders past, present and future as the Traditional Owners of the Nyungar boodja on which the Curtin Institute for Energy Transition is located.

We acknowledge the tens of thousands of years of Indigenous knowledge, culture and insight into living sustainably and caring for the natural world that have shaped this land and our ongoing research.

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Executive summary

This research provides a baseline understanding of community wellbeing and perceptions of energy developments, particularly gas, in the communities of the North Perth Basin located in the Mid West region of Western Australia (WA). The region is currently host to several exploration licences for natural gas and geothermal resources along with prospective wind and large-scale solar developments.

Using a mixed methods approach, the research comprised an online survey of 225 residents from across the Mid West, followed by 12 focus groups and 15 online interviews. The survey, in the field from November 2024 to January 2025, aimed to gain a baseline understanding of community wellbeing in the Mid West and perceptions of the gas industry. The qualitative research from the focus groups and interviews aimed to understand a broader range of concerns about energy developments in the region, including gas.

To understand perspectives of Indigenous peoples, views on energy developments in the region were captured through a yarn with seven representatives from the Yamatji Southern Regional Corporation (YSRC). The Yamatji Nation encompasses several Indigenous groups with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and spans the North Perth Basin. The claim groups (Hutt River, Mullewa Wadjari, Southern Yamatji and Widi Mob) are represented by four cultural committees as part of the YSRC. The use of the term Indigenous in this report is specific to the Yamatji community.

The key findings of the research are structured around the community wellbeing framework used in the survey (McCrea et al., 2016), which includes social, environmental and political dimensions of wellbeing, physical infrastructure, as well as economic and health dimensions. The qualitative findings from the focus groups and interviews are discussed within the community wellbeing framework as a way of integrating the qualitative and quantitative data. Key findings from these dimensions are summarised below.

Social dimensions of community wellbeing

The survey results indicated strong place attachment across all regions of the Mid West. Community spirit and cohesion was also strong across the Mid West, with slightly higher results in the smaller towns of Mingenew, Three Springs, Eneabba and Dongara. It appears that communities in the Mid West desire a sense of collective wellbeing, expressing hope for their communities to thrive and grow. Community participation through volunteering and sports were important ways that the community supported each other, particularly in the smaller towns. Levels of trust with people in the local area were highest in Dongara and the smaller towns of Eneabba, Three Springs and Mingenew.

Safety is a key indicator of community wellbeing, and the survey results indicated high levels of personal safety for communities in Dongara, Mingenew, Three Springs and Eneabba. The survey results from Geraldton indicated lower levels of personal safety, and participants in Geraldton expressed their concerns about crime in their city. Safety was also discussed in relation to increased heavy vehicles on the roads, with some roads considered unsafe due to the number of trucks. The Yarn with YSRC highlighted that the Indigenous community social wellbeing is deeply tied to the preservation of culture and the natural environment, which enables essential social, cultural and spiritual bonds.

Environmental dimensions of community wellbeing

Survey findings highlighted respondents' concerns about the impact of gas developments on water sources, particularly the risk of contamination and depletion of groundwater. Participants in the focus groups and interviews described the natural beauty of the region and how energy infrastructure projects may impact nature, in particular wildflowers and therefore tourism in the region. Concerns about waste from the materials used for renewable energy projects and the construction process were also raised along with general concerns that recycling was not prioritised or effectively funded in the region. The decommissioning of wind farms and associated infrastructure on farms (for example, concrete and roads) were also expressed as concerns by landholders in the region.

Impacts on the natural environment were a major concern for the YSRC. Impacts discussed included concerns about water contamination, excessive water extraction disrupting ecosystem functions, impacts on local flora and fauna, and native vegetation clearing. Such pressures were perceived to pose serious risks to endangered species, culturally significant plants and animals, and the overall health of country. Overlapping licences (such as for water extraction) were also identified as another potential factor that may worsen environmental impacts.

Key findings emphasise the importance of conserving biodiversity, especially culturally significant species, water sources, and sacred sites, as well as ensuring access to Country for cultural practices. These elements are vital for upholding responsibilities to Country and supporting intergenerational knowledge transfer. Participants emphasised the importance of cultural heritage management plans in guiding development in a culturally respectful manner.

Political dimensions of community wellbeing

Political dimensions related to local decision making and citizens feeling like they have a voice. One key concern that was raised in the focus groups was the use of the Significant Development Pathway, which is an application pathway for significant developments in WA and is further described in section 2.2. The use of this development pathway was seen to remove local decision making, as decisions on significant developments are made by the state. Both the state government and the gas industry were seen to lack transparency, with limited opportunities for community participation or influence on decisions by using the significant development pathway to approve projects.

A lack of trust in the state government and, to a lesser extent, in industry was also evident in the findings. Overstated project benefits, which some people felt never materialised, further undermined trust. A lack of information was also contributing to the different communities feeling uninformed, disempowered and excluded from decisions relating to energy developments in their local area.

In this context, YSRC valued meaningful participation in decision-making and early engagement to build trust, while seeking stronger influence with industry. Challenges include timing conflicts and consultation fatigue, which can be addressed through cultural awareness programs and improved information sharing.

Physical infrastructure, services and facilities

Satisfaction levels with services and facilities in the Mid West indicated that Geraldton and Dongara residents have higher satisfaction with services, such as community support, health services and sports and leisure facilities. The region was fairly uniform with participants indicating moderate satisfaction levels for local schools and childcare facilities. Dongara, Eneabba, Three Springs and Mingenew all expressed dissatisfaction with shopping for household goods and clothing, whereas Geraldton had neutral satisfaction levels for household goods and clothes shopping. For food and everyday household items, Geraldton had higher levels of satisfaction than Dongara and the smaller towns. Focus group and interview participants expressed concerns about strained health facilities, a lack of bulk billing doctors, long waiting periods to see doctors and specialists, limited health care for the elderly and inadequate aged care facilities.

The most common infrastructure themes raised among focus group and interview participants were those relating to electricity reliability, delayed connections to power and road maintenance. Focus group and interview participants described how power reliability was a frequent concern for residents in the region, particularly in the smaller towns. Geraldton was seen to have better reliability; however, delays with power connections were having an impact across the region for businesses and connecting homes. In Dongara and Three Springs, participants discussed having to wait for months for solar installers or for repairs to inverters as there was only one installer based in Geraldton. This issue was compounded by power quality issues in the region, with inverters frequently needing replacement.

The impact on roads from industry in the region was another concern that was prevalent among people within the smaller towns. Heavy vehicle movements in regional towns such as Mingenew were impacting local roads, which are a local government responsibility. Participants discussed the impact of trucks transiting through the region on road infrastructure, and the ongoing cost of this to local government. The prevalence of pole top fires in the distribution network was consistently raised as a concern by many participants across the region, but was more prevalent in Mingenew, Three Springs and Geraldton. The perceived risk of fires from gas flaring in the summer months was also raised as a safety concern.

Infrastructure concerns from both the broader community and Yamatji included limited affordable housing. Access to Country was an issue for Yamatji, as well as the affordability of domestic gas. The YSRC were supportive of renewable energy, due to concerns about climate change presenting significant cultural, environmental and economic risks to both Country and community. However, they raised concerns over the visual impact of wind farms.

Economic dimensions of community wellbeing

The cost of living was discussed as an economic concern for many participants. The need for regional and community benefits arose as a consistent theme with participants wanting more support for local businesses and the broader local economy from energy related industries operating in the region. Some communities expressed disappointment with promises made by industry that they felt did not materialise. Broader economic benefits, such as jobs were also seen as limited with the gas sector. Participants from some of the smaller towns also felt that having mining camps on the edge of town, and not integrated into the community fabric, did not contribute to the local economy.

Employment and training were recognised as important for enhancing the region's economic growth. However, in Geraldton, training in the clean energy sector was challenged by a lack of educators and participants raised concerns about the limited occupations associated with the energy sector that are likely to be created (for example, mostly in civil engineering and construction). A lack of skilled workers, such as electricians and solar installers, in the region was raised by focus group participants, referring to long wait times for solar PV installations.

YSRC also showed an interest in developing culturally respectful business opportunities on Country through renewable energy co-ownership, service provision, and the establishment of member enterprises, job creation, training opportunities, and community benefits while respecting Indigenous rights. Existing roles, such as rangers' surveys and land management, continue alongside training from energy proponents and the YSRC to build community skills and employment opportunities. The YSRC noted the importance of education, along with the need for financial support enabling Indigenous children to be enrolled and stay in school.

Health dimensions of community wellbeing

The health dimensions of community wellbeing were not frequently discussed through the research; however, participants identified opportunities for companies to let their medical staff service the broader community in the smaller towns, rather than just their organisation. Mental health was discussed in relation to stressful work environments, interactions and time taken to negotiate with energy companies, cost of living, and limited opportunities for social activities. Some staff at hospitals, local government, social services and aged care facilities were described as stressed and burnt out.

In summary, this research finds that various strategies are needed from government and industry to improve community wellbeing in the Mid West. Ensuring that communities feel informed and included in decisions about energy developments is essential. Participants discussed a need for a broader vision from the WA Government for development in the region, instead of industry led developments that are disjointed, and lack strategic vision for the benefit of people in the region. The industry may consider working with local governments about integrating workers and providing housing support for smaller towns, to enable communities in the region to thrive and grow. Aligned with a desire for vibrancy and growth in the region, power reliability, power quality and new electricity connections for businesses and housing in the region should be prioritised. Ensuring road safety and sufficient funds for maintenance and upgrades is also needed.

Acknowledgments

The research team would like to acknowledge and thank all participants of this research through the survey, focus groups, interviews and staff of the YSRC for their time, insights and thoughtful contributions in discussions. We are grateful for the information you generously shared to contribute to this important baseline study of community wellbeing in the Mid West region.

This research has been funded through CSIRO's Gas Industry Social and Environmental Research Alliance (GISERA) with contributions from the Australian Government's Department of Industry, Science and Resources. GISERA is a collaboration between CSIRO, Commonwealth, state and territory governments and industry established to undertake research on the impacts of onshore gas exploration and development on the environment, and the socio-economic costs and benefits. For information about GISERA's governance structure, projects and research findings visit https://gisera.csiro.au.

1. Introduction

The North Perth Basin in the Mid West region of Western Australia (WA) is currently experiencing a significant increase in energy related industrial activities. The region has extensive natural resources, with mixed land use that includes agriculture, large scale wind and solar developments, gas storage, resource exploration (e.g. gas and geothermal), and potential for CCS. This increase in energy project exploration and development in the region has the potential to increase resource conflicts, which is the focus of another GISERA study – Northern Perth Basin subsurface resource conflicts (CSIRO, 2024b).

The region is also host to plans for hydrogen production and the manufacturing of ammonia with the Murchison Hydrogen Renewables Project north of Kalbarri (CSIRO, 2024a). This project, and other planned developments, will see the deployment of different local energy infrastructure which will impact local residents in different ways. The nature of these impacts will likely have a lasting effect on the functioning of the community depending on how they are deployed and their interaction with the local communities.

This report details research conducted with communities across the Mid West region. The communities included the City of Greater Geraldton with a population of approximately 40,000; the coastal town of Dongara, located 64 km south of Geraldton, with a population approximately 1,400); Eneabba (population approximately 140), and the Wheatbelt towns of Three Springs and Mingenew with populations of approximately 600 and 420, respectively (Figure 1).

The research was funded through CSIRO's Gas Industry Social and Environmental Research Alliance (GISERA) and sought to understand local participants' views in relation to community wellbeing and their perceptions of the risks and benefits of potential energy developments across the Mid West region, in particular gas. The aim of this research is to provide an evidence base to help governments and industry plan for future development, address concerns, and promote transparency to ensure communities are informed and consulted about developments in the region.

The research comprised a survey conducted across the Mid West region in the towns noted above, 12 focus groups and 15 online interviews. Indigenous viewpoints on energy developments in the region were also captured through a yarn with representatives from the Yamatji Southern Regional Corporation (YSRC). This research fills an important knowledge gap, as there are currently no published studies on social attitudes or acceptance of gas projects from the Mid West region, and few studies on the social impacts of gas developments in other regions of WA.

The report is structured as follows:

- Executive summary
- Section 1 – Introduction to the research

- Section 2 – Background information on gas development in the Mid West, community acceptance of energy developments and a brief introduction to the community wellbeing framework
- Section 3 – Methods for the survey, focus group, interview and YSRC meeting
- Section 4 – Demographic summary of the communities in Geraldton, Dongara, Mingenew, Three Springs and Eneabba
- Section 5 – Main findings of the research, including a discussion of each social dimension, structured as per the community wellbeing framework (Table 1).
- Section 6 – Conclusions from the research.

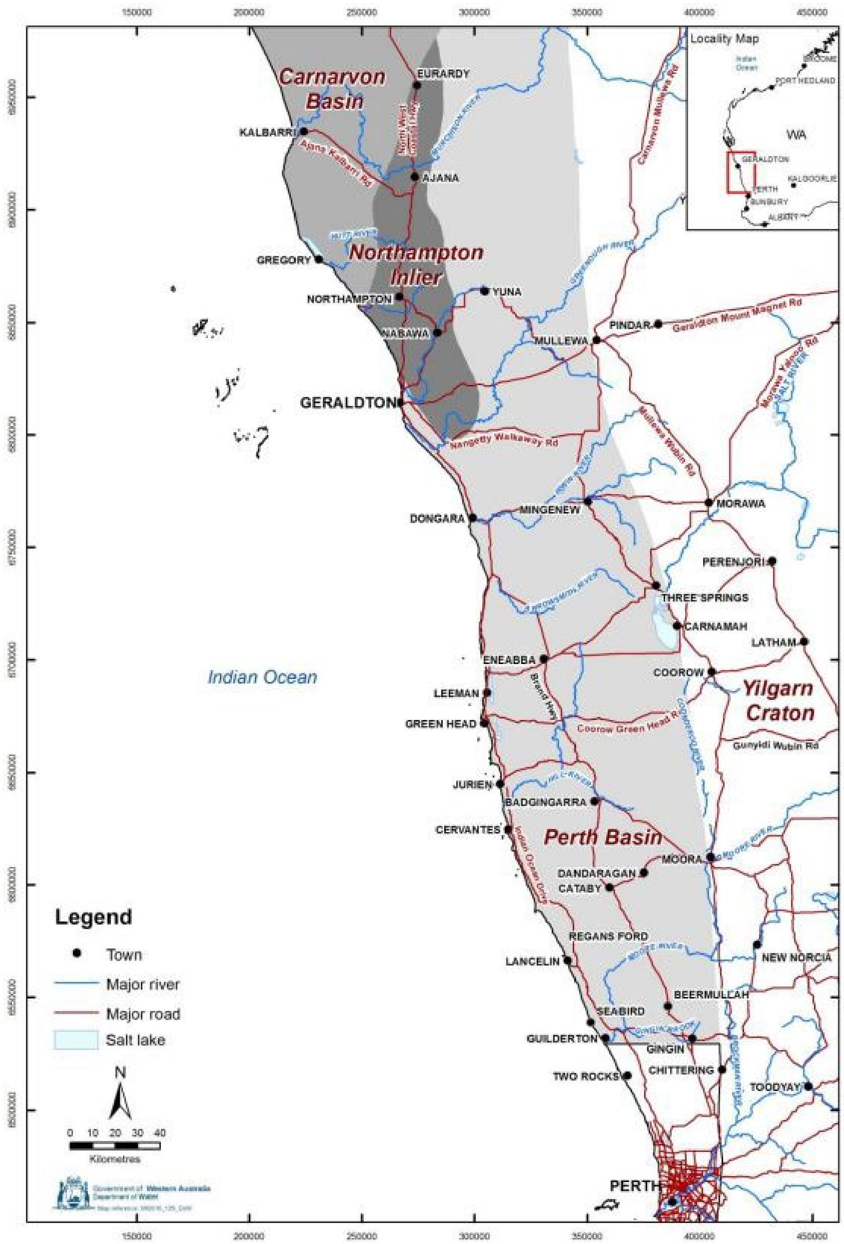

Figure 1. North Perth Basin. Source: Government of Western Australia (2017)

2. Background

2.1. Gas development in the Mid West

Approximately 60% of conventional gas reserves in WA are located in the Carnarvon and Perth basins (Government of Western Australia, 2024b). Gas extraction in the Mid West region has provided a source of gas for the WA market since the 1960s. The Waitsia, Beharra Springs and South Erregulla gas fields are focused on supplying liquefied natural gas (LNG) for energy demand in the state, with the Waitsia gas field being one of the largest onshore gas fields in Australia (Mitsui E&P, n.d.). The below map provides operating gas, oil fields and power generation sites in the North Perth basin (Figure 2)

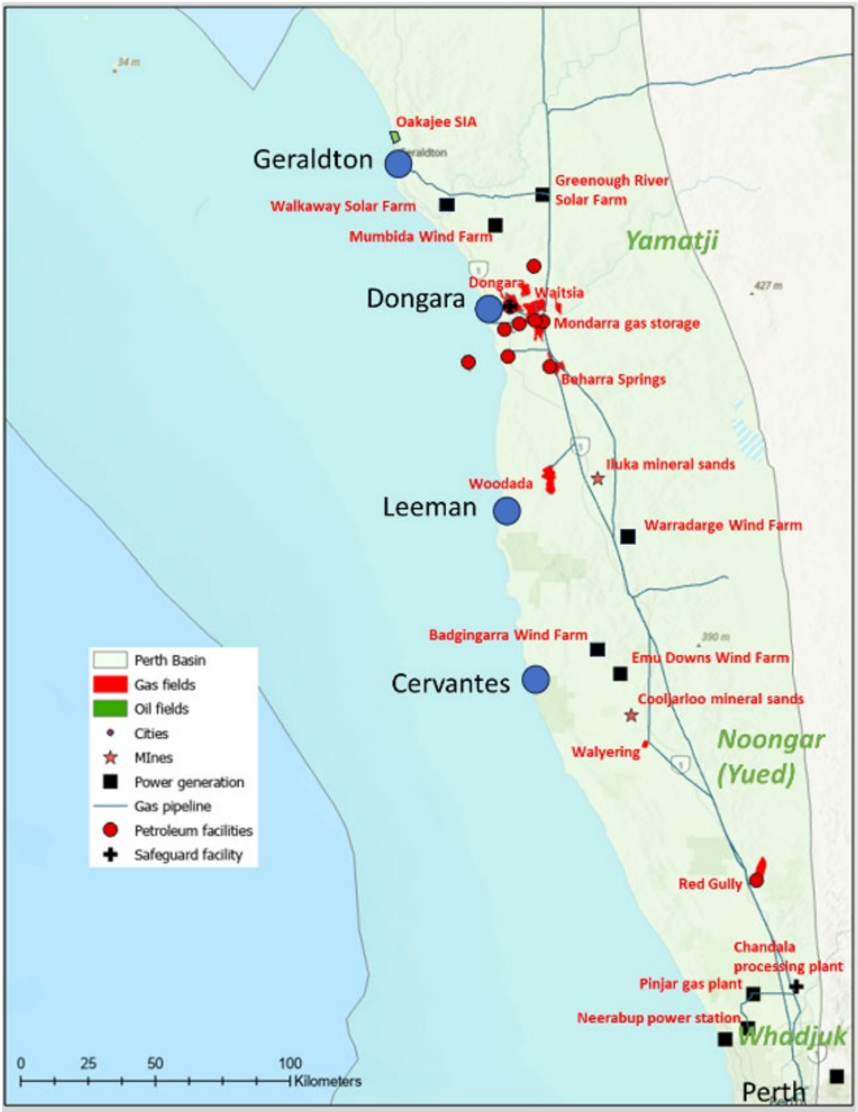

Figure 2. Operating gas and oil fields, mines, and power generation. Source: CSIRO

The WA Government has a domestic gas policy, which ensures that gas, equivalent to 15% of LNG production, is reserved for the WA market (Government of Western Australia, 2024b). It is projected that gas will remain an important source of energy for WA. For example, it is forecast that even as more renewable energy and storage replaces the retirement of coal generation in the state, gas will continue to be used in the South West Interconnected System (SWIS) and across the National Electricity Market, as a flexible generation source.

The Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) projects there will be a gas supply gap in WA from 2030 due to the growth in the industrial and mineral processing sectors and a decline in production due to depleting gas fields (AEMO, 2024, p. 4). ACIL Allen (2021) also project a shortfall in gas supply in WA to meet projected demand commencing in 2032. The WA Gas Statement of Opportunities report also projects growth in the industrial use of gas from 2027 to 2031, which is projected to occur from mining and minerals processing. This includes alumina refining and processing, ammonia and urea production for export (AEMO, 2024).

2.2. Community acceptance of energy developments

A GISERA study in 2020 on community attitudes to conventional gas in South East Australia found that trust in the gas industry and in governance issues was low and that improving both of these was key to increasing social acceptance (Walton et al., 2020). The same study also found that perceived impacts, perceived benefits and distributional fairness were important factors for social acceptance and highlighted that information should be provided on the specific issues that people care about, rather than generic information about the industry (Walton & McCrea, 2020).

Distributional fairness or justice involves questions around the siting of infrastructure and the allocation of benefits and/or harms of infrastructure siting (Jenkins et al., 2016). These findings align with the social acceptance model developed by Wüstenhagen et al. (2007) that defines social acceptance along three dimensions that include community acceptance, socio-political acceptance and market acceptance. Similar to GISERA's South Australian study, for communities, the key factors influencing acceptance related to distributional justice, procedural justice (fair and inclusive decision-making) and trust.

Enhancing transparency, local benefits, and procedural fairness is needed to engender some public confidence in conventional gas development. Witt et al. (2018) undertook a comparison of the experience of communities in the UK and Queensland, Australia asking if the gas industry were a “good neighbour” in terms of procedural fairness and distributive justice. The study was conducted using secondary literature (academic, grey and public reports) and their findings suggest that in Queensland priority development areas were allocated by the state, and market forces determined the scale of development, thus leading to a lack of local influence on developments (Witt et al., 2018, p. 554).

These findings are relevant to the Significant Development Pathway, which is an assessment and approvals pathway for development proposals that are considered significant or complex in WA. This development pathway is limited to projects that are valued at $20 million or more in the Perth and Peel regions and $5 million or more in other parts of the state. The Significant Development Pathway came into effect through the Planning and Development Amendment Act 2023 and Associated Regulations (Government of Western Australia, 2024a, 2025c). The Significant Development Pathway enables the WA government to make decisions on developments in the state, removing the need for local government approval and may have the effect of limiting local influence on developments.

2.3. Community wellbeing framework

Community wellbeing is described as a perception of one's community as a "good place to live" (McCrea et al., 2019, p. 88). It includes satisfaction and attachment to a local place of residence, considering the social and physical environment and the services and facilities of that environment. However, community wellbeing is a subjective perception that exists at a point in time (McCrea et al., 2019). Thus, changes in the community can affect how people feel about their place of residence at different points in time.

Atkinson et al. (2020) note how community wellbeing is most often subjective and assessed through quantifiable indicators. They distinguish three types of individual subjective assessment being; a) variables that affect an individual life (own house, job, stress and happiness), b) variables that affect collective living (local transport, local economy, safety and trust, and c) a collective sense of wellbeing, "being well together" that includes community cohesion, shared values, belongings and "ownership of community processes" (Atkinson et al., 2020, p. 1906).

