



*Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and  
Transport Committee*

# Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities

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City of Mandurah, WA submission



**August 2009**

## Summary

The City of Mandurah welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities. It is understood that the primary role of the Inquiry is to assess the success or otherwise of government initiatives to improve access to higher education, both for rural and regional students and for regional institutions.

### Mandurah's Demographic Profile

The City of Mandurah is one of Western Australia's fastest growing Local Government areas, and over the longer term, one of the fastest growing regional areas in Australia. Mandurah is currently experiencing 5-year (2003-2008) average annual growth of 4.5%, compared with the WA average of 2.1%, and national average of 1.5%.<sup>1</sup>

Over the 30-year period 1978-2007, Mandurah's growth has averaged approximately 6.5% per annum. During this period, Mandurah's population has grown more than sixfold, from a town of about 10,000 in 1978, to a city with a population of almost 70,000.

In recent years Mandurah's growth has slowed, partly as a result of unsustainable increases in property prices experienced during the recent housing boom, and partly due to the current economic downturn. Nonetheless, Mandurah's population is forecast to continue growing at a steady rate, to reach 100,000 by 2022, and to nearly double its current population by 2031.

Mandurah is also one of Western Australia's most rapidly ageing communities. At the 1991 Census, the median age of Mandurah residents was 35 years; at the 2006 Census it was 43 years. Currently, 20.9% of Mandurah's residents are aged 65 years and over, compared with the Australian average of 13.3%.<sup>2</sup>

At the other end of the age spectrum, Mandurah has traditionally found it difficult to retain its young adult population, as shown in the following table<sup>3</sup>:

Age Grouping	Mandurah	Western Australia
15-19 years	6.6%	7.0%
20-24years	5.3%	7.3%
25-29 years	4.6%	7.1%
30-34 years	4.8%	6.9%

There are a number of assumptions about Mandurah's comparatively low numbers of young people. However, it is generally agreed that a lack of education, training, employment and social opportunities combine to act as a deterrent to more young people calling Mandurah home. Lack of adequate secondary and tertiary education opportunities is a particularly difficult issue to overcome, as the following table shows<sup>4</sup>:

<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics – *Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2007-08*

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics – *2006 Census QuickStats*

<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics - *Population by Age and Sex; Regions of Australia*; 11 August 2009

<sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics - *2006 Census QuickStats*

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Mandurah</b>	<b>Western Australia</b>
Percentage of Population with Year 12 Completion ( <i>2006 Census</i> )	28.7%	42.4%
Percentage of Population Attending University or other Tertiary ( <i>2006 Census</i> )	1.3%	3.7%
Percentage of Population with University or other Tertiary Qualification ( <i>2006 Census</i> )	26.5%	31.5%
Youth Unemployment (15-19 years) ( <i>2006 Census</i> )	9.8%	8.9%

### **Mandurah's Employment Vulnerability**

In previous decades, Mandurah consistently experienced very high levels of unemployment; however this has improved significantly in recent years. At the 1991 Census, Mandurah's unemployment rate was 19.1%. Currently, Mandurah's unemployment rate stands at 4.9%, compared with the WA average of 3.0% and the Australian average of 4.2%<sup>5</sup>.

Mandurah also has a comparatively low percentage of residents with Year 12 completions and tertiary-qualifications, low employment levels in professional services industries, and an over-reliance on retail sector and construction industry employment. When combined, these factors point to a high level of employment vulnerability in Mandurah, a situation likely to be exacerbated by the current economic downturn.

Since September 2006, Mandurah's unemployment rate has remained below 6%, a good outcome when compared with its historical averages. A number of factors account for this, most notably the recent mining and housing boom in WA, and the 'sea-change' phenomenon being experienced in many coastal regions around Australia.

However, at this stage it appears likely that without external intervention, unemployment will again start to rise in Mandurah as a result of the existing economic downturn. This assessment is supported by the recently released University of Newcastle study into employment vulnerability.

The University of Newcastle's research report – *Red alert suburbs: An employment vulnerability index for Australia's major urban regions* – noted that the current economic downturn is likely to mostly affect people employed in the construction, manufacturing, mining, retail trade, accommodation, hospitality, finance and insurance, and property and business service industries, and those with low skills and/or casual or part-time positions. The report developed an Employment Vulnerability Index (EVI) to indicate potential job losses in capital city suburbs and large non-metropolitan urban regions.

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<sup>5</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations – *Small Area Labour Markets*; December Quarter 2008

The report highlighted two types of 'at risk' suburbs – 'Red Alert' and 'Amber Alert'. These are described as suburbs that have higher proportions of the types of jobs thought to be most at risk in the current economic climate, and also suburbs that either have for some time been among Australia's most disadvantaged places to live, or which up until the recent economic slowdown, have been relatively sheltered from the social and economic problems that joblessness brings.