The community wellbeing framework from Walton et al. (2020) (Figure 3), includes 15 dimensions of wellbeing (Table 1), categorised into six domains.

Figure 3. Dimensions of community wellbeing.

This framework has been applied across the earlier GISERA studies and for consistency and comparability, this research adopted the same framework. For example, the fifteen wellbeing parameters of the survey were based on this framework and included measures such as personal safety, community participation, community cohesion, quality of the local environment, trust in local leaders and decision makers, services and facilities, income sufficiency, economic opportunities and health. The qualitative findings from the focus groups and interviews are discussed within the community wellbeing framework used in the survey as a way of integrating the qualitative and quantitative data in this report. The report structure for each dimension follows Table 1 below. Methods of analysis are discussed further in section 3.

Table 1. Fifteen dimensions of community wellbeing within six domains.

Dimension	Domain	Brief description
1. Personal safety	Social	Safety at home alone at night, walking outside alone at night, leaving the car by the roadside at night
2. Community spirit	Social	Friendliness, supporting each other, working together
3. Community cohesion	Social	Inclusion, welcoming of newcomers and people with differences
4. Local trust	Social	Trust within the community and with local leaders
5. Community participation	Social	Volunteering, supporting, and attending community-based activities
6. Social interaction	Social	Visiting, talking, and going out with others in the community
7. Environmental quality	Environment	Quality of the environment in which people live - levels of dust and noise, overall quality of the general environment
8. Environmental management	Environment	Managing the environment for the long term: underground water, nature reserves; sustainability of local farming land
9. Local decision making and citizen voice	Political	Citizens having a say and being heard in local decision making, and trust in local government
10. Services and facilities	Physical infrastructure	Schools, childcare, sports and leisure facilities, cultural facilities, shopping for food and everyday items, other shopping, medical and health services, and community support services
11. Town appearance	Physical infrastructure	General physical appearance of the town, cleanliness, parks, gardens
12. Roads	Physical infrastructure	Condition, safety, and amount of traffic on the roads
13. Income sufficiency	Economic	Household income sufficient for household expenses, and lifestyles; impact of rent or mortgage repayments on household finances
14. Employment and business opportunities	Economic	Job opportunities in the community, local businesses doing well
15. Health	Health	Diet and eating habits, exercise habits, physical and mental health

The focus groups enabled a broader discussion with other community members to gain a richer understanding of their collective sense of wellbeing. Many of the discussions in the focus groups encompassed both an individual and collective sense of wellbeing and will be discussed across each of the six domains of the community wellbeing framework.

Key concerns about the energy sector developments in their regions and the potential impacts on their communities arose from discussions with community members through the focus groups and interviews. These concerns and perceptions are also included in the findings and discussed within the sections of the most relevant community wellbeing domain.

3. What we did (Methods)

Using the community wellbeing framework to inform the research we undertook mixed methods research (survey, focus groups and interviews) to understand how those living in the Mid West currently perceive their community's wellbeing and what factors are influencing those perceptions, particularly as they relate to energy project developments. Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee granted approval for this research on 3 October 2024 (HRE2024-0590). Further amendments for the focus groups were approved on 12 May 2025, and the amendment for interviews was approved on 12 June 2025.

3.1. Survey methods

The online survey was conducted with residents living in the region between 14 November 2024 and 4 January 2025. It was comprised of over 200 questions. The survey replicated the work of previous GISERA surveys and included the same fifteen dimensions of community wellbeing. The survey was in two parts with a focus on community wellbeing and evaluating perspectives on the future liveability of their region. The second part of the survey asked questions about residents' perceptions and understanding of conventional gas development and the energy transition. The full survey can be found in Appendix 1.

The survey link was distributed by post (Figure 4). All residential addresses across the Shires of Dongara, Eneabba, Three Springs, Mingenew and the City of Greater Geraldton received two postcards in their letterboxes a week apart in November. The first delivery of 10,514 postcards occurred between 11-15 November 2024, and the second delivery of 9021 postcards occurred between 18-22 November 2024. Survey participants were also recruited through local schools, newspapers, and other organisations, as well as local social media pages, including Facebook, Instagram and X. The Technical Reference Group (TRG) who were appointed as an advisory group and consisted of representatives from the local community, government and businesses in the region, also promoted the survey through their networks.

There were 225 survey respondents in total. Geraldton, the largest subregion, has a population of 39,489, with 151 (0.38%) participating in the survey, contributing 67% responses to the sample. Dongara has a population of 1,393, with 47 (3.37%) participating in this survey, contributing 21% responses to the sample. Eneabba, Mingenew, Three Springs are small jurisdictions which for the purpose of the survey analysis and reporting are sometimes combined (referenced as *E, M & TS*), they have a combined population of 890, with 27 (3.03%) participating in this survey, and contributing 12% to the sample. Table 3 provides further detail about the sample populations.

Across the entire Mid West region, the total survey sample only represented 0.54% of the regional population. Although Geraldton had the highest response count, its larger population means lower proportional representation, while the smaller towns of Dongara and the E-M-TS cluster had relatively higher participation. The response distribution provides a robust snapshot of regional perspectives, though comparisons should consider differences in population and sample share. The focus group and interview data provide substantial qualitative data, adding to the rigour of the research.

Figure 4. Postcard with survey link sent to residents in the Mid West

The results of the survey are reported as average scores out of 5 using a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is the least agreement and 5 is the most. A score below the midpoint of 3 is considered lower or unfavourable on average, except for perceived impacts, where the higher the score, the greater the concern about potential impacts. A list of key descriptive statistics is provided in Appendix 2. The survey results were analysed using SPSS, and Excel.

3.2. Focus groups and interviews

The focus groups and interviews aimed to understand community wellbeing in the context of a range of energy developments in the Mid West, including conventional gas. The focus groups and interviews explored five main topics that included broad views on the energy transition and technologies, feelings about community wellbeing and cohesion, expectation and experiences of the gas industry and other energy projects, governance and trust, and knowledge and information. The qualitative research utilised semi-structured focus group and interview guides to provide structure and enable flow of conversation. The use of semi-structured questions enables follow up questions to be pursued, which provides significantly more breadth to the research (Adams, 2015). This contrasts with the close ended questions from the survey. The run sheet for the focus groups and interviews can be found at Appendix 3 and 4.

Recruitment for the focus groups were promoted through social media, LinkedIn and through contacts from the TRG for the project. The target sample for the focus groups was 120 people from the general population, with a maximum of 10 people per focus group. Recruitment was also conducted by the lead author on this project in the field where the number of participants were low. This involved putting up recruitment posters at local supermarkets, and council chambers, which yielded approximately five additional participants. Snowball sampling was also used with previous participants notifying contacts in the region about the focus groups.

From late April to mid-May 2025, ten in person focus groups were conducted in the city of Geraldton and the towns of Dongara, Mingenew, Three Springs and Eneabba. Two focus groups were also conducted online with residents of Geraldton reaching a total of 41 participants. Participants included the general population, landholders, business owners and some local government representatives. The number of focus group participants was significantly lower that the targeted recruitment numbers of 120 people across the Mid West. In the smaller towns of Dongara, Eneabba and Mingenew, it was noted that the focus groups coincided with the seeding period, which was a busy period for landholders. To increase the number of respondents for the research, an additional 15 online interviews were conducted from June to July 2025, with a market research company engaged to recruit additional participants. The market research company recruited 11 interview participants, and five focus group participants. We use (Group A, B, etc) to reference focus group data and (P1, P2, etc) to reference interview data.

All focus groups and interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the focus group transcripts were thematically coded using NVivo (Appendix 5). An inductive approach was used for the initial thematic coding, which enabled themes to be constructed from the data, rather than coding to pre-determined frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2023; Clarke & Braun, 2017). From the initial coding of the focus groups, the themes that emerged from the inductive coding were further refined by categorising the data into the dimensions of community wellbeing (Table 1). The final step in thematic analysis is the writing up of results, which involves construction of the analysis into a narrative approach using data extracts as evidence (Finlay, 2021). Many participants of the qualitative focus groups and interviews provided their perspectives on a range of issues occurring in their communities, and the lead author of this report has used a narrative approach in the write up to enable meaning that emerged from the research participants to be described. Where energy technologies other than gas are discussed, this is indicated in the report.

The online interviews were recorded and automatically transcribed through Teams. The transcripts were analysed using content analysis (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Due to the time limitations with the interview data, the analysis used a deductive approach, utilising the existing community wellbeing framework. The interview data thus enabled further refinement of the focus group findings (Fife & Gossner, 2024). The findings of the focus groups and interviews are reported collectively in the report to provide an overview of community wellbeing according to the six domains of community wellbeing.

3.3. Meeting with Yamatji Southern Regional Corporation (YSRC)

The Yarn with the Yamatji Southern Regional Corporation (YSRC) involved some of its staff at the officer-level. The Yarn focused on YSRC's perceptions, views, aspirations, and priorities regarding energy-related developments on Yamatji Country. Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) approved the study (HRE2025-0237) and the YSRC have approved the results of the meeting and the content in this report. While YSRC officers participated in the Yarn to support broad-based engagement and discussion, the findings and views expressed do not necessarily reflect the official views, policies, or positions of YSRC or its Board. The YSRC Board determines any formal positions on development proposals or energy projects according to its governance processes and cultural protocols.

Seven staff from the YSRC participated in the Yarn with two staff from Curtin University on 4 June 2025. A technical presentation on exploration activities that are occurring in the North Perth Basin was also provided by an expert from CSIRO. This included gas, carbon storage, geothermal energy and natural hydrogen. The presentation was followed by a Q&A session to address questions and points of clarification from participants. The Yarn explored experiences, feelings and knowledge of underground resource exploration technologies, followed by views on impacts, costs, risks, and benefits of the initiatives. The YSRC's aspirations concerning those initiatives were also discussed.

The research protocol for the YSRC included:

1. Co-developing with consent the Yarning protocol with the YSRC participants
2. Yarning at the offices of the YSRC, which was audio recorded with consent
3. Post-Yarn anonymous transcription, with consent of the audio recording by Curtin University staff
4. Post-Yarn clarification with participants of the accuracy and precision of the transcribed Yarn information.
5. Qualitative thematic analysis of the approved Yarn transcription included coding using NVivo software
6. Return of the findings from the thematic analysis to the YSRC
7. Feedback on the findings was sought from the YSRC staff, and returned to staff of Curtin University
8. The YSRC staff were briefed on the final findings and outcomes of the YSRC aspects of the project.

4. The communities in focus

4.1. Population, age and median income

Table 2 below provides the population, median age and median weekly income across all communities that are the focus of this study. The median age across the Mid West is higher than the WA average of 38 years (ABS, 2021e), with Dongara having the highest median age of 53. Weekly household income is also lower across the Mid West region in comparison to WA.

Table 2. Population statistics (ABS, 2021)

	Greater Geraldton	Shire of Irwin (Dongara)	Shire of Mingenew	Shire of Three Springs	Shire of Carnamah (Eneabba)
Population	39,489	3,680	415	575	552
Median age	40	53	47	42	46
Median weekly household income	$1,536	$1,168	$1,468	$1,366	$1,234

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data from 2021 found that the ratio of male to females in the region were equal in the Shire of Irwin (Dongara). There were a greater percentage of females (51%) to males (49%) in Geraldton, and a greater percentage of males in the Shires of Mingenew, Carnamah (Eneabba) and Three Springs (Figure 5).

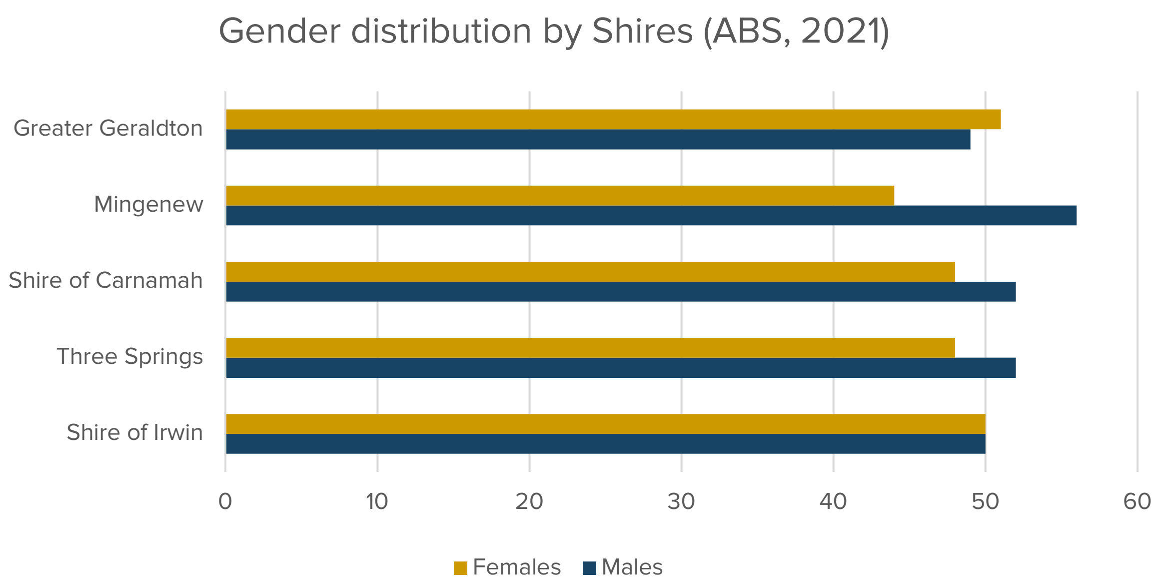

Figure 5. Gender distribution in the Mid West

4.2. Employment sectors

As expected, the regional towns of Eneabba, Mingenew, and Three Springs (Figure 6) had a higher proportion of people working in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sector, while Geraldton had the highest percentage of people working in healthcare and social assistance (Figure 7).

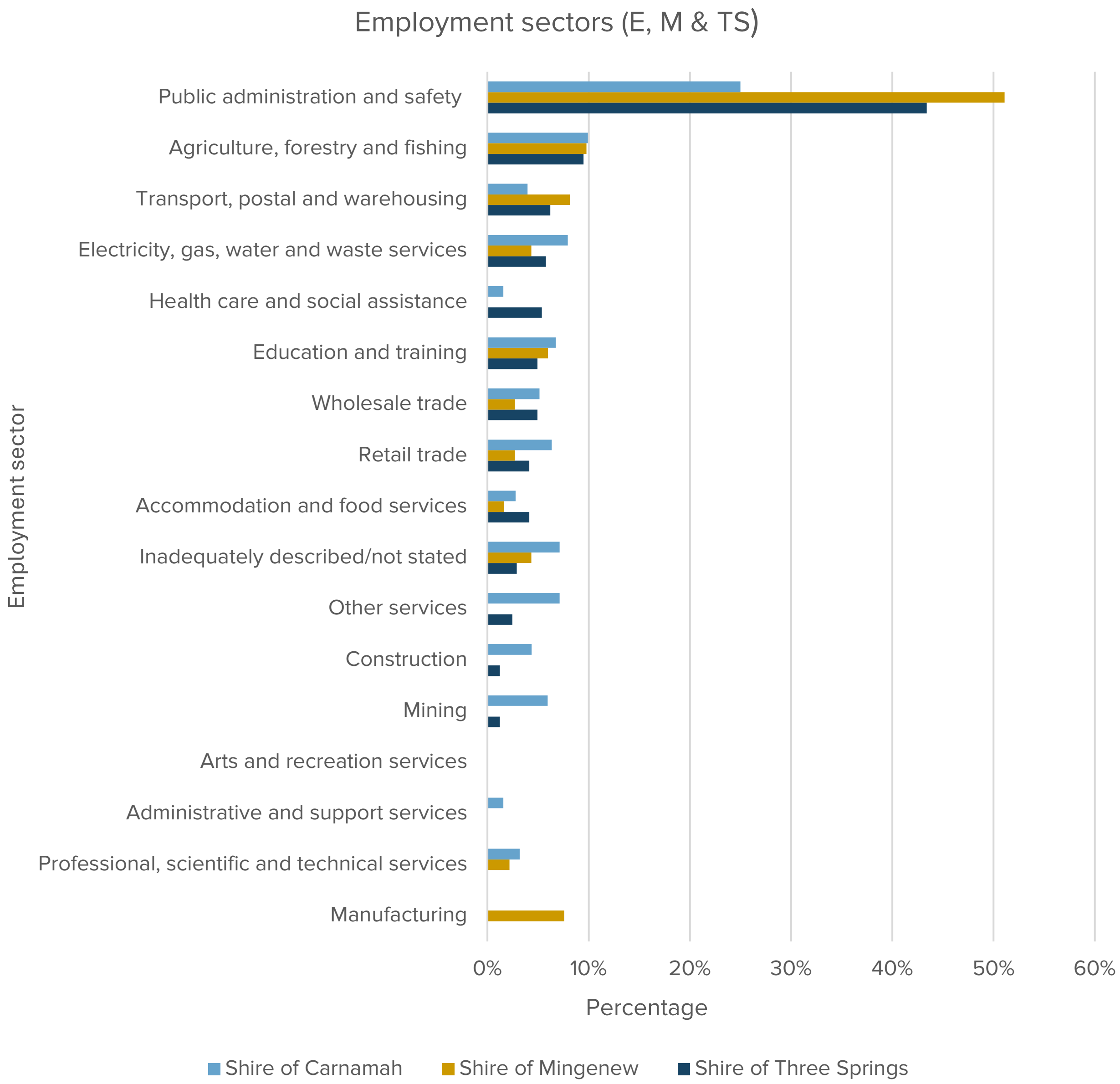

Figure 6. Shire of Carnamah (Eneabba), Mingenew and Three Springs employment sectors.

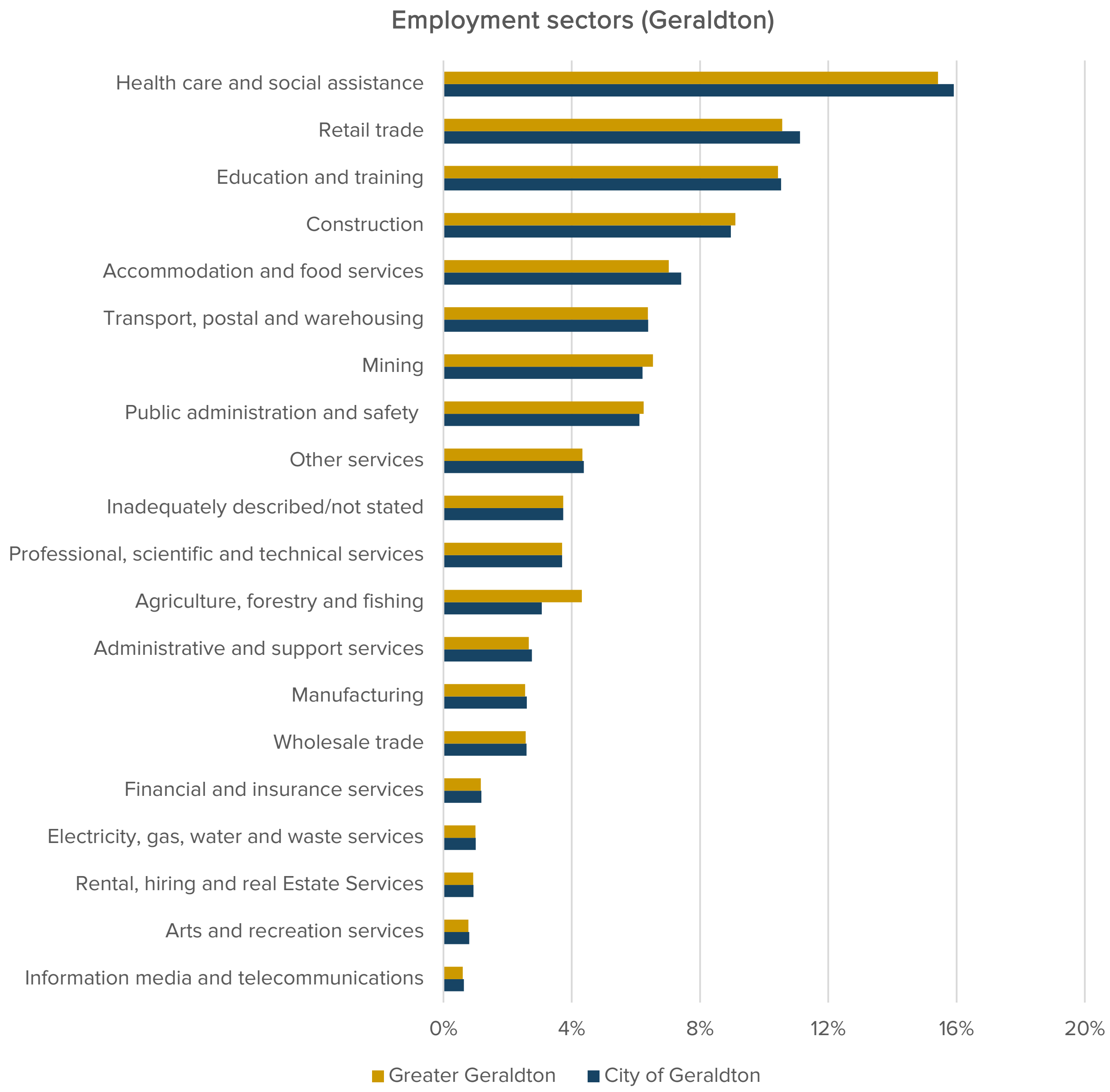

Figure 7. Greater Geraldton employment sector

For the Shire of Irwin, which includes the town of Dongara, there is still a large percentage of residents employed in the agricultural sector, but less in the town of Dongara. The majority of residents in Dongara are employed in retail trade, mining, construction, accommodation and food services, and health care and social assistance (Figure 8).