The report indicated that Mandurah is one of 16 Australian regional centres which are listed as being relatively disadvantaged compared with other regional cities, and that Mandurah is also listed as Western Australia's highest, and Australia's 7<sup>th</sup> highest Regional Concentration Ratio (high job loss potential) non-metropolitan urban area<sup>6</sup>. A regional centre is described as having more than 20 thousand residents in a non-metropolitan area.

According to the University report, of WA's regional centres, Bunbury, Kalgoorlie and Mandurah have significant numbers of job loss suburbs. It also notes that 11 of Mandurah's 17 populated suburbs are in the 'Red Alert' category. However three of the suburbs listed as either high or medium risk – North Yunderup, Furnissdale and Secret Harbour – are not actually located within the Mandurah Local Government Area<sup>7</sup>.

### **Draft State Planning Policy - Activity Centres for Perth and Peel**

In June 2009, the Western Australian Planning Commission released its draft State Planning Policy – Activity Centres for Perth and Peel. The main purpose of the planning policy was to specify broad planning requirements for the planning and development of new and the redevelopment and renewal of existing activity centres in urban areas of Perth and Peel. This included planning and coordinating the location, distribution and broad land use and urban design criteria for activity centres, in conjunction with local governments and public sector agencies.

On the issue of employment, the planning policy noted that locating a greater proportion of employment-generating businesses – including schools - in an activity centre that is well serviced by public transport provides greater employment opportunities:

*Integrate centres with intensive employment areas, higher education campuses, and major health centre precincts to capitalise on the employment base of such areas and their ability to help support the range of services offered in a centre<sup>8</sup>.*

However, this policy is difficult to achieve when sites for new schools are scarce. Previous discussions with the Western Australian Education Department and the WAPC indicate that there is no available land within central Mandurah for the construction of new schools.

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<sup>6</sup> University of Newcastle Centre of Full Employment and Equity – Red Alert Suburbs: An employment vulnerability index for Australia's major urban regions; March 2009; p.15.

<sup>7</sup> University of Newcastle Centre of Full Employment and Equity – Red Alert Suburbs: An employment vulnerability index for Australia's major urban regions; March 2009;  
[www.newcastle.edu.au/coffee/indicators/job\\_loss\\_index/evi.cfm](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/coffee/indicators/job_loss_index/evi.cfm).

<sup>8</sup> Western Australian Planning Commission - *Draft State Planning Policy - Activity Centres for Perth and Peel*; June 2009

There are currently 30 public schools in the Peel Region, including 21 primary schools, 8 secondary schools, and one combined primary and secondary school. There are 11 non-government schools in the Region, including 6 primary, 3 combined primary and secondary, and 2 secondary schools. The Region's post-secondary education campuses are Challenger TAFE and Murdoch University Peel Campus.

Whilst this seems like a substantial education presence, it is not nearly enough for a Region that has sustained continued rapid growth for more than 30 years, and is projected to almost double its current population within the next 20. The City has been advised that approximately 39 new primary schools and 9 new secondary schools will be required over the next 20 years to accommodate the Peel Region's future growth.

Another local issue is the gradual decline in enrolments in Mandurah's public school system, for a variety of reasons. This exodus creates additional demands on the private school system, and hence long waiting lists for private school enrolments, and the need for additional private schools to be built.

Whilst the State's Education and Planning Departments are beginning to plan in advance (20-50 year timeframes) for future community facilities, including new schools and higher education precincts to meet the Peel Region's projected growth, a number of the schools will nonetheless be required to establish their new campuses in the Region's inland local government areas. This then creates issues of accessibility, and the need to provide adequate public transport and servicing facilities to accommodate the needs of students and parents.

### **Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education**

In March 2008, the Australian Government initiated a Review of Australian Higher Education, to examine and report on the future direction of the higher education sector, its fitness for purpose in meeting the needs of the Australian community and economy, and the options for reform.

The Panel released its final report in December. The report made a number of findings, and listed 46 recommendations to the Minister. The Australian Government and announced its final response as part of the 2009 Budget in May. The Government announced that it would provide an additional \$5.4 billion to support higher education and research over the next four years, in a comprehensive response to the Bradley Review. New initiatives include:

- Investigating the possibility of moving from proxy measures of socio-economic status to measures based on family and individual circumstance
- Setting a national target that, by 2020, 20 per cent of higher education enrolments at undergraduate level are people from low socio-economic status backgrounds

- Examining the costs of providing teaching and research in regional Australia, in order to implement a new and more logical basis for funding. The Government will consult with universities during the consultation, research and review processes
- Providing \$52 million over four years to support collaborative research networks. This measure will support networks to encourage institutions, particularly those in regional Australia, to form partnerships with other universities in areas of research strength.
- Providing \$3 billion over four years for infrastructure provision, to enhance the capacity of the tertiary education and research sectors
- Providing \$500 million for Round 3 of the *Education Investment Fund*
- Providing \$650 million for a Sustainability Round of EIF, comprising:
  - \$400 million for research infrastructure related to the Clean Energy Initiative, and
  - \$250 million for VET, higher education and research infrastructure related to climate change and sustainability activities.