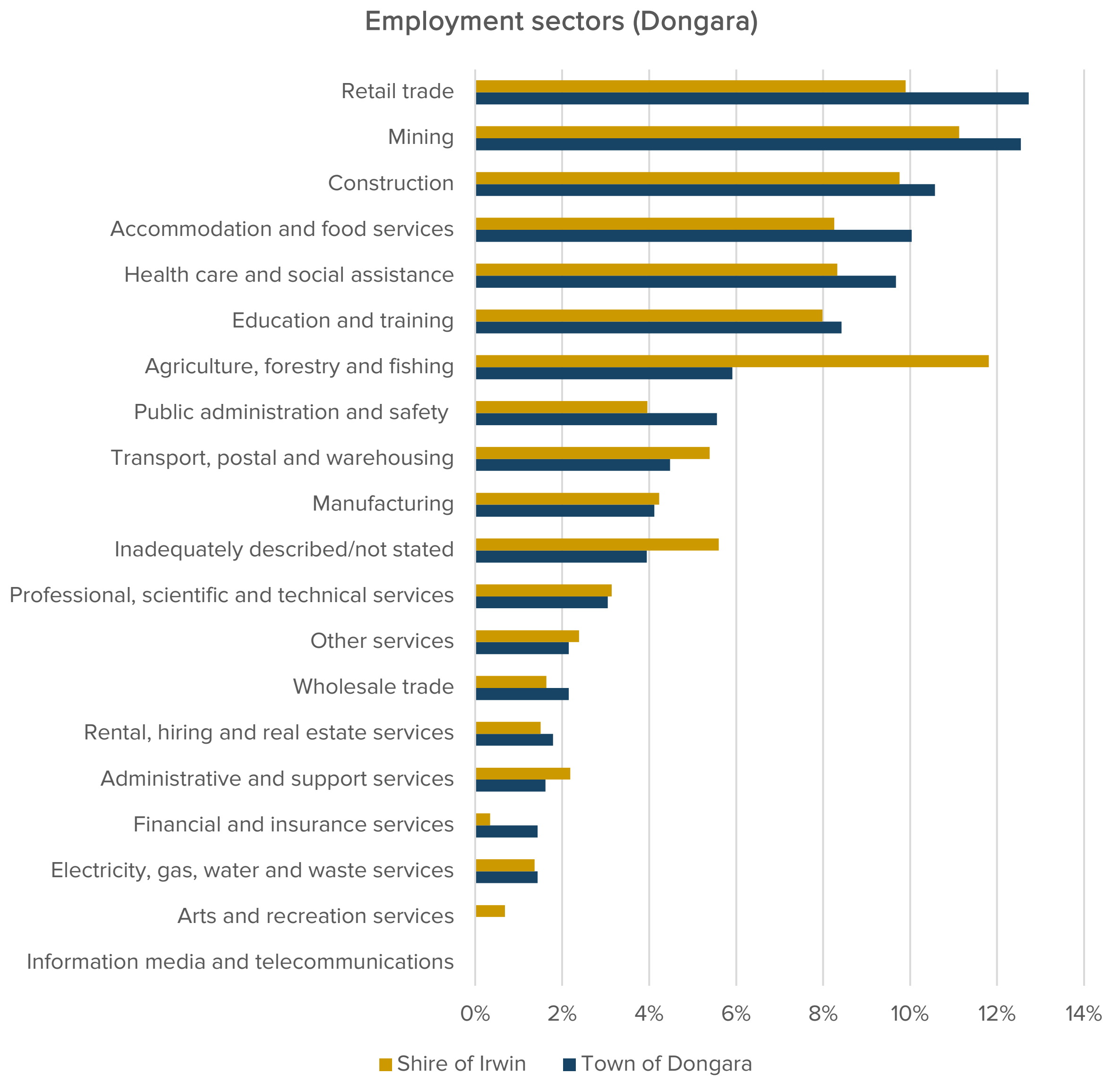

Figure 8. Shire of Irwin (Dongara) employment sectors

Across the Mid West region, there is a lower proportion of people with a Diploma, Bachelor or other postgraduate qualification than across WA. However, there are more people with vocational education in Geraldton (9.9%) than across WA (7.4%) (ABS, 2021c).

4.3. Survey, focus group and interview participant demographics

The survey sample reflected a diverse cross-section of the Mid West region, capturing variation across age, gender, education, household composition, employment, income, and regional tenure. Table 3 provides a summary of the sample demographic statistics, while more detailed demographic information from the survey can be found in survey descriptives (Appendix 2). Some of the key patterns observed from the survey data are also outlined in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Survey sample demographic statistics

Survey sample	Geraldton	E, M, TS*	Dongara	Total Mid West
Responses	151	27	47	225
Response %	67%	12%	21%	
Population	39,489	890	1,393	41,772
Total Mid West %	95%	2%	3%	
Survey Sample %	0.38%	3.03%	3.37%	0.54%
Age	**Geraldton**	**E, M, TS**	**Dongara**	**Total Mid West**
Age (median)	58	51	65	58
Gender	**Geraldton**	**E, M, TS**	**Dongara**	**Total Mid West**
Female	47.0%	48.1%	57.4%	49.3%
Male	45.6%	48.1%	40.4%	44.9%
Non-binary / third gender	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.3%
Prefer not to say	4.0%	3.7%	0.0%	3.1%
Prefer to describe my gender	1.3%	0.0%	2.1%	1.3%
First Nations	**Geraldton**	**E, M, TS**	**Dongara**	**Total Mid West**
Identified as Aboriginal	4.4%	6.7%	6.1%	5%
Identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	0%	0%	3%	0.6%
Employment status	**Geraldton**	**E, M, TS**	**Dongara**	**Total Mid West**
Employed full time	41.3%	64.3%	23.3%	40.3%
Employed part time	15.4%	14.3%	16.7%	15.5%
Household duties	2.9%	0.0%	0.0%	1.9%
Not able to work	2.9%	0.0%	3.3%	2.6%
Retired	33.7%	21.4%	56.7%	37.0%

Survey sample	Geraldton	E, M, TS*	Dongara	Total Mid West
Student	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%
Unemployed looking for work	1.9%	0.0%	0.0%	1.3%
Unemployed not looking for work	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%

The median age of survey respondents across the Mid West towns was 58 years. In Geraldton, the respondent median age was 58 years, notably higher than the town's population median of 47 years (ABS, 2021c). it is unclear if the higher age demographic in Geraldton influenced the survey results. Respondents from Dongara also had a median age of 58 years, compared to the town's population median of 51 years (ABS, 2021a). The combined median age for respondents from Eneabba, Mingenew, and Three Springs was slightly younger at 51 years, aligning with ABS population medians of 52 years for Eneabba, 47 years for Mingenew, and 42 years for Three Springs (ABS, 2021b, 2021d, 2021f). The majority of survey respondents were either employed full time (40.3%) or part time (15.5%), and a significant proportion of the survey respondents were retired (37%).

Of the survey population, 14.9% held a Certificate III or IV and 8.2% reported completing a trade certificate or apprenticeship. Nearly a quarter of survey respondents (23.4%) held a Bachelor's or Honours degree, with similar rates across all subregions and 8% of the sample had a postgraduate degree, with the highest proportion in the combined Eneabba, Mingenew and Three Springs sample (11.8%).

All towns in the region have a higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people compared with the overall WA population of 3.3% (ABS, 2021g). In particular, the Shires of Geraldton and Three Springs have a significantly higher proportion of Aboriginal people in their communities. According to the 2021 Census, the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population in Geraldton was 8.8% and 8.7% in Three Springs. For the survey, 5% of respondents across the total sample identified as Aboriginal and 0.6% of the total sample identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Table 3).

The YSRC is the representative Prescribed Body Corporation (PBC) of the Yamatji Southern Native Title Determination Area, working towards the strategic objectives set by the Directors whom the members appoint. Yamatji Native Title encompasses non-exclusive rights, and the Determination Area covers most of the Mid-West region of Western Australia across approximately 48,000 square kilometres, including parts of the Shires of Meekatharra, Mount Magnet, Murchison, Upper Gascoyne, Cue, and Yalgoo, as well as pastoral leases (see the YSRC Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) map in Appendix 6).

For the focus groups, there were a higher percentage of female participants (56%) with 44% of the sample being male. The interviews also included a higher percentage of female participants (60%), compared to male participants (40%) (Table 4 & Table 5). The age ranges of the focus groups and interviews were older than the general population in the region with the exception of some younger participants in Geraldton, Mingenew and Three Springs.

Table 4. Focus group participant demographics

Location	Male	Female	Age range
Dongara	2	4	55-69
Geraldton	7	10	30-79
Mingenew	5	5	35-79
Eneabba	2	0	55-79
Three Springs	2	4	25-49
Total	**18**	**23**	

Table 5. Interview participant demographics

Location	Male	Female	Age range
Geraldton	3	7	40-84
Mingenew	1	2	40-54
Three Springs	1	0	60-64
Morawa	1	0	50-54
Total	**6**	**9**	

5. Key findings

The following sections describes the results of the survey data, focus groups, interviews and the Yarn with the YSRC. Overall community wellbeing, place attachment and expected community wellbeing from the survey are first presented followed by results of each of the dimensions of the Community Wellbeing Framework (Table 8).

5.1. Overall community wellbeing and place attachment

The survey results indicated that overall community wellbeing in the Mid West region is positive across all subregions with some variations. Figure 9 shows that these favourable views also extended to expectations for future wellbeing, to a lesser extent.

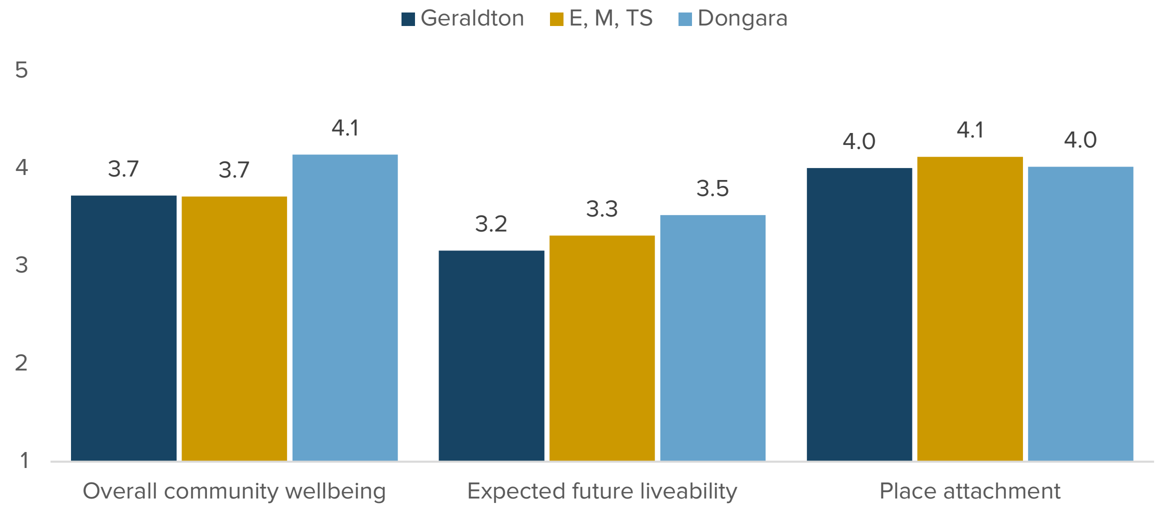

Figure 9. Community wellbeing, expected future liveability and place attachment

Most survey respondents across the region expressed a strong sense of place attachment. The high scores for place attachment suggests there is a strong connection to the region. The survey showed that 71% of people agreed (somewhat or strongly), with the statement "I feel that I belong to this area". Most respondents (74%) also reported feeling safe in the area.

A majority of respondents (59%) indicated that they expected community wellbeing to remain the same over the next three years (Figure 10), with smaller, regional towns having a slightly higher perception of wellbeing in their community. A quarter of respondents stated that they expected community wellbeing to decline (26%), while 15% felt it would improve.

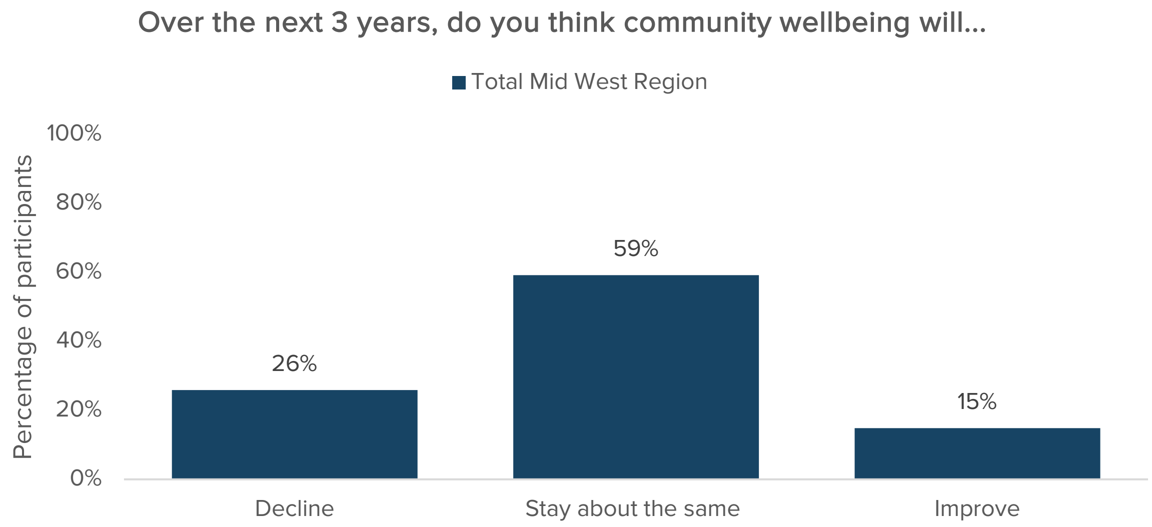

Figure 10. Future community wellbeing

In the survey, 92% of respondents used the open-ended text question to explain their reasons for the selection of future community wellbeing. The text responses were analysed using Excel to identify recurring themes. Each text response was assigned a description and conditional formatting was used to identify the recurring descriptions. From this analysis, six key themes emerged from survey respondents who felt that community wellbeing would decline. These are described in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Reasons for expecting community wellbeing to decline

Theme	Proportion of responses*	Example quote
Crime and antisocial behaviour	33%	"Youth violence and breaking and entering is increasing. 20–30 age group is more violent on the street."
Lack of investment in infrastructure and limited services	24%	"No new state funded projects/investment from a city centric state government. Extending the local hospital, but it's still too small for the current population."
Economic and population decline	20%	"Decline in population and services and facilities. There is just no vibrancy to the community and nothing really to attract the next generation back here."
Governance	18%	"Poor governance - federally, state and local."
Housing and cost of living	12%	"Housing prices and availability. Lack of rentals for families, this affects the day care and schools."
Eroding community cohesion and trust	18%	"More Perth people and less community spirit."
Other	16%	"Aged volunteers not being replaced"

*Responses included multiple themes therefore total proportion does not equal 100%.

Respondents that felt community wellbeing would decline, noted concerns about crime and antisocial behaviour, a lack of investment in infrastructure such as roads and limited services, economic and population decline leading to a lack of opportunity, governance, lack of housing and cost of living concerns, and eroding community cohesion and trust. Comments made in the survey about governance referred to a lack of accountability of decision makers to the local community, limited political representation in the regions and stagnation from a lack of growth. Other concerns for people who felt community wellbeing would decline covered a range of issues including racism, ageing volunteers, mental health concerns, climate impacts and some concerns about renewable energy projects.

For survey respondents who indicated that community wellbeing would remain the same, there was less concern about crime. Other concerns mentioned included a lack of investment in infrastructure, limited services such as health, education and recycling. Concerns were also raised about housing and the cost of living as well as an ageing population and a lack of volunteers impacting on services in the community with younger people “more apathetic to their community”. Another respondent felt there was a need for volunteers stating, “The number of people who are involved with most community groups are volunteers. For more things to develop they will require more volunteers, and there doesn't seem to be more people wanting to volunteer.”

Four themes emerged from the smaller 15% of text responses from the survey who felt that community wellbeing would improve (Table 7). These included expressions of hope with change, growth in the population bringing opportunity and more vibrancy with a younger population, community cohesion with improved policing and people working together; and examples of investment in infrastructure and services that would provide opportunities for the region.

Table 7. Reasons for expecting community wellbeing to improve

Theme	Proportion of responses*	Example quote
Progress and growth	30%	“The town is growing, and new people are coming to town to either start of as young families or retirees like us. We will have a diverse community.”
Hope in the future	19%	“Most things improve in time”
Community cohesion	22%	“The policing has improved. The lighting has improved”
Investment in infrastructure and services	26%	“Stage 2 of the hospital upgrade will be completed and hopefully stage 3 will then commence”

*Responses included multiple themes therefore total proportion does not equal 100%.

5.2. Social dimensions of community wellbeing

Social dimensions of community wellbeing relate to personal safety, community spirit, community cohesion, local trust, community participation and social interaction. Table 8 provides an overview of the key themes that emerged from the research across the social domain.

Table 8. Key themes from social domain

Dimension	Key themes from research
Personal safety	• Concerns about antisocial behaviour and crime in Geraldton was consistently discussed. • Safety on roads with trucks also raised consistently.
Community spirit	• Place attachment was high across the Mid West region.
Community cohesion	• Volunteering and involvement in sports contributed to community cohesion
Local trust	• Higher levels of local trust within the community and local leaders in smaller towns
Community participation	• Concerns about population decline and an ageing population
Social interaction	• Social interaction consistent across the Mid West with slightly higher results in the smaller towns. Social interaction was not a key theme from focus group or interview discussions.

Key contributions to wellbeing in communities that were discussed in the focus groups and interviews included population growth, community participation, support of local businesses, and contributions to the community. Contributions to the community were discussed in several forms, support of local business, which in turn supports the local economy, infrastructure and employment. Support of the local economy was often linked with what people felt contributed to wellbeing in their communities, as stated by one focus groups participant:

> *I think communities thrive if we're doing well. So, if your business is - like if your bakery, your pub, and your shop are doing well, and we, as farmers are doing well, then the town is much better. Even if we're having a drought year, but they're having a great year because they're getting you know - all this input from other people, then you don't feel quite so bad because you get to town and you go, do you know what - we might be having a crap year but town is having a great year. That's community. (Group D)*

This view of community wellbeing fits with a sense of collective wellbeing, and some communities visited were particularly strong on wanting a sense of collective wellbeing and expressing hopes for their communities to thrive and grow.

In Geraldton, interview participants noted there were a variety of recreational activities for different age groups that included sporting activities, arts and markets (P3, P6, P11). While

Geraldton enjoys social events around sporting activities, the smaller towns struggled with putting teams together due to smaller populations. There was a fear that loss of sports would have a big impact on the communities from the interviews and focus group discussions, with one interview participant highlighting the importance of sport for community:

> *These things on a Saturday for a sport are the social sort of fabric of a community. When you get to see your neighbours, when you get to chat to the guys in the next town over. And once you lose sports, then the rest will just all drop off (P2).*

5.2.1. Community spirit, cohesion and participation

The survey findings indicate that residents in the smaller jurisdictions of Dongara, Eneabba, Mingenew and Three Springs tend to have more favourable perceptions across dimensions such as personal safety, community spirit, social interaction and community trust, rather than Geraldton (Figure 11). For example, personal safety scores were significantly higher in Dongara (4.2) and in Eneabba, Mingenew and Three Springs (4.1) than in Geraldton (3.1), indicating that concerns about safety were more pronounced in the larger regional centre of Geraldton. Perceptions of community spirit were also higher in the smaller regional towns (4.2) than in Geraldton (3.7).

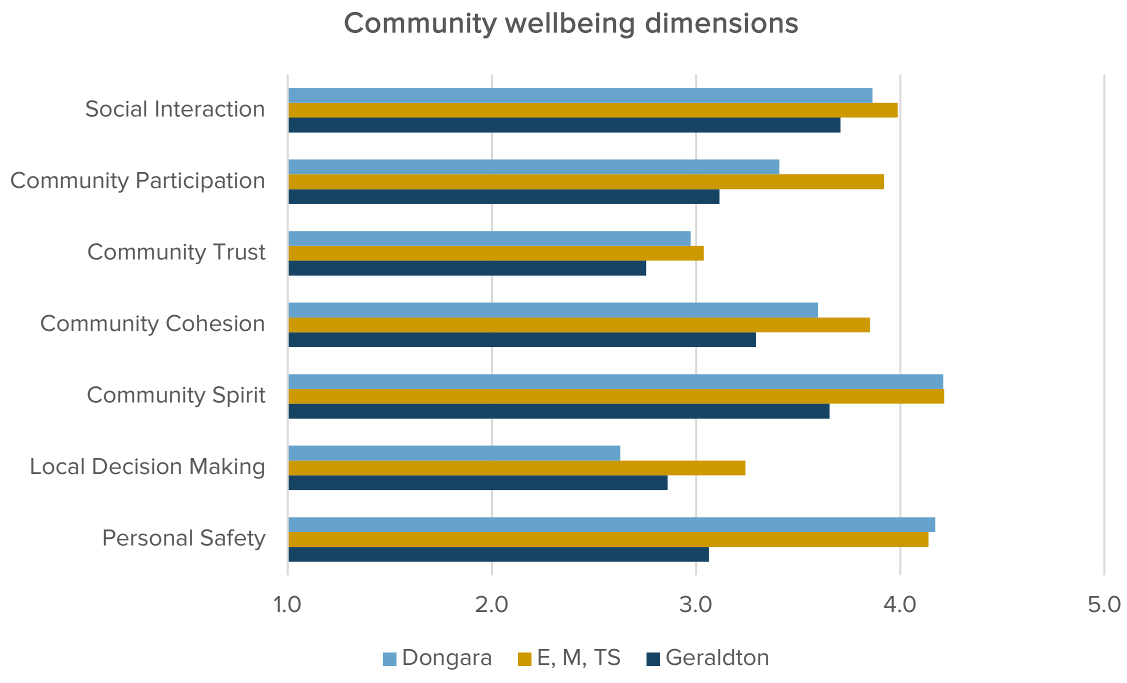

Figure 11. Community wellbeing dimensions

Results from the focus groups indicate that the smaller towns of Three Springs, Eneabba, Dongara and Mingenew had slightly different views on community cohesion and participation, than the city of Geraldton. For the smaller towns, participants discussed how having a larger population could support local businesses, such as supermarkets and bakeries. Population was not raised as an issue from participants in Geraldton. References were made to the existing mining camps in the region not seen to be contributing to the social cohesion of the community. For example, there was an expectation that those workers could participate more in sporting teams and perhaps volunteer on other local committee's that are valued by the town (P2). This sentiment of wanting more people to add to the vibrancy of the town was expressed by one focus group participant as:

> *There's a point of connection and cohesion, but connection of people - it's actually physical presence of people being here. Like, I mean wouldn't it be great if we could all sit around this table in five years and go, wasn't the gas industry - isn't it such a good thing that it's here? Isn't it providing - and that family sitting around the table, and they work for the gas [industry], driving the ambulance. And they're the ones also there available to go to the fire, and they've got kids going to school and they're helping out with you know footy training - like wouldn't that be great. (Group D)*

Another focus group participant, had a similar view about the need for more people in the region stating:

> *I just agree with what's being said because obviously as I said earlier, I've lived here a long time, so you know I've been lucky enough to have been in this community when there was double the population that's here now. So, I try not to think about then because you live in the present, and the young people who are here really do try and make the most of their numbers and participate in everything. (Group C)*

In relation to energy infrastructure, such as wind turbines, there was also a "dilemma of social conscious" (Group B) as one participant described it. This participant was discussing how if a nearby landholder had a wind tower on their property, that they could see from their own property, they felt they may as well have one on their property, stating; "you'd be earning money from it. So, you've got this real dilemma of social conscious."

Volunteers were seen as a crucial component for the regional towns we visited. One participant described how volunteers were crucial to community cohesion, and thus having more people in town who could become potential volunteers was seen as being critical for some of the smaller communities.

5.2.2. Local trust

Questions on levels of trust in each community were asked in the survey (Figure 12). The survey results indicated that the lowest levels of trust "to make decisions that impact my local area" was in relation to the State Government (2.05) across all towns surveyed in the Mid West.

Levels of trust with people in the local area were highest in Dongara and the smaller towns of Eneabba, Three Springs and Mingenew (combined). There was slightly less trust in the local community indicated in Geraldton. For trust in local government, Dongara had the lowest level of trust (2.71), followed by Geraldton (2.85). The combined towns of Eneabba, Three Springs and Mingenew had higher levels of trust in local government (3.41). Findings from the survey are consistent with discussions that occurred at the focus groups, with lower levels of trust in local government in Dongara and Geraldton and higher levels of trust in local government in the smaller towns.

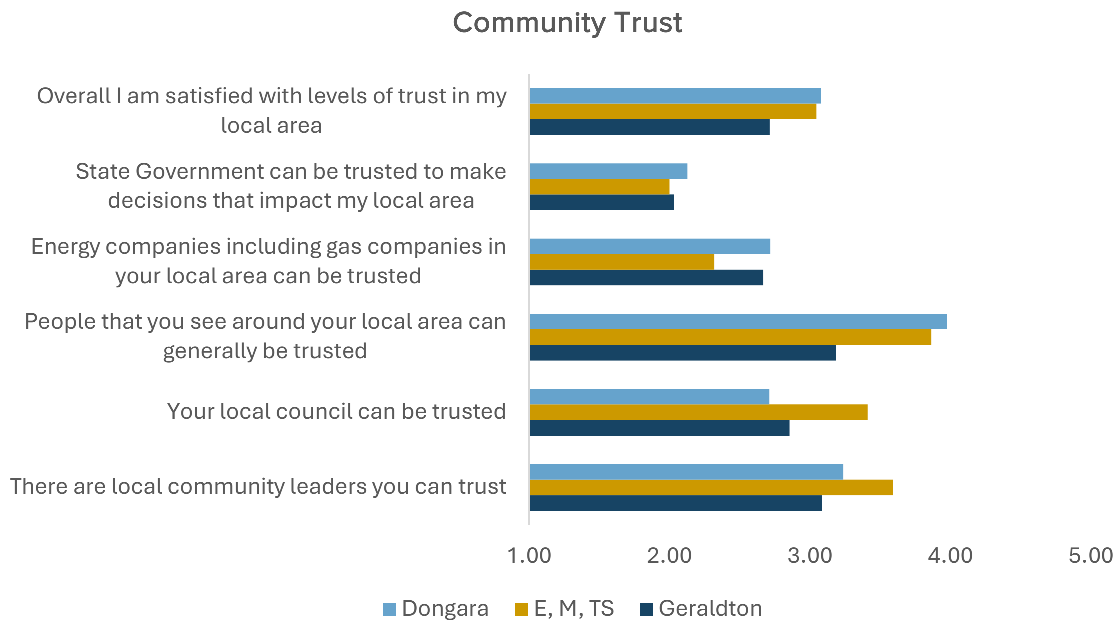

Figure 12. Levels of trust in local community, government and companies (mean perception)

The survey results also found higher levels of trust with local community leaders across the towns, with higher levels of trust within the smaller towns of Eneabba, Three Springs and Mingenew. However, levels of trust in energy companies (including gas) were lower across each region, with slightly less trust in Eneabba, Three Springs and Mingenew combined. These results are again consistent data from the focus groups.

Findings from the focus groups and interviews were consistent with the survey findings that trust in the state government was particularly low. Reasons that were provided for the lack of trust in the state government included, a government that was:

- City centric with limited consideration of regional communities
- Ignoring their own planning policies
- Having to read between the lines to find the truth
- A general sense of mistrust due to promises not eventuating (Groups B, C, E, P3, P9 & P10).

There were some perceptions of benefits flowing only to landholders, or a smaller number of people, which undermined local trust. A discussion from one focus group talked about the perceptions of the broader community about certain landholders receiving significant financial benefits, with the companies then telling landholders that the community were receiving broader benefits. This was disputed by landholders who were aware that the community were not receiving the stated benefits.

This lack of understanding between community members and landholders as described in the focus groups, combined with the lack of transparency from industry has the potential to create division in the community. One of the focus groups felt the industry were not being honest about broader community benefits in an attempt to undermine negotiations with the landholder. The discussion about perceptions of landholder benefits in the broader community also indicates limited understanding from community members about the level of authority that the oil and gas industry have to extract state resources from privately owned land.

5.2.3. Public and personal safety

The issue of safety was discussed in the focus groups and interviews in relation to crime, particularly in Geraldton and in relation to infrastructure, particularly damage to roads and fire risks from pole top fires within the distribution network (section 5.5).

Crime

Geraldton residents expressed concern about safety in the town through the focus groups and interviews, which is consistent with the text responses in the survey. Residents expressed feeling unsafe with crime and violence in the town, particularly at night. As described by a focus group participant in Geraldton:

> *I'm not out after 7 p.m. I've got two young kids. I do online shopping. I'm not in town very often. I know the last few times I have been in, in the evenings with the kids - I won't go along the foreshore because there's a lot of aggression. There's a lot of swearing, there's a lot of violence. It's intimidating and scary. But if I live in my little bubble and kind of go out between 7am and 7pm, it's a really peaceful, quaint, quiet town. But that's a choice I've made – to tailor my life to that. Whereas there is definitely the other side. It's a two-tier town. (Group F)*

Several interview participants also discussed crime in Geraldton and of feeling unsafe in the city, particularly as women. Some instances of crime were also mentioned with one participant discussing a relative who experienced a violent robbery at her workplace. The interview participant noted that:

> *most people feel they need to have security cameras, or security screens, or you know - I think it is probably on the top of the list for some people.* (P9)

Crime in Geraldton was attributed to the cost of living, addictions, and boredom in relation to youth crime (P5, P7 & P8). The cost of living was also discussed in relation to other key social issues such as crime and homelessness and the disadvantage of living regionally (P7, P9). One participant when asked what is impacting people in the region, related the increase of crime to the cost of living, stating:

> *I would say our crime has increased quite a bit, because of the cost of living - and it's, you know, crime from burglary and breaking and entering – to you know, people trying to walk out of shopping centres with full trolley loads of, you know, they're literally just loading up their trolleys and walking out with them and you're seeing that on a daily basis and nothing is done to stop them. (P7).*

Other female interview participants in Geraldton reported feeling safe in the town (P3 & P4), with one participant discussing the community support that exists in the town, stating:

> *There's a lot of community support for each other. When different people need things. So yeah, it's safe in this community. I guess the size of the town, the people within the*

> *community, it's something that happens in Geraldton. There are areas that are worse than others and when the communities are unsettled, the schools become unsettled. (P3)*

Safety or crime was not raised as a key concern in any of the smaller towns, which is also consistent with the survey results.

5.2.4. Yamatji community social wellbeing

The lands team from the YSRC had direct experience with energy-related initiatives, including renewable energy, oil, gas and CCS projects. This direct experience helped them to identify potential benefits and concerns from different projects. However, the level of knowledge and awareness about some of these technologies, mainly underground resource projects was low, thus limiting detailed understanding by the YSRC of the potential impacts these initiatives can have on Country and the community.

> *Is it fair to say that the technologies are quite advanced, so like, [...] I find it hard to kind of understand what actual impact projects have.*

> *I struggle to understand how it all works. And you know, how it interacts with all the different things, whether it's the water, whether it's the - you know, all that sort of stuff. That's just my personal view is that I think it's - some technologies are easy to understand, like wind turbines, solar panels or even, you know, like, mining, you know, like, where you can - they dig out of the ground. Sometimes leaves a hole. That's the impact - obvious, but the stuff that's underground, you can't always - don't always understand how it all works.*

Findings from the Yarn with the YSRC reveal that community social wellbeing is directly related to the conservation of the group's culture and their environment, as well as the deep connection of people, culture and Country. Dominant themes related to biodiversity conservation, particularly culturally significant species, the preservation of springs and watercourses, cultural sites, and access to Country for cultural practices (e.g., ceremonies).

Conserving biodiversity, specifically culturally significant species (such as totemic species, which are symbols of spiritual, cultural and social relationships), water sources, and waterways (which embed spiritual values), along with access to Country enables the maintenance and strengthening of local cultural practices, thereby promoting community social wellbeing. Rangers emphasised how those aspects are essential to ensure responsibilities towards Country are in place and maintained so that intergenerational knowledge transfer can occur, reinforcing social, cultural and spiritual bonds.

> *Yeah, or if like, so you know how like black fellas we have totems and stuff like that, and you know that could be a potential impact and could be at risk where we don't see them anymore or you know like yeah disrupt, that's rights, their home, and their habitat, yeah.*

> *I guess there'll be less access to Country. It's these places become restricted, then people can't access their Country where maybe traditionally did.*

Participants also noted the importance of having cultural heritage management plans in place to ensure that the cultural aspects of the community are preserved while planning and developing projects, benefiting community wellbeing. This ensures that Country is managed in a culturally appropriate way and so that any initiative is culturally, and environmentally respectful and safe.

5.3. Environmental dimensions of community wellbeing

5.3.1. General environmental concerns

Table 9 provides a summary of the key themes that emerged through the focus group and interviews relating to environmental concerns.

Table 9. Key themes from environment domain

Dimension	Key themes from research
Environmental quality	• Concerns about the impact of climate change and impacts on groundwater sources, nature, marine life and land impacts.
Environmental management	• Concerns about continual focus on gas consistently raised. • Most participants agreed that climate change is an issue. • Concerns about waste management in the region.

Participants of the focus groups and interviews expressed concerns about the environmental impact of energy projects on nature, marine life, climate change, waste and freshwater supplies. A shared view among the participants was the natural beauty of the region and how industrialising some of the region would impact nature and tourism (Groups G, H, P15).

Participants also felt that industrialising some parts of the region would exacerbate the impacts of climate change and human activity on the natural environment (Groups B, E, F, I and J). Examples discussed by participants included the threatened Carnaby Cockatoo habitats, and potential impacts of crayfish migration with the proposed construction of wind farms near a fishing location north of Kalbarri (Group H).

Other environmental concerns included potential threats to wildflowers, which are a tourism attraction in the Mid West. One participant expressed the view that the environment was of importance for health and wellbeing for the Mid West community, due to the community valuing nature and spending their leisure time in the environment (Group L). There were also concerns from fishing communities that seismic mapping would impact marine life when conducted offshore (Groups A & H). Another participant felt that resource companies paid little attention to the fact that the region was a biodiversity hot spot (Group A).

The Murchison Green Hydrogen project was stated as an example of a project that was poorly sited due to its proximity to the Kalbarri National Park (Group H), with CCS and ammonia aspects of another project viewed with scepticism (Groups E & L). Several people in the region expressed unprompted scepticism about the Murchison Green Hydrogen project (Groups C, G, H & L). The Kalbarri region is not located in the North Perth Basin and was not a part of this research, however, it is notable that this project was often mentioned unprompted in the focus groups.

The issue of waste was also raised by some participants with descriptions of mining rubbish dumped at the tip (Group A) and the lack of recycling and green waste bins in Geraldton (P7, P8, P4). This was highlighted by one participant:

> *I think Geraldton's lacking a lot of infrastructure in general. We don't even have recycling unless you go and take your different recycling bits to all the different places. So pretty much recycling here doesn't happen because we don't have any industry to support it. That has been raised by the Council, and the Council said it would be too expensive now to start making those sorts of industries (P8).*

There was also some concern from participants about waste from the construction and materials for renewable energy projects (Group C). Participants felt there was an association with the energy transition and increased waste, which ultimately ended in landfill. This led some participants to conclude that this was doing more damage to the environment. Another participant pointed out that solar panels could eventually also end up in landfill as there are currently very limited recycling options for solar PV in Australia, although there is some early work attempting to do this for larger scale solar farms (Circular PV Alliance, 2023).

5.3.2. Water

Participants across nine focus groups and one interview expressed concern that increased industrial activity would lead to the depletion and contamination of groundwater in the region thus having a direct impact on potable water, vegetation and agricultural production. There was also concern about the amount of groundwater being extracted by the mining industry and the reliance on groundwater (Groups B, C, D & P6) as stated by one participant:

> *[Company], which is east of Perenjori, they're taking water from an aquifer over here, piped from here over to there. So, depending on what sort of industries happen here, then if they start drawing down on huge quantities of water, it affects the community. (Group C)*

Another participant with experience in the mining sector discussed how the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation manages water allocations, noting that they will not issue licences in an area if the maximum allocation has been met. However, this participant also stated that with a drying climate “a lot of these small sub areas are already over allocated or fully allocated” (Group I).

There were also concerns that hydrogen production required a large amount of water with participants raising the option of desalinating water for hydrogen production. This then raised other concerns such as, the large amount of energy required for hydrogen production, the cost of hydrogen production, and the potential environmental impacts posed by brine that is left over from the desalinisation process. Participants in four focus groups were of the view that desalination was a solution to water issues and an opportunity for the renewable energy and mining industries to use desalinised water and not groundwater. This was seen as a better option to preserve ground water and was possible due to the proximity of sea water. One participant discussed the energy intensiveness of hydrogen production using desalinised water, stating:

> *I know we need renewable energy but in terms of hydrogen production, we don't have the groundwater, and I don't see the benefit in transitioning sea water doing desal [desalination] going through all that process to try and be efficient to produce hydrogen. Desal is such a power-hungry process. I'm not in the inner sanctums of anything, but to*

> *me it just the economies of scale, just they don't work. It would be wonderful if it did. (Group L)*

Despite fracking not currently occurring in the Mid West region, the issue of fracking was discussed across 9 of the 12 focus groups with concerns raised that fracking uses a lot of water, and could lead to water contamination, which was seen as a problem for the future (Group B). There was concern about the unknown and uncertainty with fracking, with one participant saying that "they're talking about fracking here now" (Group B). The general consensus across the focus groups was that the impacts from fracking were unknown and not well supported. A discussion between three focus group participants who were landholders about perceptions of fracking in the community highlights the limited information available about the status of fracking:

> SPEAKER 4
>
> *I also think on community perception there is a large anti-fracking movement and there is a little bit of distaste around people's mouths thinking that we're getting compensated heavily, but really hindering the community in terms of -*
>
> SPEAKER 3
>
> *But this is not fracking either. There is no fracking.*
>
> SPEAKER 2
>
> *And I think that education is lacking from them.*
>
> SPEAKER 4
>
> *But they're also hearing that we're making huge amounts of money and we're doing something so horrible to the whole community because we're allowing fracking on our land ... I feel more people are thinking we're compensated very well. I think that's the main story. (Group D)*

Findings from the survey highlighted respondents' concerns about the impact of gas developments on the natural environment and water sources, particularly the depletion of groundwater (Figure 13).

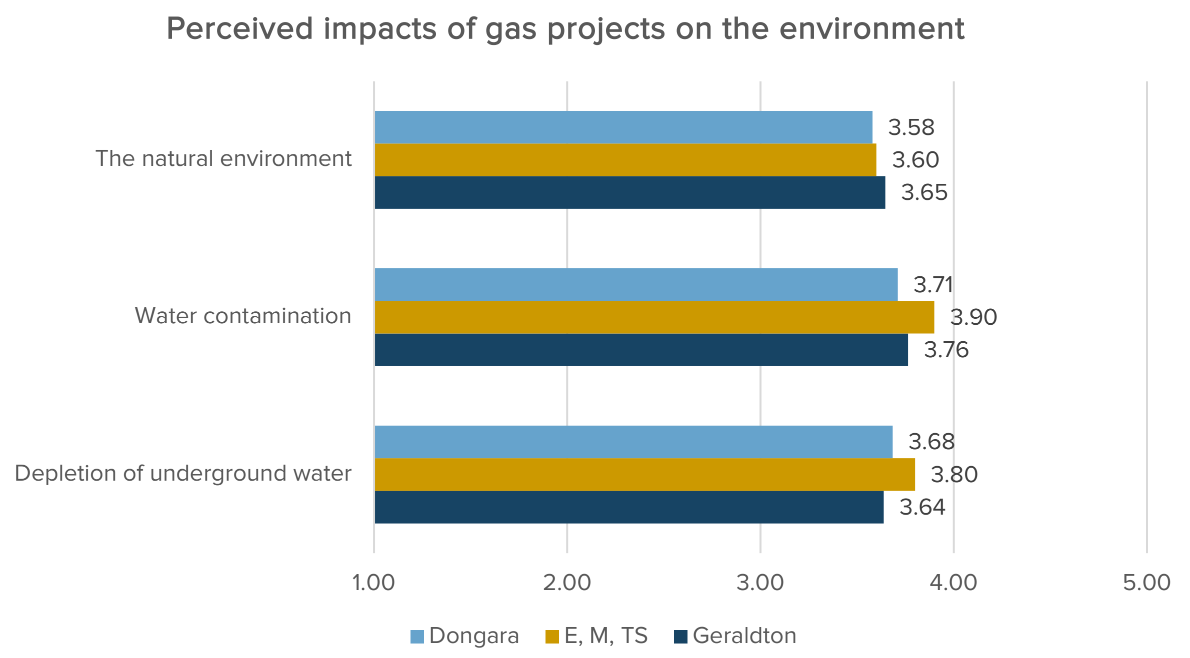

Figure 13. Perceived impact of gas development on the natural environment and water

Results from the survey indicated moderate to high levels of concern regarding various environmental risks associated with conventional gas development (Figure 14). Concerns were particularly strong on the issue of water related risks which ranked among the highest concerns. These concerns included water contamination (3.8), depletion of underground water (3.7) and the natural environment (3.6). These findings indicate that protection of the natural environment and concerns about water contamination are relatively high in the community. Other environmental concerns included air pollution (3.4) and contributions to climate change (3.2), reflecting broad environmental concerns with gas developments across the Mid West.

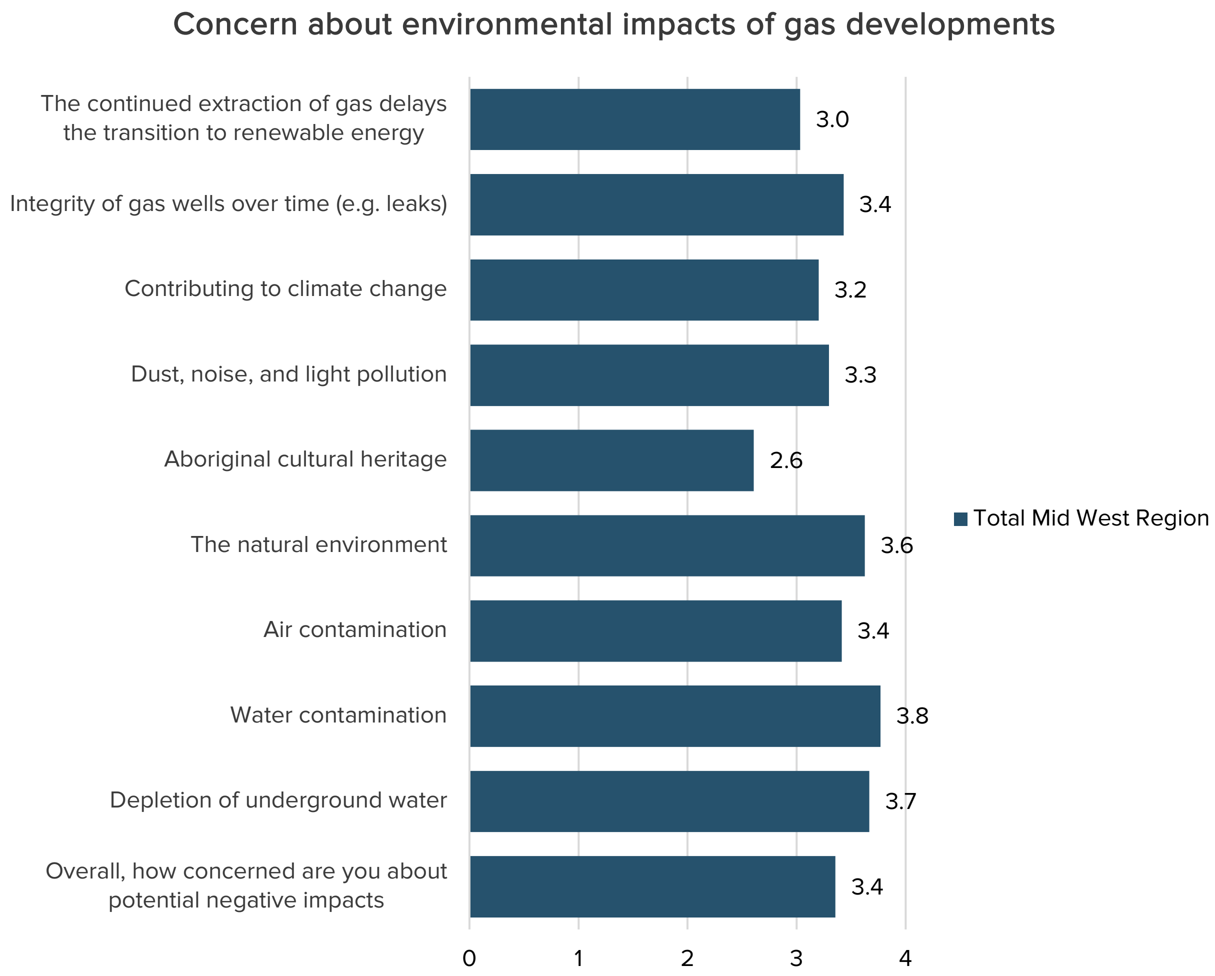

Figure 14. Concern about environmental impacts of conventional gas developments

5.3.3. Land rehabilitation

Some focus group and interview participants discussed their concerns about land rehabilitation noting that some companies did not do enough to rehabilitate land, and it was not always written into contracts (Group B, D & P1). Some participants had a preference for renewable energy projects because they were seen to have less impact on the environment.

In contrast, a participant in focus group D, argued that they would prefer gas developments over wind because the decommissioning of wind turbines was expensive and the installation required an exceptional amount of screeding. This participant also discussed how many wind developers do not discuss decommissioning when they approach landholders.

> *The decommissioning process of wind turbines is half a million bucks, above surface is achievable. I've dealt with 4 different companies now, not one of them has any interest in sub-surface rehabilitation (Group D).*

5.3.4. Climate change

There was moderate concern about climate change from focus group and interview participants, with some participants feeling that efforts to mitigate climate change were undermined by the continued coal exports from Australia, which was viewed as shifting the problem to other countries. Gas was also noted as contributing to emissions, particularly fugitive emissions with flaring and was described by one participant as “filthy as coal” (Group E). Another participant discussed the impact of climate change, referring to increasing volatility with weather events, such as Cyclone Seroja (Bureau of Meteorology, 2021) and the vast tracts of Australia, which are now uninsurable due to climate change (Group J).

Another participant discussed their view that the rush to renewable energy was a “political decision, not a scientific one” and stated that we should keep using gas due to increased costs incurred from the transition. This participant also discussed how:

> *The general public got the idea that we [will] achieve net zero tomorrow. Suddenly climate change stops, and it doesn't. It just keeps going. The Earth does what it wants to do when it wants to do it. (P6)*

5.3.5. Yamatji environmental concerns

Environmental health

Impacts on the natural environment are a major concern for the YSRC regarding the possible projects shown in the technical presentation (gas, carbon storage, geothermal energy and natural hydrogen). These impacts can take various forms, including concerns about water contamination from carbon dioxide (CO_2) leakage related to CCUS projects, or other harmful substances, excessive water extraction that disrupts ecosystem function, impacts on local flora and fauna, air, water, and soil pollution, and the native vegetation clearing. Such pressures were perceived to pose serious risks to endangered species, culturally significant plants and animals, and the overall health of Country.