The City of Mandurah is particularly eager to explore the opportunity for collaborative approaches with universities and TAFEs, to expand the Peel Region's education, training, and research and development sectors. Potential exists to establish a variety of local climate change and clean energy initiatives, which will provide not only enhanced employment and commercial opportunities, but also position Mandurah as a city that is well prepared for any climate change eventualities.

Other research avenues exist in terms of both environmental and commercial opportunities associated with the Peel-Harvey Estuary and riverine system, eg environmental aspects, water management, aquaculture, etc.

And as an extension of a recent comprehensive business activity survey, a joint study is about to be commissioned on the potential for a technology hub in the Mandurah/Peel area.

### **Mandurah's *Southern City Strategy***

The *Southern City Strategy* concept is designed to reverse Mandurah's historically high unemployment levels, primarily by diversifying its employment base and improving its education outcomes. The strategy aims to ensure the creation of 'high-end' jobs and ongoing employment in professional and other sectors, and to retain Mandurah's local youth base through increased education and employment opportunities. It broadly involves the following actions:

- Increase scale in City Centre zone (mandatory commercial with residential)
- Increase level of CBD activity (as opposed to suburban 'box' shopping centres)
- Improve local and regional public transport linkages

- Upgrade University and TAFE infrastructure, and expand course availability
- Identify and attract knowledge / IT / innovation / industrial & professional sectors
- Create an adequate ratio of primary and secondary schools, and additional private schools
- Plan regionally (e.g. Nambeelup Industrial Estate, Keralup Residential Estate, Boddington Gold Mine).

The *Southern City Strategy* is designed to ensure that Mandurah residents can continue to live *and* work locally. It seeks to create an expanded employment base, with an additional 40,000 'high-end' local jobs created in Mandurah and the broader Peel Region. The *Southern City Strategy* aims to position Mandurah as the economic anchor to the southern Perth metropolitan area, and enhance its reputation as a great place to live, work and stay. Naturally, education and training will play a vital role in the achievement of the Southern City Strategy.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, there are a number of issues that require addressing in order to improve Mandurah and the wider Peel Region's education, training and employment prospects. These include:

- Student accommodation - accommodation needs must be met, particularly at the TAFE and University level, to attract and retain students. Planning and delivery of such facilities needs to be undertaken as a high priority.
- Attracting teaching staff – affordable housing is required to attract teachers to the Region. Again urgent work is required to address this issue, which will also affect local business, industry and essential services if workers and employees are unable to secure affordable rental or purchase housing.
- Mandurah's demographic – a low value is placed on education and learning; therefore increased government support is required for 'learning community' initiatives to underpin a variety of initiatives the City is undertaking and involved in to improve an intergenerational legacy of low learning and literacy skills.
- Regional universities – 'virtual' universities are not enough; higher education in the Peel Region requires a physical regional presence, and greater community engagement by universities – possibly even to the extent of setting minimum requirements to be met as a condition of Federal funding.
- Non-aligning departmental boundaries – this makes inter-agency planning difficult; joined-up solutions are required for effectively dealing with complex social, community, servicing and infrastructure issues.
- Public transport – effective links are required between Pinjarra, Waroona, Dwellingup and Mandurah's Transit Station and Education Campus; a new station at the Gordon Road Peel Education Campus is also required.

A number of these actions will need to be led by other levels of government; others can be achieved by collaborative partnerships between local government, the education sector and the private sector.

Unfortunately due to our limited staff resources, timelines and other pressing issues, this submission is necessarily brief. **The City of Mandurah would therefore very much welcome the opportunity to host the Senate Committee at a public hearing in Mandurah, to discuss these issues in greater detail, and to appraise the Committee of Mandurah and the Peel Region's particular circumstances.**

With an award-winning Peel Education Campus – one of only a few of its type – involving a senior high school campus, TAFE and university, as well as its learning communities initiatives, including the hosting of the 2010 Australian Learning Communities National Conference, we consider Mandurah and the Peel Region to be a very useful example of both what can be achieved through co-operative effort and – equally importantly – the potential to take education and learning to greater prominence, acceptance and community benefit.



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