Concerns about perceived cumulative impacts regarding water extraction were identified as another factor for the YRSC that may worsen environmental impacts. It was felt that initiatives should therefore consider the cumulative demands and impacts of neighbouring or concurrent initiatives, such as those involving water extraction. Cumulative impacts can lead to significant environmental stress, particularly in areas where multiple land uses, like agriculture, oil and gas development, and mining, co-occur.

Environmental research and monitoring

Securing ongoing water monitoring contracts was perceived to potentially assist to mitigate impacts on environmental health and also highlight potential sites and activities for improvement. For example, Yamatji Water and the Yamatji Cultural Committee emphasised the importance of establishing buffers to protect water sources.

> *Definitely, yeah. So, groundwater's an important one. That's something that Yamatji Water is engaging with the cultural committees on at the moment. So, if there's surface water, and it's culturally significant, and basically what they're going to do with the cultural committees is draw a big buffer around it and make sure that there's no activity within that area that could impact the aquifer and then the groundwater, or the surface water, I should say.*

There were efforts made by YSRC to safeguard water quality and quantity, including conducting research on waterways, local wildlife and plants, as well as cultural heritage surveys. These activities were viewed as opportunities for growing the revenue derived through Yamatji Water from selling water allocations to industry. These practices, when implemented together, were perceived to provide opportunities to enhance the conservation of fauna and flora, align with cultural values, and support both business and community development. The development of Healthy Country Plans[1] was viewed as a key initiative undertaken by the YSRC to ensure positive outcomes. Cultural Heritage Management Plans and ongoing monitoring of cultural heritage sites were also discussed as crucial activities for protecting Country, and as a means to inform development.

> *Yeah, but there's always a potential for, for the impact of, of heritage, and you know that's why heritage surveys are so important and also monitoring as well. So, during the construction phase just in case something is found that wasn't necessarily identified as part of the survey, and typically that's why our expectation is for any construction projects is a cultural heritage management plan, which basically establishes an agreed process in case, artefacts or human remains are found.*

YSRC climate change concerns

Concerns about climate change and its environmental impacts were also highlighted, particularly regarding the effects of drought on local fauna and flora. In this context, supporting renewable energy initiatives were favoured over oil and gas initiatives.

> *I'd say it's definitely, like climate change is definitely quite pretty topical up here and I've heard a lot from different people as of late, like, you know, there's, It's record, like, you know, lack of rainfall the last 6 months, like it's so dry up here, there's very limited room in vegetation around and there's definitely concerns that, the lack of rainfall is just causing large areas to die out, so there's the environmental concerns there, there's cultural concerns of losing species there [...] Do we sign on to work on a project that's potentially contributing to climate change through emitting fossil fuels? That I guess there's sort of challenges there but that's something that just has to be sort of considered when there's opportunities available. I think the corporation's pretty forward thinking [...] we're looking at wind and renewables.*

[1] Healthy Country Plans are an adaptation of the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation, an inclusive, community-driven approach where the community creates a plan centred on key targets such as cultural knowledge and language, cultural sites, human wellbeing (including livelihoods), and natural values (such as habitats, plants, and animals).

5.4. Political dimensions of community wellbeing

Political dimensions of the community wellbeing framework relate to local decision making and citizens feeling like they have a voice. Table 10 provides a summary of the key themes to emerge from the focus groups and interviews in the political domain.

Table 10. Key themes from political domain

Dimension	Key themes from research
Local decision making and citizen voice	• Significant levels of distrust and a sense of a lack of transparency from both industry and the state government. • Concerns about the use of the Significant Development Pathway for energy projects thus removing local decision making • Lack of transparency (state, local government and companies) • Limited participation, information and influence on decisions • An overstatement of benefits with energy projects • Non-disclosure agreements • Lack of government vision

5.4.1. Trust, fairness and involvement in decisions

Perspectives on trust and transparency from the focus groups were described by one participant who felt that was a lack of transparency as an "overstatement of benefits and total understatement of no benefit." This participant was referring to new projects that occur in the area that promise benefits, but don't consider "the effect on the towns and cities and workers who were there already" (Group J). Another participant discussed the lack of information in the region from industry, and when asked about the relationship between communities and energy companies, stated "there isn't one", further noting that:

> *They're all just anonymous. Yeah, out there doing something so nobody really knows what they do. Nobody. People imagine that there's these sorts of benefits they might get. They don't ever sort of really - well, look, they must materialise for some people, right? (Group A)*

Discussions about industry not being visible in the community were seen by some as a deliberate strategy to stay under the radar. There was also a sense of "cultivated disinterest" (Group A) due to the lack of influence that people feel they have on decisions, which included at the local government level in some areas.

Participants in the focus groups discussed some of the ways in which they felt disempowered by the gas industry operating in the region, due to the inability to refuse gas drilling and extraction on privately owned land. This was described by a landholder in the region as follows:

> *It's just extraction, but we don't have a choice. We cannot say no. As landowners we cannot say no. We only own the top metre. We cannot stop them coming on to our land. We can for open cut mining, and that's why they [mining companies] quite often*

purchase people's properties to do that. But for the gas and oil exploration - even when they get to production, we have no rights. (Group B).

Other concerns raised in the focus groups related to the WA Government's Significant Development Pathway process (Government of Western Australia, 2024a), which in some instances was seen to take away from local decision making and the local government based development application process. All gas developments are assessed through the Significant Development Pathway, and concerns were raised about the ability of local governments to place conditions on the developments for the benefit of their local region. There was also a sense that the state government was not enforcing its own planning policies, in relation to the building of mining camps, when they are a detriment to the local community (Group C).

Another focus group participant in Geraldton, discussed how even smaller developments now go through "a development assessment council, which is run through Perth" (Group L). This participant used the example of a local petrol station, which was out of the hands of local government, and being approved through the state government. The threshold value for projects to go through the Significant Development Pathway through the state government is $5 million or more in areas outside of the Perth, Peel or Swan Valley Planning schemes (Government of Western Australia, 2024a). This is a relatively small amount for projects, and if local government have no ability to enact conditions on these developments there is a risk that it will have detrimental impacts on the region.

There was also discussion across several groups about the need for government to set a broader vision for development that happens in the region noting that what was missing was "a big sense of vision, where we're going and how we're going to get there." Some people noted that instead of vision "what we are hearing these days is free stuff" (Group F). Participants talked about having a state-based framework, "around what obligations developers have to their communities and what sort of benefit communities receive from that development" (Group H). Some regions had also developed their own locally based framework for community benefits (Group C). The WA government released their community benefits guidelines for communities hosting renewable energy projects for consultation in June 2025 after the focus groups were held. The WA government has released the guidelines to seek input from communities where renewable energy is proposed or in development (Government of Western Australia, 2025a).

The survey results indicated that there were significantly low levels of trust with gas companies across the Mid West region (Figure 15), with 35% of respondents having no trust at all in gas companies. The second most frequent response from the survey was that people had "a little" trust in conventional gas companies. Trust that gas companies would listen and respond to community concerns or listen and respond to issues occurring with conventional gas were also negative (2.3) (Figure 16). Accountability for breaches to regulations was also viewed negatively (2.5) indicating that people in the community do not trust gas companies, or regulators to be held accountable for breaches of their obligations.

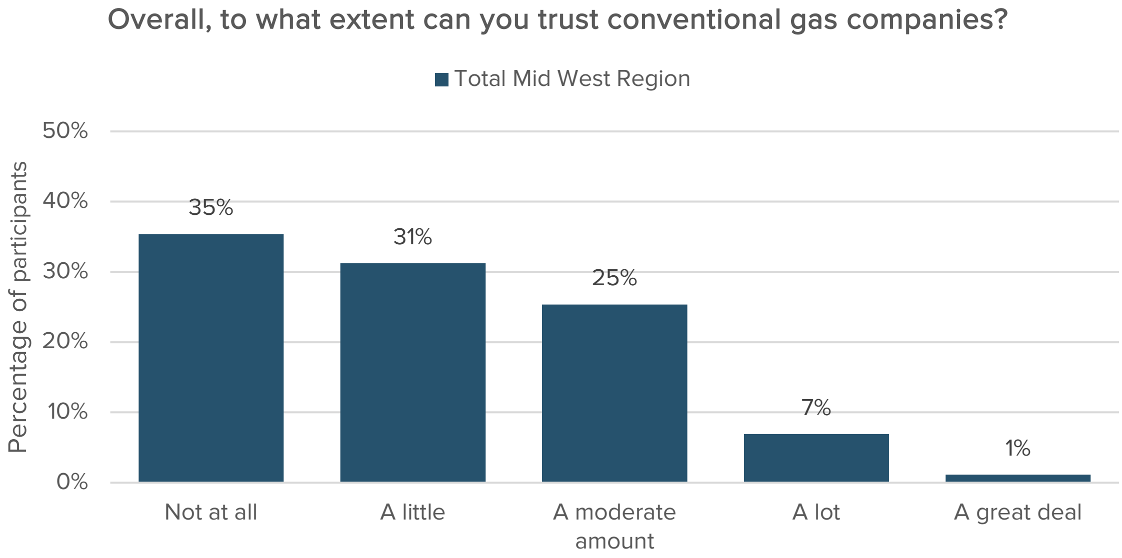

Figure 15. Overall trust in gas companies

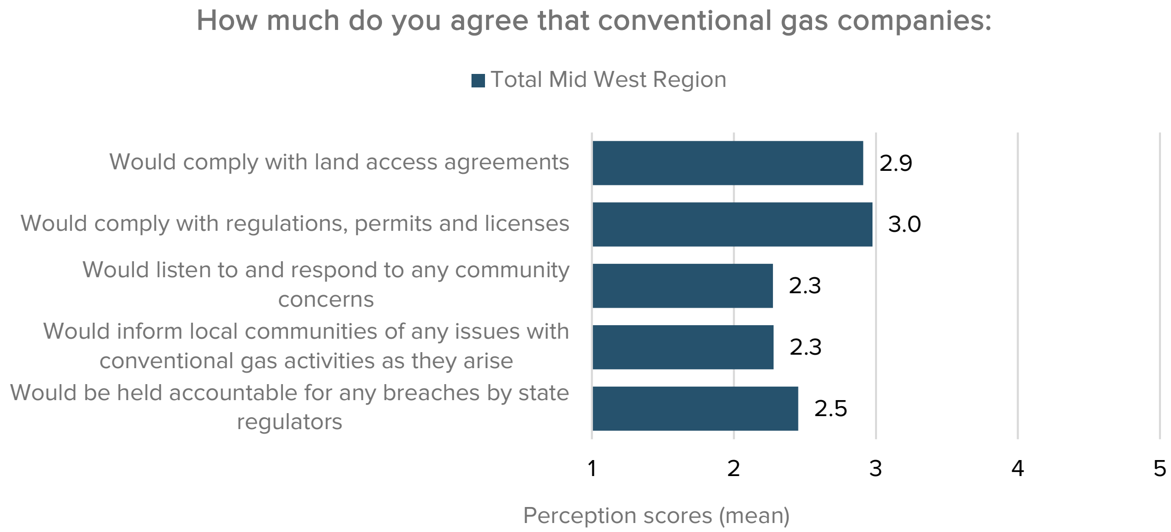

Figure 16. Trust on compliance and listening to the views of community

The survey asked a hypothetical question on the fairness of living near a conventional gas development, if there were compensation and benefits (Figure 17). Results indicate that Eneabba, Mingenew and Three Springs felt it was fair to live near conventional gas developments if the community, local council and individuals were compensated accordingly. Geraldton and Dongara had lower scores overall but indicated neutral to slight agreement if the community received benefits from conventional gas developments.

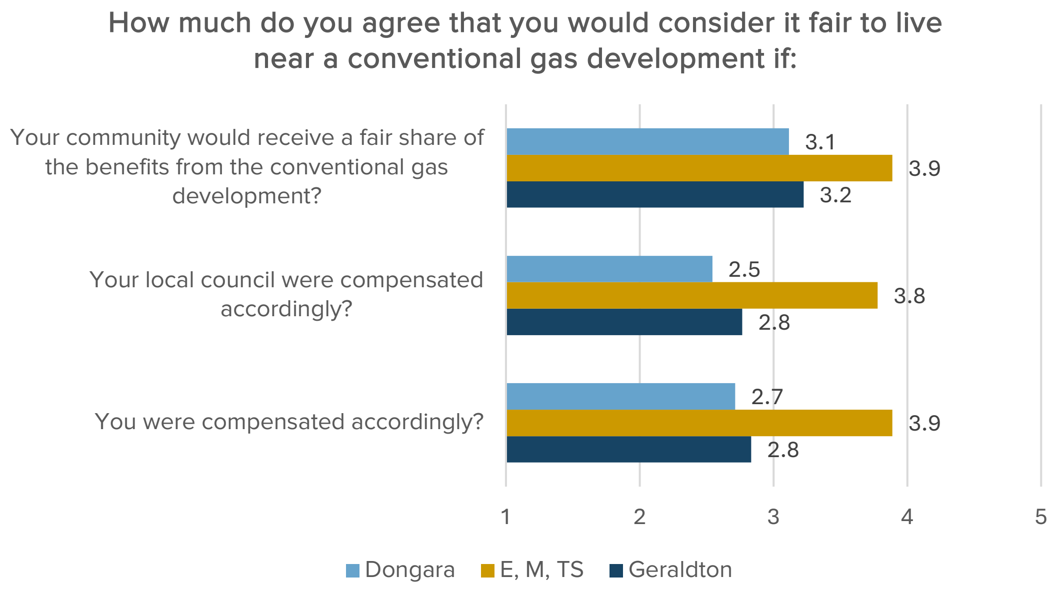

Figure 17. Fairness of living near a conventional gas development

Following on from the hypothetical question above, the survey asked respondents to think about a gas development and to what extent they would trust the company to act in the best interests of the community. Survey results indicated respondents' had a negative perception of gas companies operating in the communities' best interests (2.2) and acting responsibly (2.6) (Figure 18). The survey results are consistent with the results from the focus groups, which found that there was a significant lack of consultation from the gas industry, with concerns from the community about being ignored, and a sense that decisions were already made.

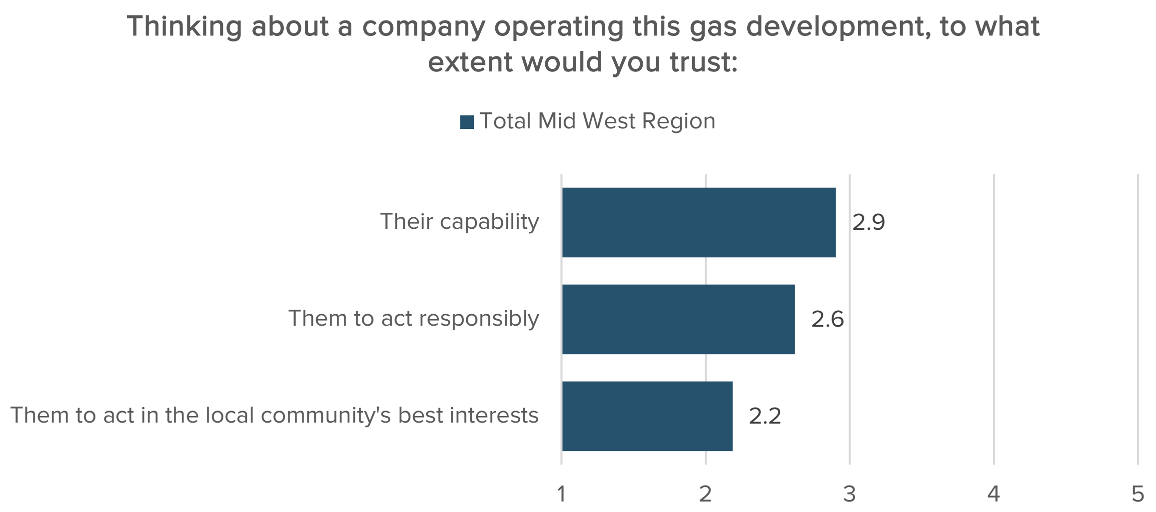

Figure 18. Trust in operations of gas developments.

Survey respondents had low perceptions of procedural fairness of the gas industry, with most participants not feeling that the industry would provide opportunities for residents to be involved in decisions, listen to residents, or change their practices in response to community sentiment (Figure 19).

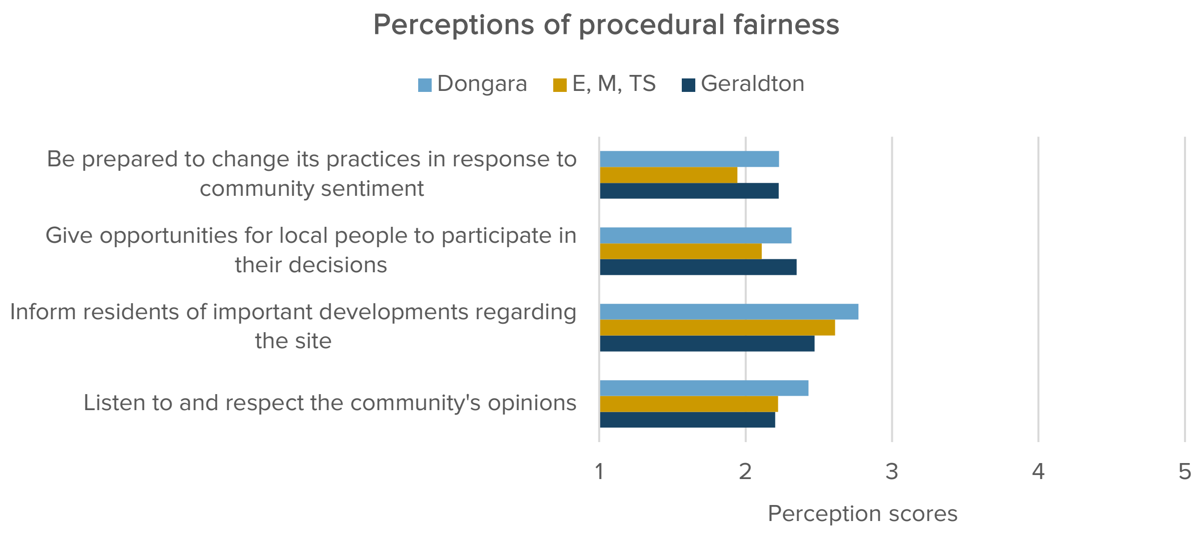

Figure 19. Perceptions of procedural fairness of gas industry

5.4.2. Information

The survey results indicated that a significant proportion of people either wanted a lot more information or some more information about the gas industry (Figure 20). Survey respondents who indicated they wanted a lot more information was more pronounced in Geraldton (41%), with a higher proportion of people in Eneabba, Mingenew and Three Springs seeking “some more information (44%).

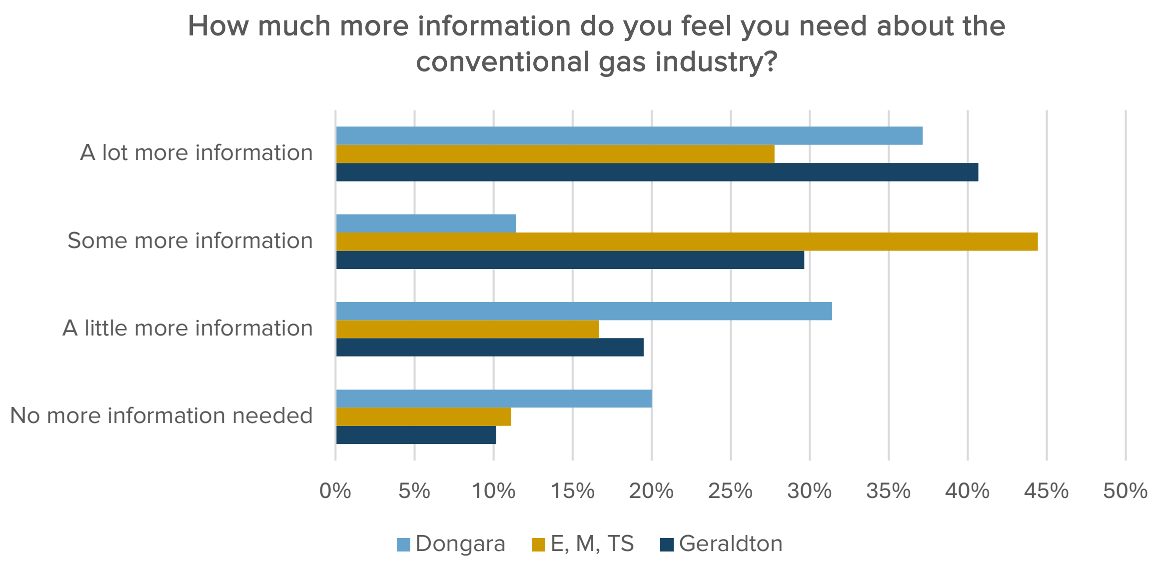

Figure 20. Information needs from the conventional gas industry

The focus groups and interviews included a question about the types of information that people sourced, but also what people would like to be more informed about. This question was discussed broadly in the focus groups and interviews. Many participants were adept at finding their own information and often sought information from a variety of sources, both local, nationally and globally. There was consensus across all interviews and focus groups that information about energy developments in the region was lacking.

Availability and accessibility of information

Participants in six focus groups and three interviews expressed their views that information on energy development in the Mid West was limited. These participants indicated that the community feels uninformed of what is happening with energy developments in the region and this was more pronounced in Geraldton and Dongara. This sense of being uninformed was described by one focus group participant:

> *But this is what I'm saying about the dissemination of information. This is probably the biggest thing most people in the town wouldn't have a clue, that's why they react to it. That's whether it be business, the Shire, the state government, whatever, if you want to get the community on board, well you must share (Group F).*

Some participants felt the community was intentionally kept ignorant of energy projects with another participant discussing how information about projects can be vague with “lots of whispers” about new developments (Group F & L). This participant talked about how there was no comprehensive information about projects but stated they would like information on “who all the players actually are - and know what stage they’re up to in their development” (Group L). Another participant talked about how people did not understand what ammonia is, and the different ways in which it is described as green or blue (Group G).

When it came to sources of information, participants relied on different sources that included mainstream media, social media, forums and conferences, local councils, government, energy companies and word of mouth. Some participants reported that they occasionally read mainstream newspapers such as the West Australian, the Geraldton Guardian, the Australian Financial Review and the Mid West Times. Some participants reported that they do not get newspapers on a regular basis, while others felt they could not afford paid subscriptions to access newspapers online and often came across paywalls with local news.

There were mixed views in the focus groups regarding mainstream news channels as sources of information. Participants felt that some of these channels are biased, but can be informative. Some participants used social media particularly YouTube, Twitter [X], podcasts and Facebook as sources of information. Participants indicated that some social media sources are good because the content is from experts, for example following journalists on Twitter [X] as stated by a focus group participant.

> *I honestly reckon it [Twitter] is typically underrated. If you know where to find good sort of policy wonks and people who have consistently intelligent things to say. My experience with that site has been like if you just use it to follow like random like the comments section and it's a very poor quality site, but a lot of experts, a lot of journos*

> *like really historically like that site and a lot of them are still on there so, it's still a really good site just to be able to get that stuff. (Group H)*

However, most participants were sceptical about both mainstream and social media, as described by another participant:

> *I don't go to social media, no Facebook, Twitter, any of them, I just stay right away from them. I don't go to Fox News, so it's mainly SBS or ABC and all the rest of it I simply research it. (Group J)*

Local government as a source of information

Some participants in the focus groups and interviews felt that local governments should be disseminating information on energy projects more regularly. Participants in focus groups A and F expressed their concerns that local government did not communicate well. However, other participants in other regional towns felt that their local government did communicate well, but the information about projects was potentially beyond their remit (Group D).

Some participants attributed poor communication by local governments to a lack of knowledge, poor communication skills and the local government not having much say about energy projects in the region (P11 and Group A). Participant 11 stated:

> *It's a difficult one because sometimes developments are out of the hands of local government. You can give an approval for a particular venture, but then there are time limits and constraints - we are not always aware of the finer details. So, it is a difficult one, we can't always give the information out because sometimes it's confidential. (P11).*

A participant from focus group G also reported that the Shire had conducted information sessions for a hydrogen project, which was promoted as "the new Kwinana". The information session was described as having a reasonable turnout and the participant described feeling "slightly more informed." But they also felt that nothing really came out of that information session, in relation to follow up. Other participants did not find information sessions useful as they could end up becoming heated discussions or "lip service" and one-way discussions with no room for engagement between the shire and the community (Groups B & D). Another concern was that meetings could be disrupted by people who would cause trouble without any real interest in the projects (P6 & P11).

Farmers and landholders in the council who were interacting with energy companies were likely to have more information than either the Shire or the community.

> *It's only through landholders being in the council that we know what's going on and really proactive advocacy and being in the room and networking by our CEO who's understanding where the industry is. (Group D)*

Some participants indicated that they would be willing to take part in energy consultations however they felt there had been no invitation or information about meetings from the local councils. In Geraldton, the yearly mystery tours run by the mayor were viewed as a good source of information (Group F & P4). These tours enabled residents to ask questions directly to members of the Council, with one participant noting that "every year the mayor runs a mystery tour around town, and you come up with all kinds of good information from that" (Group F).

Forums and word of mouth

Some focus group and interview participants relied on word of mouth to gain information about energy projects (P8, P9, P11, groups D, F & G). However, one interview participant pointed out that word of mouth can be distorted and it was not the ideal method to rely on for information dissemination.

Some of the landholders in the smaller communities relied on each other to get information on energy developments. As a result, they worked together to inform each other and felt that it was much more conducive to a functioning community, and it also brought a sense of trust that they were working for the benefit of the whole community.

> *I think they [farmers] have started communicating much better among themselves. That's good for a community that everyone's communicating with each other, rather than renegades trying to get the most for themselves (P2).*

A participant in focus group F, pointed out that community conversations at schools and supermarkets were evidence that the community were engaged and wanted to be involved. Another participant from focus group G attended a conference in Perth and stated that the costs for such conferences are prohibitive for Mid West residents, hence this reduced opportunities for people in the region to attend such conferences. This participant felt the conference was commercially run and predominantly attended by business owners and government representatives.

Other sources of information

Other sources of information participants used included non-government organisations such as the Australian Conservation Council and World Wildlife Foundation, but they also read industry reports, indicating wider reading and a desire to be informed. As stated by one participant:

> *I do read a lot of information that comes from like conservation type groups, you know, reputable type information. I do read information that comes out from business, so, the gas industry, their promotion, you just must laugh at it. (Group E).*

Reports from the Australian Renewable Energy Agency and the Clean Energy Council were other sources of information that participants went to for information (Group A), while another participant talked of renewable projects in the eastern states as they felt they were more progressed than Western Australia.

Information from companies operating in the region was lacking, and when companies do hold information sessions, often they don't always get a large turnout. A participant in focus group G, described company information sessions that occur in the region as,

> *So, the average punter in the community wouldn't get much info. Dongara will tell you more about what they get out of [company] and all that kind of stuff. And Kalbarri's getting a bit from [project], but they hold the exact same sessions that they hold in*

> *Kalbarri. They hold them here or in Geraldton as well, like the day or two before, but they don't get a huge turnout. (Group G)*

There was also a sense from some community members that there was conflicting information, or opinions on social media that led the participant to feel confused about what to believe, as both sides were believable, in the case of renewable energy for example (Group F).

Information needs

Participants of the research indicated the type of information that they would like to receive from local and state governments and energy companies operating in the region relating to the developments they were either undertaking or proposing. Participants informed us that they needed the following types of information:

1. Information that is credible and disseminated via relatable channels and not limited to digital content (P5, P7 & P9)
2. Information that is specific to the community, easy to understand and includes visual images
3. Details on what the infrastructure will look like, with approximate dimensions and the amount of space required for the infrastructure
4. Information sessions that are advertised widely, not just on social media or digital platforms, and are held at times that allow most people to attend (after work hours). (Groups G, F, D, P1, P4, P6 & P7)

Residents of the Mid West region also indicated the type of information about projects that they would like to see disseminated. This included:

- Transparent information about energy transition costs, for example, ongoing costs, energy costs (Groups G, J & H)
- What project proponents plan to do, when they will do it and how they will do it. (Groups A, G & P11)
- Longer term thinking and issues related to decommissioning of wind turbines, end of life of solar panels and the actual number of jobs created for their community

The findings of this research indicate that there is a clear role for trusted sources of information, such as from the CSIRO or universities. There is also a role for industry and government to provide consistent, timely, accurate, and comprehensive information relating to energy projects across the state, and particularly in the Mid West region. The lack of information was contributing to communities' feeling uninformed, disempowered and left out of decisions relating to the energy transition. Visual information was also needed to put the projects in context, with a broader vision or plan from the state government for their decarbonisation goals. Local governments also have a role, but expecting local governments to do the work of information dissemination on state projects places an additional burden on them with limited resources.

Companies in the region need to provide timely information and opportunities for communities where they are operating. The gas industry appears to have difficulty in meeting community needs for information with our findings showing that communities hear things about projects, largely through speaking with each other. At times, this information is disconnected and not always accurate. Social media can and does fill a void where the information is lacking, and this can create further confusion for communities about the accuracy of information.

5.4.3. Yamatji political concerns

Decision-making

The YSRCs participation in decision-making processes was viewed as essential. The Yamatji community's cultural committees and cultural authorities, who represent the broader community, along with the PBC executive directors, are the key decision makers at the YSRC. However, other people provide input into those decisions, such as rangers and individuals undertaking heritage surveys. The PBC perceives the relationships with industry and government to have been positive so far with some commitments to implement the Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) according to the YSRC. However, there is an intention by the PBC to focus more on obtaining social licences to operate from proponents, thereby delivering greater benefits for the community.

> *[...] my experience so far is that [the relationship with industry is] mainly positive. It's just been a couple of proponents who, you know, aren't interested in entering into those side agreements that I was talking about before, so we're just going to have to keep working on them, so they're just sticking to exactly what's written in the ILUA and, you know, they can do that. But we're asking them to I suppose focus a little bit more on that social licence to operate and to engage with us and try and maximise benefits for their members. But, on the whole, [the relationship with industry] it's been pretty, quite positive.*

The YSRC also had a positive view of the government and their commitment to implement the ILUA:

> *I think government are really, really supportive and they want to see the ILUA implemented. And they understand how complex it is, and that it also takes quite some time for an Aboriginal organisation to build capacity and deliver that. You can't deliver on everything from day one.*

Engagement

The YSRC valued engagement at the early stages of an initiative, to build relationships and establish trust. Challenges in engaging with the industry include conflicts between industry and Yamatji over the timing and timeframes of initiatives, notably industry deadlines. To overcome this and other challenges in engagement processes, YSRC suggested incorporating formal YSRC led, cultural awareness programs into engagement processes to facilitate collaboration between organisations, and to build the reputations for all parties involved.

Another challenge was the demand placed on the YSRC to engage with proponents and the lack of capacity to meet those expectations, which is exacerbated by consultation fatigue. However, the YSRC noted that industry was getting better at identifying Yamatji as a key stakeholder earlier.

Information sharing was another topic raised by the YSRC, and how doing so can benefit the engagement process.

> *Probably the best thing industry can do is just engage directly with us, and then, you know, we're happy to share information via our socials or newsletters and things like that.*
>
> *Yeah, if they do newsletters as well, like the project got a newsletter, that's always helpful.*

5.5. Physical infrastructure, services, and facilities

Issues relating to physical infrastructure were raised consistently across the focus groups, interviews and through the survey. Recurring themes that were raised from the focus groups and interviews are noted in Table 11 below.

Table 11. Key themes from physical infrastructure domain

Dimension	Key themes
Services and facilities	• Satisfaction with services in the region was mixed with the larger town of Geraldton, generally having higher satisfaction levels for community support, health services and sports and leisure facilities • Focus group participants expressed a perception of a lack of services and infrastructure in the region, which was consistently raised across all focus groups • Reliability of electricity, power outages and long wait times for electricity connections for homes and businesses was frequently raised • Fire risks from pole top fires and concerns about gas flaring • Lack of housing, cost of rentals and poor-quality housing • Discussions about projects that are promised, but not delivered.
Town appearance	• Concerns over decommissioning of wind infrastructure • Concerns over visual amenity of wind infrastructure • Gas infrastructure not visible to general community members.
Roads	• Impact of heavy vehicles on local road infrastructure and cost of maintaining local roads.

5.5.1. Services and facilities

The survey asked respondents to indicate their satisfaction with services in the region, that included community support, medical and health services, shopping, local schools, childcare and sports, leisure and sports facilities. The results indicate that Geraldton and Dongara residents have higher satisfaction with services, such as community support, health services and sports and leisure facilities. The region was fairly uniform in satisfaction levels for local schools and childcare facilities. Geraldton had neutral satisfaction levels for clothes and household goods, whereas Dongara, Eneabba. Three Springs and Mingenew all expressed dissatisfaction with shopping for household goods and clothing. Geraldton had higher levels of satisfaction for food and everyday items than Dongara and the smaller towns (Figure 21).

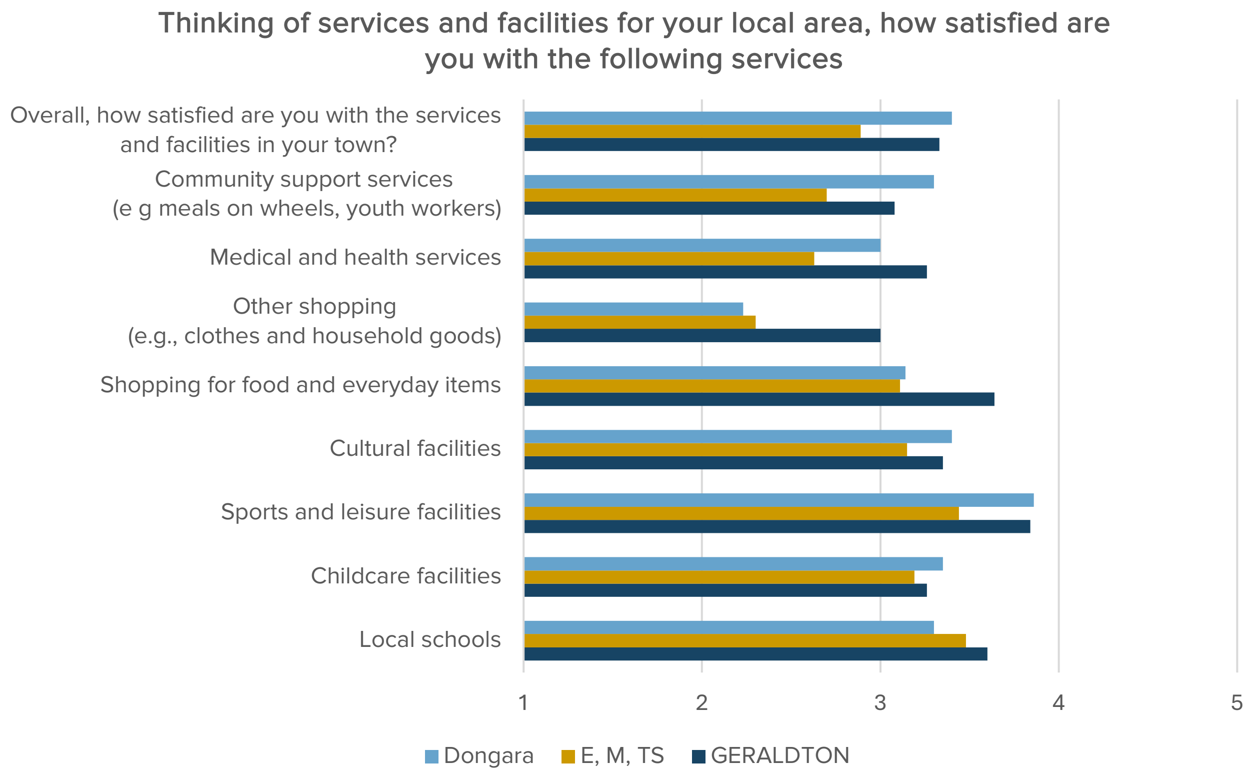

Figure 21. Satisfaction with services and facilities

Concerns about gas flaring

Concerns about gas flaring were raised in one of the focus groups, particularly in the summer months and the potential risks of fires from flaring. Participants acknowledged that the industry took safety seriously with flaring. However, they still questioned the necessity of doing flaring in summer due to the increased fire risk and the double standard that occurred, as stated by one participant:

> *I think the issue – and it's a gas industry and everyone else rule. So, there's a double standard, so we are not allowed, you know, we can't even move, we can't even drive a sprayer, like – do anything. We can't drive – we can't make money. Which is fine, everyone is fine with that - but you're actually putting flames into the air on a 45-degree day when the easterly is going crazy. (Group D)*

Two of the focus groups also discussed a lack of preparedness, and responsiveness from the gas industry to a naturally occurring fire in the region that was left for the community to address, even when it threatened a gas facility (Groups C & D). As stated by one participant:

> *And when the fire was on, they [gas company] were leaving the fire ground. They had nothing organised, and we were in there sorting it out around the gas thing. So that's one thing. That was less than 5 km from my house. (Group D).*

Electricity network and reliability concerns

Fire risks were also a safety concern for focus group participants who cited a lack of maintenance of the electricity network in the case of pole top fires that can occur when light rain or humidity mixes with dust or pollution build up (Groups C, J & K). On the issue of pole top fires, Western Power state that they conduct regular maintenance of the electricity network through their asset management strategy, noting that helicopters are used in “vast or hard to reach areas” to wash and apply silicone to insulators on poles (Western Power, 2025b). However, several focus group participants cited a lack of maintenance of pole tops in the region with one participant stating:

> *Why do we keep having pole fires? Why don’t we keep blowing stuff off the top of the poles because during the dry season, you know that all the dust comes down, settles on, we get a bit of rain, next thing you know, the whole thing explodes. Why aren't they cleaning? Why aren't these transformers [insulators] cleaned? Where's the ongoing maintenance of these things? And then we're all expected to sit back and cop it. You know, it's ridiculous. And then I'll go back to what I said before, we got millions and millions of dollars sitting in the bank and it’s not being used where it should be used. (Group J)*

Another common theme raised across nine of the focus groups and one interview participant was the issue of electricity reliability, power quality and delayed connections to power especially during the storm season. Unreliable power was impacting businesses in the towns, and it also often affected internet connection and EFTPOS in some areas. Many locations were using Starlink internet services, and one interview participant felt it was more reliable for phone and internet connectivity.

Some participants attributed the unreliable power issues to the 330 kV transmission line that stops at Three Springs (Groups G, H & J). As discussed by one focus group participant:

> *It's been a bane of contention that the 330 kV line doesn't come all the way to Geraldton.*
>
> *Like the Development Commission, you know the Shire, everyone is [saying] we need that big line up because that helps us in Geraldton. And while it's constrained and Western Power have released their North Link project which has six projects in it, five are just substations in northern suburbs of Perth, it's not the Mid West. It says the Mid West is in the project, but it's nothing to do with the Mid West and they're just extending the line to Three Springs or fattening the line to Three Springs. (Group G)*

Another participant in Geraldton discussed how they were “quite passionate” about upgrading the line from Three Springs to Geraldton stating, “we lost $3 billion worth of investment because the urea plant moved from here to Three Springs because that's where the 330 KV ended” (Group H).

Another issue that was raised by participants in Dongara, and in Three Springs was the lack of electricians and solar installers in the region. Participants discussed having to wait for months for solar installers or for repairs to inverters as there was only one installer based in Geraldton. A participant in Three Springs discussed the following issue:

> *.. we've had the system for two years and have been through two inverters and apparently because we're at the end of the [transmission] line. The guy that came out to do it, he said we're at the end of the line for Western Power and they're going to continually go. So once the warranty is finished, we have to claim the cost of the inverters on the house insurance. (Group K)*

Power outages in the region are not new, and there have been media reports of significant power outages in the Mid West region, and the subsequent impact on communities and businesses in the region (ABC News, 2022, 2023). Western Power have provided information on their website about the proposed upgrades as part of Clean Energy Link North. The work includes several upgrades, including converting “290 km of existing 132 kV transmission line to 330 kV from Northern Terminal in Malaga to substations at Pinjar, Regans, Cataby, Eneabba and then Three Springs, and a new double circuit transmission line between Eneabba and Eneabba Terminal” (Western Power, 2025a). The WA government recently announced they have awarded contracts to progress plans for Clean Energy Link North to be completed to meet increasing demand in the Mid West and to connect wind and solar resources in region (Government of Western Australia, 2025b).

Some participants also discussed the impact of Cyclone Seroja (Groups C, F, H & J) when it occurred in April 2021, and they questioned if they could get a standalone power system (SPS). One participant asked this question of Western Power, but they were told that standalone power was not scheduled in the region for “at least another ten years” (Group C).

Delays with power connections were also having an impact across the region for businesses and connecting homes as discussed by several participants in a focus group in Geraldton. It was noted that delayed power connections were affecting major industry in the town. Spudshed was provided as an example of a business being unable to finish their building, due to not having a power connection. Another interview participant who owned a business in the region has plans to develop and connect modular housing in the town but is facing issues connecting accommodation to power, as discussed:

> *Without Three Springs, basically the Midwest doesn't have power. We're a real integral part of that. Western Power are wanting this massive upgrade and looking at anything from 100 plus contractors coming into the area. But we don't - we don't have enough accommodation for contractors to do the upgrade, which we're trying to accommodate, but we can't bring on any more accommodation because we can't get power so it's a catch-22....*
>
> *And it’s not just us, the hotels, the supermarket has the same issues. The guy that's got supermarkets is trying to set up a bakery and cafe in town. He can't set that up because he can't get enough power. Uh, it just goes on and on and on. (P2)*

This particular participant was told (from the local electrician) that getting a new electricity connection for his business to expand would be an 18 month to two year wait, and even then, they may be required to pay for the connection upfront, of which this particular business could not afford.

5.5.2. Impacts on road infrastructure

Question 12 in the survey asked about satisfaction with roads around four dimensions: roads overall, amount of traffic, safety and condition of roads (Figure 22). The survey results indicated that on average, safety on roads received a mean perception score of 2.87 and condition of roads were rated 2.93 across all towns in the region, suggesting a slightly negative to neutral perception of the safety and condition of roads in the region.

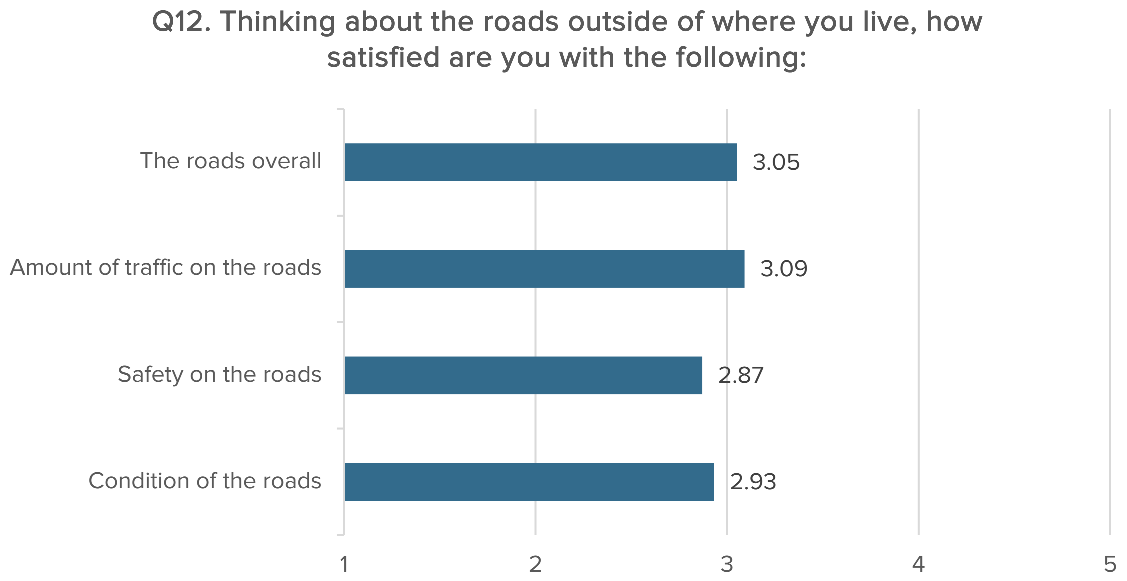

Figure 22. Satisfaction with roads

From the survey, concern about traffic on the roads was more pronounced in the smaller towns of Eneabba, Three Springs and Mingenew, with participants in these locations expressing more concern about traffic on the roads than in Geraldton or Dongara. The survey results found that on a Likert scale from not at all concerned (1) to extremely concerned (5), participants in Eneabba, Three Springs and Mingenew expressed higher concern of 3.8, in comparison to Dongara 3.3 and Geraldton 3 (Figure 23).

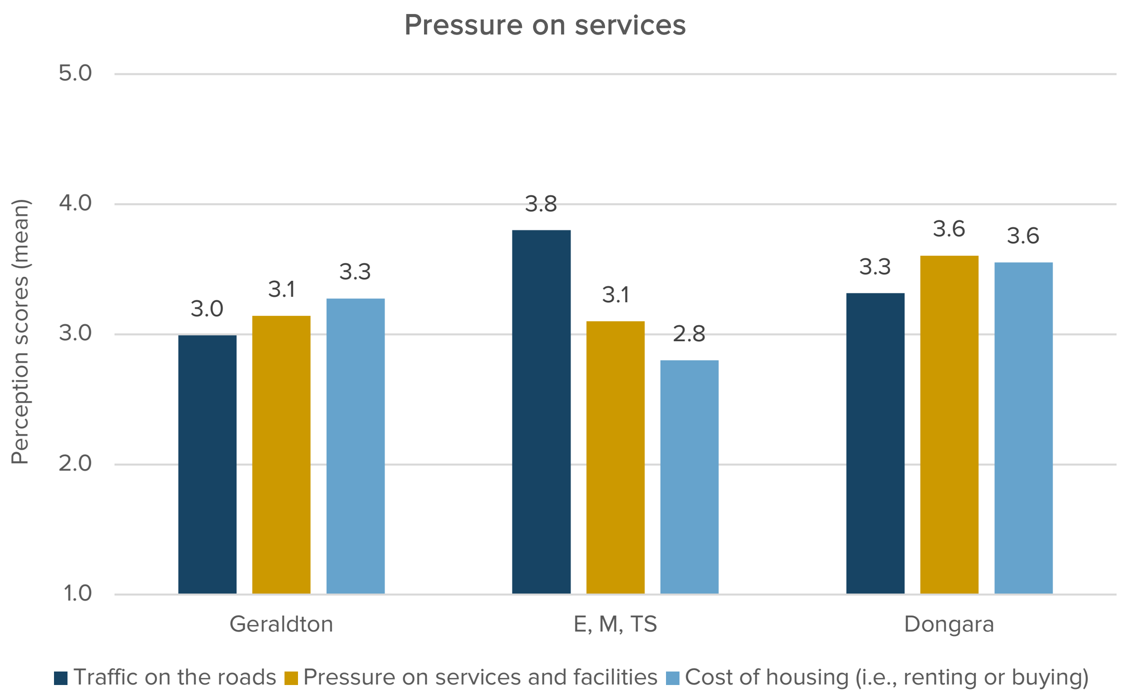

Figure 23. Pressure on services and facilities

The recent longitudinal GISERA study from Western Downs and Eastern Maranoa regions of Queensland found that the safety and condition of local roads were rated least favourably across all community wellbeing dimensions with mean perception scores of <3 across each of the four surveyed years – 2014, 2016, 2018 & 2024. (Walton et al., 2025, pp. 17-19). These results are therefore consistent with the survey data from the Mid West.

For the focus groups and interviews, the issue of heavy vehicles on roads, maintenance of roads, road funding and safety was consistently discussed across 7 of the 12 focus groups (Groups A, B, C, D, F, I & J) and 4 interviews (P1, P2, P8 & P9). When asked about safety on roads in the Geraldton region, an interview participant stated,

> *I do feel like the roads are safe. I think that just in general, a lot more maintenance needs to be done on certain roads, whether it's, you know, dual lanes and things. (P8)*

Another interview participant (P2) in a smaller town was discussing road works that were occurring on a 40km stretch of road due to a mine operator needing to transport iron ore via road instead of rail as a result of a failed contract with the rail provider. The participant discussed how this "tripled" the amount of road trains, which coincided with harvest time. The participant also noted that there were six truck crashes in the "last eight days", with one of these being a fatality.

The impact on roads from industry in the region was another issue that was raised in seven of the focus groups. This issue was more prevalent across the smaller towns. Specifically, the impact that the gas industry vehicles had on local roads, which are a local government responsibility. Participants discussed the impact on infrastructure of trucks transitioning through the region, and trucks on local roads, particularly when it rains, with the local government then having to "pick up the bills" (Group B) for road maintenance. The flow on effect of damage to roads to farmers' businesses and vehicles, and the cost to local government was described by one participant:

> *So, if you're going to haul a product on a road like iron ore or something like that, Main Roads has a thing called a Concessional Loading Scheme. That's a state government thing. We cannot use that scheme, so we have really no ability to charge the road users like Main Roads. (Group C)*

The participant continued to discuss how industry operators pay main roads 3 cents per tonne, but the local government do not receive that funding. Local governments receive grants with a road component, but it is not just for roads. The impact of damage on local roads from heavy vehicles is a cost that is then carried by the local government, the farmers and ultimately the rate payers in the community.

Another focus group participant described how the focus at local council meetings is solely on the resources industry to the exclusion of other industries in the region such as fishing and tourism. The participant described how they felt the planning strategy is "totally occupied" by the resource industries. They then described their experience of sitting in on council meetings as follows:

> *And when you sit in the meetings, the way they respond is they're continually having to spend money on all the roads that are around. All of those things because they have*

> *big trucks and the roads fall apart very quickly, but then everybody else is complaining [be]cause nothing is done anywhere else. (Group A)*

5.5.3. Housing

Issues around housing affordability and a shortage of housing was another key issue that was raised across nine of the 12 focus groups, three interviews and was also noted in the free text comments from the survey. Participants discussed the flow on effects of limited housing stock, making it hard to attract people to the region for critical jobs like teaching and health services. For example, one participant discussed how the local government needed to house critical workers due to the limited number of Government Regional Officer Housing (GROH) available (Group C). There was also concern about the lack of housing for the developments that are occurring in the region, and limited contribution to the region with the fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) model when camps are built outside of towns.

The Wimmera Southern Mallee region in Victoria faced similar issues with a lack of housing that restricted people coming to the region, and inhibited growth and economic development. To enable longer term growth for the region and to meet housing demand with projected population growth of 1.9% over 15 years, the Wimmera Development Association developed The Housing Blueprint (Wimmera Development Association, 2022). The Housing Blueprint was a collaborative process developed through community engagement and aimed to develop a shared vision with six local government areas. The Housing Blueprint includes support for short term and medium density housing, attracting tradespeople to the region, reviewing planning schemes, delivering social and affordable housing, and developing a housing model to attract investors to build properties in the region (Wimmera Development Association, 2022)

Other focus group participants discussed the cost of rental properties in the region and the limitations this caused when trying to recruit staff to the region (Group F). Issues with housing and lack of staff also flowed on to maintenance with public and social housing, with one focus group participant discussing how work orders that are meant to take 28 days are now stretching out to a year, due to a lack of contractors who can do the work. Another participant discussed how they employed apprentices, but they expressed disappointment that there was no training available in Geraldton. When asked about the courses offered, the participant stated that the courses are not available due to a lack of lecturers at the regional TAFE. This participant discussed how they have to send apprentices to Perth for training, but they felt this could be done much easier locally if the training, lecturers and housing were available in the region (Group J). Another participant followed up on this discussion stating:

> *We've got a great TAFE. Everything's there, but we've got no lecturers. We haven't got the facilities. We haven't got the housing, and this isn't just in Geraldton. I mean it's across the board and it's not only in Western Australia. It's right across Australia and when I see a state with millions of dollars sitting in the bank and not being utilised where it should be utilised, I get pretty angry about it (Group J).*

5.5.4. Gas infrastructure

Landholders who attended the focus groups had gas wells on their property and informed views on the gas industry, as they are directly dealing with gas companies with infrastructure on their land. Most were pragmatic about it, but it was noted by participants in four of the focus groups that there was not a lot of visibility of the gas industry or gas infrastructure in the region (Groups A, D, G & H). Other participants discussed how the broader community have little awareness of what is going on with the gas industry, except when flaring occurs. The gas wells are usually on private property, and the industries' presence in communities is minimal. The gas pipeline was mentioned, with one participant having to contend with a substation outside their home (Group K). However, it was emphasised that the times the gas industry are visible in the community is when they provide funding or sponsorship for certain things, such as a festival or community projects (Groups B, L & E).

Survey respondents were asked to think about possible futures for conventional gas development and how concerned they would be about the extension of gas into farming areas, the integrity of gas wells over time and the continued extraction of gas delaying the renewable energy transition. Results from the survey indicate that there are some regional differences, between Geraldton, Eneabba, Three Springs and Mingenew and Dongara (Figure 24). There was higher concern about conventional gas developments extending into other farming areas in WA in Eneabba, Mingenew and Three Springs. From the survey, concerns about gas well leakages over time were relatively consistent across all three areas. The most significant difference was views on continued extraction and whether this would delay the transition to renewable energy. This view received least agreement in the smaller towns of Eneabba, Mingenew and Three Springs.

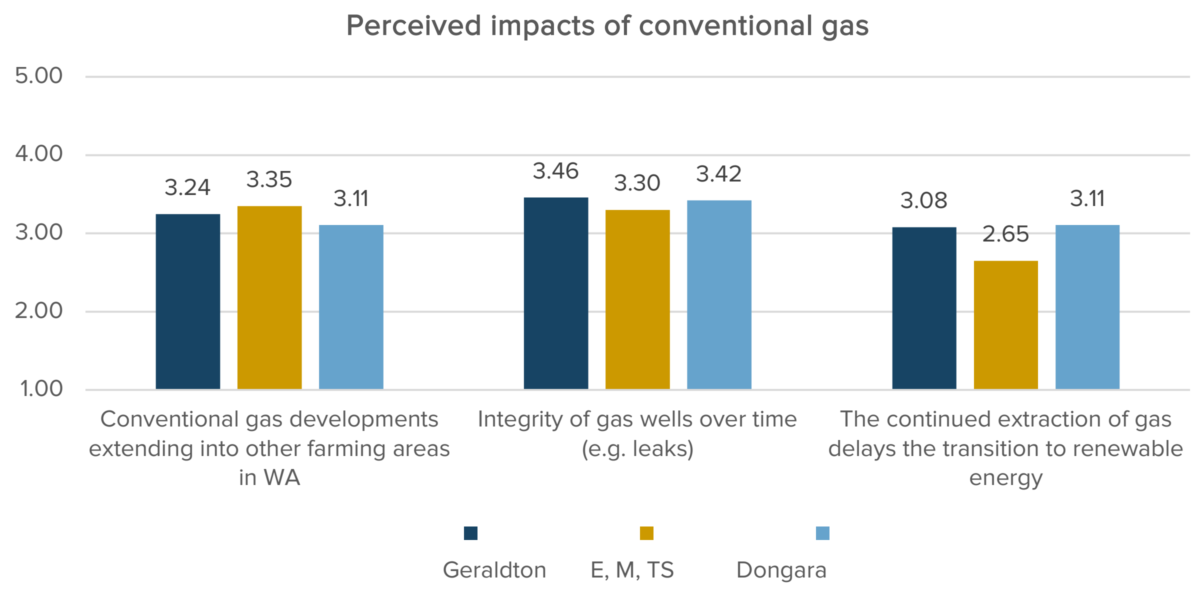

Figure 24. Perceived impacts associated with conventional gas development

5.5.5. Wind farms and other energy infrastructure projects

Other infrastructure developments in the region have an impact on community wellbeing, particularly in relation to people feeling they have a voice about developments occurring in the region. Survey participants were asked about their support for technologies to decarbonise and meet Australia's future energy needs. Figure 25 shows support for solar PV (4.1) is high with wind and distributed energy resources similarly high at 3.9 and 3.7 respectively. Hydrogen support (3.4) is moderate, sitting in the middle tier. Transmission infrastructure (3.3) and conventional gas (3.2) receive more mixed responses, suggesting conditional or divided views among residents. At the lower end, underground hydrogen storage (3.0), CCS (2.8), and ammonia (2.6) receive the least support.

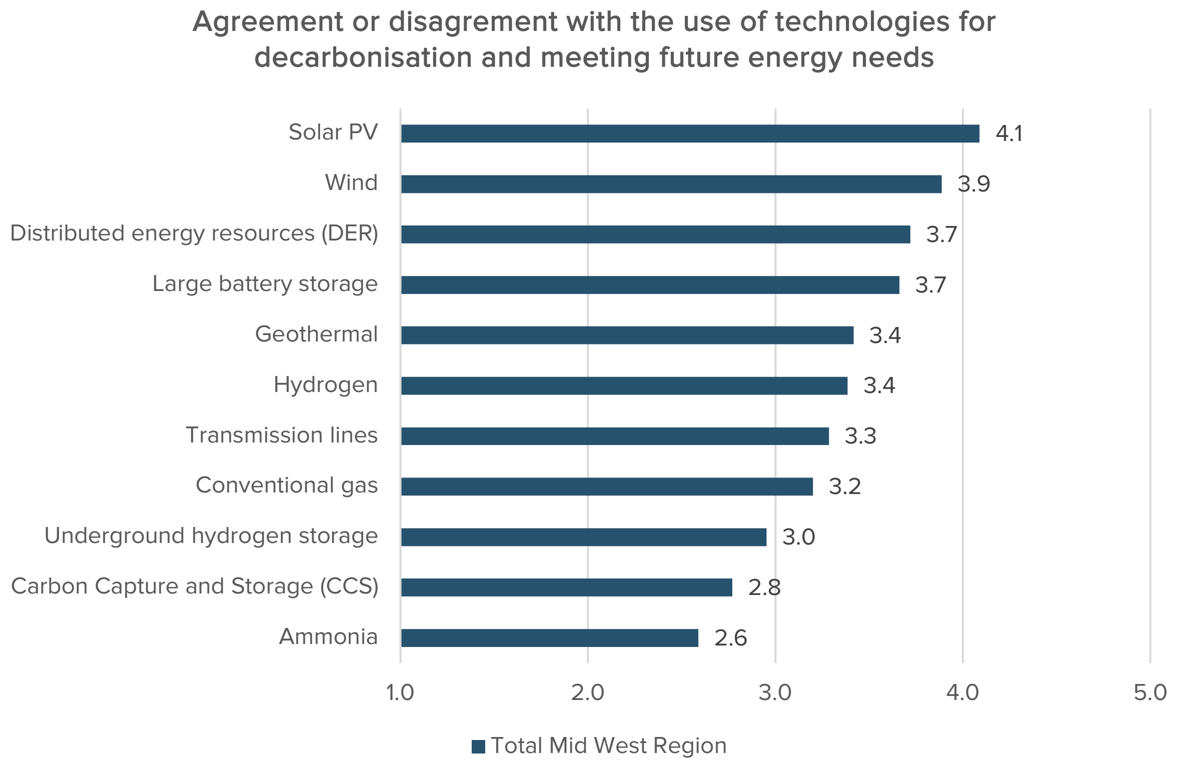

Figure 25. Agreement with the use of different technologies for decarbonisation

The qualitative research enabled people to raise other infrastructure concerns that affected overall wellbeing, particularly for landholders. Participants of the focus groups and interviews raised concerns about the decommissioning of wind farms and the approaches made to landholders by wind farm developers. Concerns were raised from farmers in the region about the infrastructure on farms (concrete and roads), decommissioning of turbines at end of life and the frequency of access to properties (Group C).

There were also concerns from focus groups participants about the way that industry approach landholders. This was the case for both gas and wind developers, but it was particularly pronounced in the case of some wind developers. There was an established build, own and operate (BOO) wind developer that had a good reputation among landholders, with an established decommissioning process for the wind farms at end of life. However, some other developers were seen to be speculative, and one focus group participant described the renewable energy industry as adopting a culture of the gas industry stating:

> *From the gas industry or other mining industries, and I think the danger is the culture in those industries, that is a classic example of how that culture is moving straight into the renewable sector because that's where they're sourcing their employees. So, if the renewables want to say we're better than them, which they love to say - they need to get their culture right from the start. And at the moment all they're doing is adopting a culture that's come, which is really poor. (Group D)*

Some interview participants also questioned the carbon intensiveness of wind farms when the entire life cycle of the technology is considered, such as the manufacturing and transport (P2, P6 & P5). The lifecycle and environmental credentials of batteries was also raised by some participants (P6). There was also the view from some participants that renewable energy was more beneficial for the environment, but there was a realistic perception of the embodied carbon in all energy systems (P8 & P5).

Other participants at the focus groups talked about household solar PV, and community batteries (Groups A, B, F & I). Participants were largely positive about household solar, and many participants questioned why community batteries were not in the region, particularly in areas that had reliability issues. As stated by one participant:

> *I just want to see a little community battery where we can all feed our solar into - our excess, and we can all draw off it. That's all I want. (Group F)*

Another participant discussed how they felt it would be beneficial for community groups to be responsible for shared infrastructure on local buildings. This participant had looked into having a community battery for the town but found it was too complex (Group A).

5.5.6. Yamatji physical infrastructure

Housing and infrastructure

Similar concerns on housing were raised by the YSRC, with a lack of affordable and appropriate housing identified as a fundamental need for YSRC members around and beyond Yamatji Country. A lack of housing infrastructure and services such as a reliable gas supply and the high cost of electricity were also raised. This was a particular concern due to the fact that gas extraction occurs in the area – a point that was also raised by broader community participants. These challenges were perceived to be directly impacting community wellbeing, mainly for the most vulnerable members.

Accommodation on Yamatji Country was perceived as inadequate and unaffordable either to rent or to purchase. Participants highlighted the importance of considering existing demand for housing and services against future demand due to an increase in the working population of the region, when assessing the social impacts of an initiative or project. Addressing housing needs in an affordable way was considered fundamental to ensure community wellbeing.

> *[...] There's an accommodation crisis across Country at the moment. Probably worse in places like the Pilbara, but it's still bad here and it's getting to the point where it's just*

> *not affordable for people to rent or definitely buy their own home. So, we just need to make sure that these new projects - that, you know, when they're doing their social impact assessment, that they're coming up with, with real solutions in regards to not only accommodating their workforce, but ensuring there's enough accommodation for all those support services. Because you know, if you've got more people coming to the community, you need more hairdressers and nurses and police and everything else.*

Visual impacts on Yamatji Country

Visual impacts, mostly related to wind farms, were identified as a concern, despite people being used to the presence of wind turbines on Country. Negative effects of wind farms on the broader community, not just the Indigenous community, were also mentioned along with concerns about their impact on tourism (e.g., aesthetic) and fauna (e.g., birds and bats). Oil and gas developments were considered more favourable in relation to visual impacts as they were perceived to produce smaller footprints than wind farms.

5.6. Economic dimensions of wellbeing

Regional and community benefits were a key concern that came out across all focus groups and the key themes and concerns that emerged from the research are noted in Table 12 below.

Table 12. Key themes from economic domain

Dimension	Key themes
Income sufficiency	• Cost of living concerns
Employment and business opportunities	• Support of local businesses • A need for broader economic development and growth and vibrancy in the towns • Employment, training and the impact of mining camps consistently discussed

The survey asked respondents to indicate their agreement to the question "How much do you agree that onshore conventional gas development would provide significant local benefits" for a range of issues (Figure 26). The survey results indicate that people did not strongly agree that conventional gas development brought long lasting benefits for the region. There were also lower levels of agreement from the survey that conventional gas development benefits the local community. The area where most agreement occurred was that the conventional gas industry would provide corporate support for local community activities, which is consistent with the focus groups and interviews. However, results from the qualitative research indicated that this was not necessarily the type of support that people wanted or preferred. Support for local services, infrastructure, local business opportunities and local employment were seen to contribute longer lasting benefits for the community.

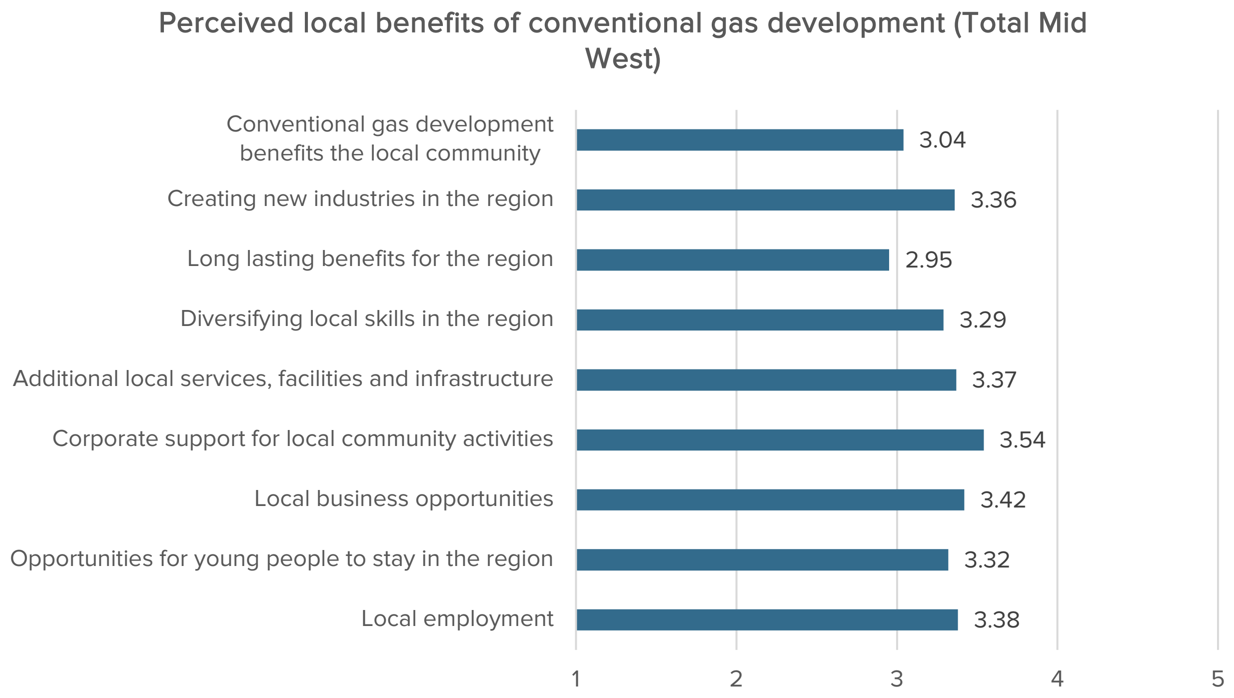

Figure 26. Perceived local benefits of conventional gas development

5.6.1. Regional economic benefits and income sufficiency

The survey showed mixed perceptions of distributional fairness in relation to broader benefits from the gas industry, with participants in Dongara and Geraldton having lower scores for perceptions of distributional fairness. The smaller towns of Eneabba, Mingenew and Three Springs had considerably higher scores for perceiving that there would be broader community benefits, compensation for the local government and individual compensation (Figure 27).

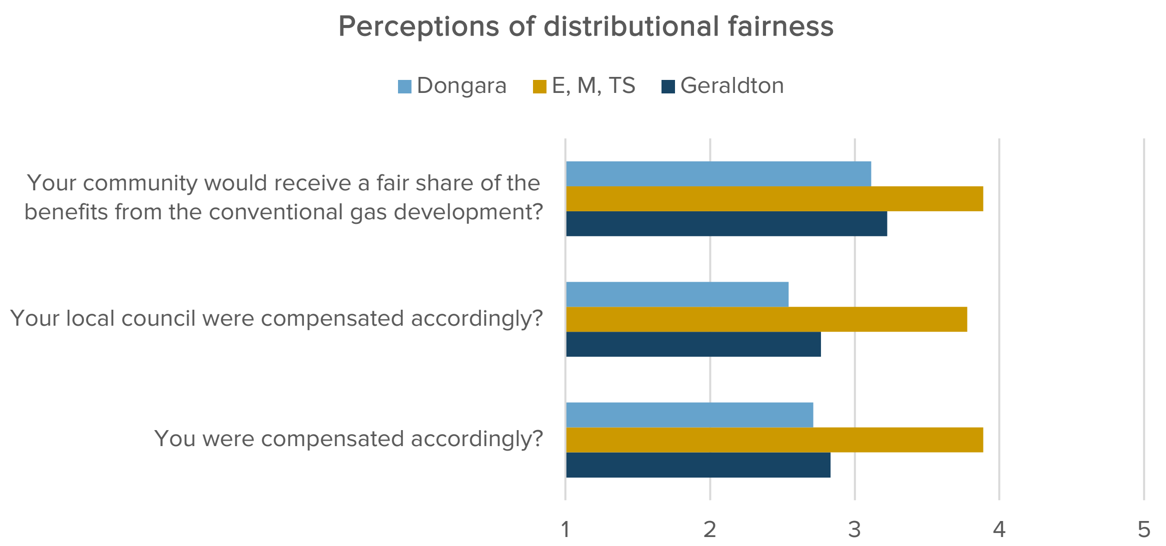

Figure 27. Perceptions of distributional fairness

Focus group and interview findings

In the focus groups and interviews, participants expressed concerns about the cost of living (such as housing) and electricity costs. People were not convinced that either gas or renewable energy would lead to reduced energy costs. The cost of electricity was a concern for residents, but also for businesses. One participant discussed the cost of gas bottles as they were not connected to natural gas, so they decided to remove gas from their home and only use electricity (P10), which had reduced their overall energy costs, indicating that for this participant, eliminating gas use in their home had a positive impact on their energy costs. Another participant also expected that the energy transition would lead to higher consumer prices (P8), with another participant not sure if they benefited from wind energy in the region noting that "I don't think our power is any cheaper than anywhere else" (P5). Others were of the view that it would cost more money in the future if appropriate actions to transition to low carbon electricity were not taken now.

Several participants talked of the need to support the local economy with contributions to the community needing to be more than tokenistic to truly benefit communities. This was discussed in relation to both renewable energy and gas industry proponents. Two of the groups also engaged in a discussion about the history of Mingenew, and how historically, industry contributed to the town as stated by one participant:

> *If you ever have time to just drive around the community and nearly every building would have a plaque on it as a result of [company] because they built the town - the swimming pool, the hall, the sports centre, the oval. A camp - so they built a camp in town. So, they had that foresight back then. (Group D)*

This participant also understood that the gas industry may only operate in the region for up to ten years, stating that, "it doesn't matter for that 6 or 8 years they can put infrastructure into the community, and we will benefit from it" (Group D). Another participant encapsulated the sentiment among many when talking of broader benefits to the region from the gas industry, discussing how the gas industry is not visible in the region, yet there is a significant amount of money being made from the region, stating:

> *You know, this industry - and really unless you happen to drive along the road, which you know, that there's a gas well or a processing plant - you wouldn't know it's here. And there's millions and billions of dollars coming out from under our feet and there's nothing that we - as a community, we haven't - we always talk about - like in the Shire one of your responsibilities is economic development. How crap would it be if there's no wider economic development benefit? (Group D).*

One focus group participant felt that only a small number of people benefit from gas industry operations and that the benefits need to be distributed more widely to the community. There were also discussions about the boom-and-bust cycle of industry in the region with one participant likening recurring industry promises in the region as becoming "the new Texas" (Group A). Another participant was discussing a sense of decline in the social fabric of central Geraldton with "satellite" developments and shopping precincts that have been constructed in the greater Geraldton region.

There was discussion in the focus groups about the Royalties for Regions program with acknowledgement that there is a legislated amount of funding that is to be spent in rural areas, but that much of this funding is “now funnelled into Perth and only gets spent in Perth.” (Group C). it was further clarified from one focus group participant that much of the Royalties for Regions funding is now provided for roads and rail, which used to be State Government funded. The participant describing the changes noted that:

> *The statutory programs that they should have been funding anyway are now taking the Royalties for Region money, so there's no... we can't go and apply for Royalties for Region money for argument's sake to upgrade this facility, whereas we could have. It's just not there. (Group D).*

Another focus group participant discussed the Royalties for Regions program further and described the decision to put the money back into government revenue “and now they just sort of breadcrumb it out a little bit, and they do it through the development commissions” (Group I). It was noted by this participation that the funds are distributed through the Regional Economic Development (RED) Grants (Government of Western Australia, 2025d), but that it mostly only helped businesses in the region, and did not assist with community infrastructure.

This perspective of the community not benefiting from industry development in the region was significant when considering the cost-of-living challenges that were being faced across the region and described by several interview participants (P7, P8, P9). Participants also expressed their concern about the impact of Oakajee with the cost of living in the town, both in the future and historically with house prices increasing on the back of promises from Oakajee, and then the subsequent decline in house prices when people “lost a lot of money” (Groups F & G).

One participant discussed the challenges of living regionally in relation to economic development and social support, stating:

> *I feel that the government don't actually consider us, we're not in the metro area. So our thoughts and views really don't count. They'll do some lip service to pretend they're listening, but they're not really. And everything they do is just making life harder and harder for small rural communities. And people are leaving because of it and then that makes it even harder for those that are trying to stay. And that's across everything from health, education, trying to start up new small businesses. (Group B)*

A similar point about the region not necessarily benefiting from industry projects in the region was made by another focus group participant, who felt that Perth received more of the benefits (Group L). One focus group participant who had lived in the region for a long time discussed the promises that were made and noted how new people that arrive to the region tend to believe the “hype” that comes along with new developments, only for the status quo to remain the same. This view was reinforced by another focus group participant who talked about the promises for jobs but felt that ultimately most of the development was Perth centric, particularly in relation to electricity infrastructure.

A focus group participant in Geraldton discussed how “everyone sees the little clips that come out, 40,000 jobs, 50,000 jobs, all that stuff. But no one really understands what the transition will be" (Group G). This participant was discussing how energy is generated near Geraldton for the benefit of Perth, but also companies are trying to capitalise on producing renewable energy in the area, to "make an export" in the case of producing ammonia for export from renewable energy.

Another focus group participant who was relatively new to WA, made the observation that private enterprise appeared to have a significant decision-making influence on the community (Group F). Yet, some people in the focus groups observed that some industry in the region also contributed positively to the region through employment stating that, "everyone knows someone who's worked there, has a job and did well" (Group G).

Landholder compensation

An issue that was raised in some of the focus groups, related to landholder compensation and contract negotiations, mostly from the gas industry, but some participants also mentioned the wind industry, particularly in relation to decommissioning of wind farms (Groups B, C & D).

There was some concern from landholders about the length of time companies would take for exploration as landholders were not compensated for exploration and were told by gas companies that "there is no money because we might not find anything" (Group B). Another participant talked of gas companies as "playing the long game" stating that:

> *You know, we'd be happier if you [gas company] weren't even here. I've had situations not – in the past with another company where it wasn't until – and they had made a really big mistake - until I threatened to put it on the front page of West Australian and within 24 hours the money was in our account for the full compensation we asked for what they'd done. (Group D)*

Landholders who attended the focus groups felt that interactions with both wind and gas energy companies, required support from experienced legal experts and other landholders. The gas and wind industry paid landholders to engage lawyers for negotiations. Some examples of the challenges with negotiations mentioned by landholders were (i) the amount of time required to understand agreements (between landholders and energy companies), (ii) insufficient knowledge of what should be in the contract (for example funds for decommissioning of wind turbines), (iii) contracts with subsidiary companies with no support from the parent company, and (iv) handling different contracts with different energy companies at the same time.

On the issue of time, focus group participants discussed their own time that was taken up by negotiations from the gas industry, which is not compensated. This was exacerbated when participants met with industry "half a dozen times", but then the work gets passed on to another company. The following participant discussed the impact on their own time from this process of negotiating with one company, which was then replaced by another company:

> *So, they come, and they meet with you, and they'll explain everything that they're going to do and then they bring some beer, then they come and meet again with some bills that's more involved with the project. And you go out on site - and you can discuss - you know where they were hoping to have access from - but you never get paid for that*

> *time. And then you'll meet with them half a dozen times. And then oh, they've run out of money. So that permit then gets bought by somebody else. So, then you start the whole process again with a new set of people.*
>
> *it's getting to the stage that we're almost going to say, well, if you want to have a meeting with us, that's fine, but this is our hourly rate. (Group B).*

Ultimately, landholders talked with each other and worked together to achieve better outcomes in their negotiations with companies. This was mildly challenged by confidentiality clauses in contracts where landholders saw it as a deliberate strategy of companies who tried to "play off" different landholders in the communities. A key learning in these negotiations was that landholders made it clear that they would be talking with other community members. Landholders have the right to talk with each other, yet confidentiality clauses in both wind and gas development contracts can limit landholders exchanging details about compensation and lease payments (Parkins et al., 2022, p. 679). There is some evidence internationally that landholders prefer projects that are transparent and have broader benefits across the community, for example with benefit sharing models (Parkins et al., 2022, p. 685). This is consistent with findings from this research.

An interview participant described their view on the negotiations and the expectations that had been set, stating:

> *We had to do a lot of work to get the compensation to where it is, but now I'm quite happy with the how it's all gone, and I think that's kind of set the standard for a lot of the other wells in the area. (P1)*

The research provided some excellent examples of community working together to achieve broader economic benefits for their community, but it is noted here that landholders had to expend a significant amount of time and unpaid labour to achieve minimal benefits from gas exploration.

5.6.2. Employment, training and mining camps

There was discussion in the focus groups about jobs in the clean energy sector, including the types of jobs that will eventuate in the sector. One participant who was familiar with training in the clean energy sector discussed that the types of jobs that are likely to be created are in civil engineering and construction. This participant also questioned the scale of jobs that are being promoted in the clean energy sector stating:

> *There's not the scale of jobs they're saying, and there's not the scale of jobs that people think of when they think of an emerging industry, which we're used to is iron ore or anything like that. (Group G)*

For the gas sector, the broader economic benefits were seen as minimal, with one participant discussing the limited jobs from the gas sector (Group G). Other participants in some of the smaller regional towns expressed concerns with mining camps on the edge of towns. The camps were seen to not contribute to the local economy due to them being completely self-sufficient and self-contained with a FIFO or drive-in, drive-out (DIDO) culture.

Another focus group participant discussed concerns that were raised by community members in the region over a company who intend to build a workers' camp outside of the town. The concern from this participant was that without workers living in town, there was no economic support of local businesses, such as the hotel (Group H).

Part of the concern with mining camps on the edge of town related to the promises from industry about employing local people where they can. However, their past experiences have shown that companies will bring people in from outside the region and establish mining camps to accommodate them outside of the town (Group B). There was also discussion that this was a change from the past 30 to 40 years ago when mining companies used to own housing in town and people used to live there, with a participant stating that "it was of great, a much greater benefit to the towns" (Group I). Another participant described the flow on economic benefits that would occur if workers lived in the region, rather than in mining camps:

> *You imagine - you know it gives us, due to our declining population, it'll give us some critical mass if we can get them to move in town. They will support our local businesses, our supermarkets, our eateries, whereas out there they build their own bakery. Everything's on site, their own sporting facilities. Why would they do that when we've got it all here? Because they're spending millions and millions. And if you do the sums, it's actually cheaper to build houses in town than set up mining centres. Then they have to fly them in. They have to house them, feed them. It's more expensive but that's the model they only want to go with, so they stay away from the communities. (Group C)*

Wealth transfer was also an issue that was raised with mining camps, when workers from Perth fly in and fly out of regions, they do not contribute to the local economy, with wealth being instead spent in Perth (Group C). Hence the view of Perth being the "centre", while resource extraction occurs in the regions.

5.6.3. Yamatji economic opportunities

Business opportunities

Realising business opportunities, that do not compromise culture from developments on Country were a strongly emphasised aspiration from the YSRC. Such businesses would ensure community financial sustainability, while enabling culturally appropriate investments in community wellbeing, and cultural and environmental protection.

> *[...] we're definitely about trying to maximise benefits for our members and part of that is working with industry and generating opportunities from that. So, uh, you know, whether it's employment and training opportunities for our members, or it's some sort of financial benefit, even the potential to have equity in projects, you know, something that we're keen to explore further. Uh, it's all about maximising benefits for members without compromising, culture and, and the environment.*

Potential business opportunities that were discussed by the YSRC included those that arose directly from energy-related initiatives (such as co-ownership); in partnership with developers on the YSRC land estate; through the YSRC's assets as a service provider (such as water supply or ecosystem services); or through members' initiatives (such as manufacturing businesses owned by members).

The interest in developing YSRC's own businesses and having co-ownership in renewable energy initiatives without compromising the community's cultural interests was highly rated. Yamatji Water, owned by the YSRC, is a key business arm of the Corporation that plays a crucial role in interactions with energy-related developments. There were aspirations for Yamatji Water to be a utility provider, with the participant noting that "we're looking to be part of Geraldton's long-term water supply, but I suppose in this context it's more about - it goes to - groundwater supply."

Co-developing renewable energy initiatives on YSRC land and having the opportunity to explore co-ownership in those developments was viewed as enabling opportunities for Caring for Country in a culturally appropriate way, while also having an initiative that provides training and employment for community members, and reinvesting revenues into community development initiatives.

> *[...] part ownership in [initiatives]. So, we have a seat at the table and the profits that have been generated from these [initiatives] coming back into our trusts and then being distributed to the members.*

Negotiations around lease agreements, considering Indigenous land rights and benefit agreements with project proponents before development takes place were noted. Further negotiations regarding project decommissioning were also mentioned as challenging to secure co-benefits from developments, while also presenting opportunities. Lease negotiations were considered as opportunities to source funding for the YSRC's programs and businesses, thus positively impacting community development, land management, and the preservation of culture, while also promoting the community's economic sustainability. The creation of businesses such as a nursery, fee for service seed collection, tourism endeavours, and fishing were raised alongside the possibility of broad-scale revegetation and restoration.

> *It's a huge area and what we need to try and do is generate revenue, even though we don't have the power to lease, generate revenue from that land so we can afford to manage it because we're still going to be responsible for fire breaks and controlling ferals, you know, we, we'll obviously be responsible for illegal dumping of rubbish, which you can guarantee is going to happen. So, we need to, yeah, generate revenue, and if we're able to do that you know, by being able to propagate native plants and be involved in revegetation work, it'd be awesome.*

YSRC employment and training opportunities

Employment opportunities that are already in place and can continue in the future include flora and fauna surveys conducted by rangers, cultural heritage surveys for developments, weed removal, and feral animal control. Ongoing monitoring of significant sites and the ecosystem was mentioned as desirable to promote culturally appropriate land management, and long-term employment.

Two types of training opportunities were identified as potentially feasible opportunities: those where proponents of energy-related initiatives could employ community members, and those that can be offered by the YSRC to build capacity among community members (such as GIS training).

Education was also identified as an essential aspect of future employment opportunities, along with the need for financial support to enable Indigenous children to be enrolled and stay in school. Securing the education of youth was viewed as a potential benefit of hosting energy-related initiatives.

5.7. Health dimensions of community wellbeing

5.7.1. Physical health

The issue of health was less discussed across the focus groups and interviews and was not discussed from the YSRC. The key themes to emerge from the research on the issue of health are described in Table 13.

Table 13. Key themes from health domain

Dimension	Key themes
Health	• Concerns raised about limited health facilities in region and long wait times for doctors and specialists • Mental health concerns in relation to work related burnout and some interactions with energy companies. Cost of living concerns also causing stress.

Participants in the focus groups and interviews felt that current health facilities in the region are over stretched with people discussing their hope about the refurbishment of the hospital in Geraldton. Other health challenges described from people included a lack of bulk-billing doctors, limited health care for the elderly, long waiting periods to see doctors and specialists, and inadequate aged care facilities. The lack of services in the region was described by one participant who stated:

> *So for me I was just thinking - it's like a lack of services, like not in regards to like gynaecology, medical, but like basically anything really like everything is completely overstretched and you can't get appointments like - in anything. Like you could be considered urgent, but there's that many people above you that you're not even getting into like a specialist or something that you need to see for a year.(Group F)*

One opportunity identified by participants in focus group C was that energy companies could let their medical staff service the community, rather than just their organisation. In focus group D, an example of a missed opportunity was provided of an energy company that refused to give a donation to the community for health services, but they still wanted priority access for their staff at a health facility during COVID.

5.7.2. Mental health

Mental health was discussed at the focus groups and interviews in terms of the work environment, interactions with energy companies, cost of living, and limited opportunities for social activities. Staff at hospitals, council, social services and aged care facilities were described as stressed and burnt out. Mental health issues in work environments were attributed to various factors. For example, one participant in the social services sector discussed the lack of skilled workers in the region that leads to long waiting periods for repairs or construction of public housing, resulting in increased stress and mental health. This participant from group F shared her experience working in the sector, eager to make a difference but felt helpless because of lack of resources and left the job, stating:

I was so positive wanting to make change and I tried so hard. I was like I am one fish and there's nothing I can do so I have to get out because I'm caring, I'm stressed, I'm burnt out and I'm not able to fix this, so I'd rather not have it in my life. (Group F)

Some interview participants (P6, P14) expressed concerns that the cost of living was having an impact on mental health, as people are not able to buy goods they needed, or able to afford to visit a doctor. Another participant discussed the impact of extended power outages on the health services in the region with refrigeration of medicines stating:

Are they going to upgrade the end of the grid - because this is Mullewa, it's one of the communities when all of a sudden, they will go off power for 18-24 hours and longer. The doctor has serious issues because it means no refrigeration. All their medicines, immunisations and everything like that got to be chucked out. Northampton has a similar problem - and Kalbarri. (Group F)

6. Conclusions

This report provides a comprehensive summary of community wellbeing and concerns about onshore gas development and other energy technologies in the Mid West region. This was achieved through the use of a survey, twelve focus groups, fifteen interviews and one yarn with the YSRC conducted between November 2024 and July 2025. Most participants of the research expressed a strong sense of place attachment, belonging and connection to the region, and a strong sense of community cohesion, particularly in the smaller towns. This finding was evident in survey results as well as the qualitative data.

Contributions to community cohesion were discussed through volunteering or from support of local business, which in turn supported the local economy, infrastructure and employment. Volunteers and local sports were seen as crucial components of wellbeing in the Mid West. However, this was being directly impacted by lower population in the towns, and the use of mining camps for workers that were perceived as not contributing to the local fabric of the community, which then had negative flow on impacts to economic growth, local employment and housing infrastructure in the region.

Results from the survey indicated that levels of trust within the local community itself was high in the towns of Eneabba, Mingenew, Three Springs and Dongara, but not as high in Geraldton. Similarly trust in local leaders and the local government was highest in Eneabba, Mingenew and Three Springs, but lower in Geraldton. The WA state government had the lowest levels of trust across all survey respondents, with people also expressing lower levels of trust with energy companies (including gas companies).

Personal safety was raised as an issue in Geraldton with people expressing concerns about the level of crime in the town. Others expressed a fear of going out at night, which was not described elsewhere. Safety was also discussed in relation to infrastructure including road safety (with increased heavy vehicles) and fire risks with concerns raised about pole top fires on the distribution network and flaring in summer from the gas industry.

Perceived benefits from the conventional gas industry were mixed with survey respondents indicating a neutral response to long lasting benefits and focus group participants indicating there was an overpromising of benefits that did not always materialise. While participants agreed that the conventional gas industry would provide corporate support for local community activities, this was not the type of support that people wanted or preferred as identified in the qualitative findings. Support for local services, infrastructure, local business opportunities and local employment were preferred as a way to contribute to longer lasting regional benefits. The survey results indicated a positive perception of local benefits in the region for employment, business opportunities, diversification of skills, local services and facilities, and opportunities for young people to stay in the region.

There was also a lack of visibility of the gas industry in the community, with many participants in the focus groups and interviews noting that the wider community have limited awareness of the industry in the region, except when flaring occurs. The gas industry may want to consider providing transparent information and early engagement about their operations for the communities they operate in. Drawing on initiatives in the eastern states where there is a longer history of onshore gas development and as described in The Gas Guide (Gas Fields Commission Queensland, 2022), this could include information about who the company is, their project plans (including expected timelines and impacts), and the practices and procedures of the project (what, when and how).

Another significant concern raised by focus group and interview participants was the impact of heavy vehicles on local roads and the lack of housing in the region. There is a need to ensure that local governments and rate payers are not carrying the cost of local road maintenance that are impacted by heavy vehicles. Consultation with industry, local government and Development Commissions in the region is suggested to develop a funding model that improves road safety and reduces the maintenance and cost burden that exists for local governments. Industry could also consider working closely with the state government on housing plans for the Mid West region to encourage workers to stay in the region, rather than the current DIDO and FIFO out models.

Concerns were also raised about the WA Government's Significant Development Pathway process, which was seen to take away from local decision making. Participants of the research also indicated that they felt information on energy development in the region is limited, with focus groups participants indicating a large part of the community felt uninformed of what is happening with energy development in the region. Participants reinforced a need for more comprehensive information about the energy transition and energy projects in the region and felt the state government has a role to play in providing this information. The lack of comprehensive information and a vision of energy development in the state was contributing to communities feeling uninformed, disempowered and excluded from decision making in relation to the energy transition.

Participants in the focus groups and interviews also consistently raised issues around the challenges with power reliability, power quality and delayed electricity connections for businesses. Power quality issues appeared to be worse in Dongara and discussions about community batteries were raised from this community. The state government owned power corporation (Western Power) may consider undertaking consultation in Geraldton and the surrounding Mid West region to understand the energy needs, and aspirations for future growth of communities and businesses in the region. This will ensure that energy infrastructure in the region, not only meets the needs of industry but also meets the needs of the Mid West community. This is particularly important for local businesses who expressed the limitations for their growth, due to constraints placed on new connections.

The yarning with the YSRC found a positive, strategic, and pragmatic approach to the future, focusing on engaging with industry to maximise benefits for its members, while fostering a sustainable future. Central to the YSRC vision and activities is the importance of culture (specifically beliefs, practices, and places), which informs their decision-making. Climate change posed a significant cultural, environmental and economic risk to both Country and community, with YSRC staff emphasising a preference for renewable energy initiatives.

The YSRC expressed two desired situations for future development. One refers to low-risk, low-investment, short-term job and business opportunities through existing work such as heritage and biodiversity surveys, weed removal, feral animal control, and water monitoring. Ongoing monitoring of Country was also recommended to keep a healthy Country and inform projects, whether environmentally or culturally. Another opportunity refers to larger, long-term investments, such as co-ownership with renewable energy companies, which may include benefit-sharing agreements involving capacity building of community members to drive such initiatives.

Key concerns

In summary, key concerns from the wider community in Geraldton, Dongara, Mingenew, Eneabba and Three Springs about industry in the Mid West included:

- A lack of transparency, consultation and information provided about energy developments
- Limited participation and influence on decisions
- Mining camps not contributing to the broader economy, with wealth transfer to Perth
- Impacts of trucks on local road infrastructure, with costs of maintenance left to local governments
- Limited broader economic benefits of projects in the region, with a focus on tokenistic benefits instead (for example, funding of local projects).
- Non-disclosure agreements in contracts (for both gas and wind projects), and
- Concerns about the environmental impact of industry, particularly on groundwater and agricultural production

Several issues and concerns were discussed in the focus groups and interviews that contributed to a lack of trust in the WA government. These include:

- A need for broader government vision for development in the region
- The use of the Significant Development Pathway, with a sense that this limited local decision making
- Unreliable electricity and long wait times for electricity connections
- Lack of housing and the cost of rentals
- A need for broader economic development and growth in the region, including support for local business
- Transparency and consolidated information about projects in the region, with a desire for the “what, when and how” to be provided about projects in the region
- A need for longer term thinking on the decommissioning of wind farms, end of life solar panels and job creation for communities
- Limited training (and availability of lecturers) for the training needed for the energy transition

Concerns specifically related to the YSRC include:

- Biodiversity and culturally significant species preservation
- Education as a key aspect of community wellbeing
- Job creation

- Lack of housing and high costs impacting wellbeing
- Concerns about visual impacts from wind farms
- Risks from water contamination and declining ecosystem function
- Concerns about overlapping licences and environmental impacts
- Impact of drought on local fauna and flora
- Timing conflicts over project timelines and consultation fatigue
- The need for early-stage engagement and trust-building with proponents

Appendices

Provided in separate document.

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