

Beyond the Bush:
WACOSS Regional Development /
Regional Policy Discussion Paper

April 2005



WACOSS

Western Australian Council of Social Service Inc.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper has been developed to demonstrate the importance of WACOSS' involvement in the issues surrounding regional areas and the development of these areas in Western Australia. The paper provides the context for WACOSS' current involvement in regional areas and suggests the future direction of this work.

In doing this, the paper makes the following recommendations:

- Develop a strategic work plan to direct WACOSS' work in the regional development / regional issues area until June 2006.
- Develop and formalise the rules of engagement between WACOSS and the WACOSS Networks through the development of a WACOSS – WACOSS Networks Protocol.
- Develop and formalise the process for regional input into the WACOSS Pre Budget Submission.
- Provide continued developmental support to the Mid West Community Services Network to assist the network in achieving the objectives outlined in their strategic plan.
- Expansion and consolidation of WACOSS Networks in the Great Southern, Goldfields and Kimberley.
- Review and evaluation of the recommencement of the WACOSS South West Network.
- Increase the presence and capabilities of WACOSS Regional Policy activities on the WACOSS web site.
- Host a State Regional Networking Day as a preliminary conference activity for the WACOSS Conference 2006.

BACKGROUND

Regional Western Australia encompasses one-third of Australia's land area and its half million people represent 2.7 per cent of the nation's population¹. Regional areas of Western Australia are of significant importance to both the State and the nation as a whole, as is clearly demonstrated by their contribution to exports. Collectively, regional Western Australia contributes 20 per cent of Australia's and 83 per cent of Western Australia's exports, most of this originating from primary and resource industries².

Regional areas in WA are also important for cultural and historical reasons. This is partly due to the development of primary and resource industries in these areas following European settlement, such as agriculture, pastoralism and mining. The expansion of these industries throughout regional Western Australia in the years since European settlement has resulted in the establishment of a number of country towns and regional centres. The cultural and historical importance of regional areas in Western Australia is also due to the significant proportion of Indigenous population that live in the regions. Of the State's Indigenous population over 75% live in regional areas³. In each of the regions, except for the Perth metropolitan area and the South West, a significant proportion of the regional population is Aboriginal.

Despite this importance a crisis exists in regional Western Australia. Globalisation, economic restructuring, deregulation of industry and services, the introduction of national competition policy, regionalisation of government services and technological advances are all factors that are contributing to the demise of many regional areas. The impact of these factors during the past 20 to 30 years has been devastating, resulting in the withdrawal of government, banking and telecommunication services, increased levels of unemployment and low commodity prices. As a result, many regional areas currently suffer severe disadvantage and inequity when compared to their metropolitan counterparts and the 'gap' between the city and the bush continues to grow.

In the context of this paper, the term "regional" refers to all areas of Western Australia outside of the Perth metropolitan area. The regions are the nine non-metropolitan regions of the Kimberley, Pilbara, Gascoyne, Mid West, Goldfields-Esperance, Wheatbelt, Peel, South West and Great Southern (See Appendix 1). The regions are identified by the boundaries of the Regional Development Commissions established under the Regional Development Commission Act (1993). There is great diversity between the nine regions and great variety between their individual economic, social and environmental challenges and opportunities. Information about the nine regions is included in Appendix 2.

¹Department of Local Government and Regional Development (2003). *Regional Western Australia – A Better Place to Live: Regional Development Policy*. Government of Western Australia, Perth. pg. 6.

²Department of Local Government and Regional Development (2003). *Indicators of Regional Development in Western Australia*. Government of Western Australia Perth. pg. 10

³Department of Indigenous Affairs (2004). *Consulting Citizens: Engaging with Aboriginal Western Australians*. Government of Western Australia, Perth, pg. 9

CURRENT ISSUES IN REGIONAL WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Regional Western Australia is facing a crisis in a number of areas including:

Accessibility to goods and services

- *The lack of access to services and to diverse service types* - Many regional communities are experiencing a decline in the availability and accessibility of government and non-government services. A combination of a number of factors, such as the decline in population of many regional communities and the ever-increasing cost of service provision in these communities, is resulting in the withdrawal of services by both private and public sector agencies.
- *The lack of mental health services* - As stated in the WACOSS Pre-Budget Submission to the State Government 2005 / 06, mental health services in regional Western Australia are extremely under-resourced and far from adequate. People in the Mid West and Gascoyne are experiencing a four-week delay in accessing services provided by mental health professionals⁴. This issue exists to varying degrees throughout much of regional Western Australia and is more pronounced in remote areas.
- *The lack of services for young people* - Currently very few resources go into services for young people living in regional Western Australia⁵. Without access to appropriate resources, negative community outcomes are likely to result. These are likely to include high levels of youth migration away from regional areas, an increase in the incidence of crime and juvenile delinquency in regional areas, and the exclusion of young people from the communities they live in.
- *The higher costs of essential items, such as food, particularly in remote communities* - The cost of living is significantly higher throughout regional Western Australia than it is in the Perth metropolitan area. The distance of regional areas from Perth and the associated transportation costs are the dominant factor in the difference in prices. Subsequently, the cost of essential items is much higher in remote regions such as the Kimberley, Pilbara and Gascoyne, while regions closer to Perth such as the South West and Great Southern are only slightly more expensive⁶.
- *The impact of the digital divide* - The 'digital divide' refers to the inequalities that exist in access to information technology and the Internet. Living in regional areas of Australia does not in itself determine access but there is a regional dimension to the digital divide. While there has been an increase in access to information technology and the Internet in regional areas since 1998, access in these areas is still significantly lower than in metropolitan areas⁷. The cost of accessing the Internet remains higher for those who live in regional Australia compared to those in metropolitan areas.

⁴ WACOSS (2004). *Turning the Tide: The "Trickle-Up" Effect* – WACOSS Pre-Budget Submission to the State Government 2005 / 06. WACOSS, Perth. pg. 37.

⁵ WACOSS (2004). *Turning the Tide: The "Trickle-Up" Effect* – WACOSS Pre-Budget Submission to the State Government 2005 / 06. WACOSS, Perth. pg. 73.

⁶ Department of Local Government and Regional Development (2003). *Indicators of Regional Development in Western Australia*. Government of Western Australia Perth, pg. 59

⁷ Curtin, J. (2001). *A Digital Divide in Rural and Regional Australia?* <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/cib/2001-2002/02cib01.htm> (Accessed April 2005).

Employment issues

- *Higher rates of unemployment, particularly for some groups* - Unemployment levels vary considerably. While the average unemployment rate for regional Western Australia is slightly below the average for the State, the rate for some particular regions is significantly higher. In June 2002 the average unemployment rate for Western Australia was 6.5 per cent, while the unemployment rate for the Kimberley (14.3%), Mid West (8.3%) Gascoyne (7.8%) and Peel (7.2%) were significantly higher⁸.
- *Lower average incomes* - The average wage earned in regional Western Australia and wage growth rates are on average lower than those in Perth and slightly more people earn less than \$399 per week⁹.
- *The impact of 'fly-in fly-out' employment practices* - Due to the remoteness of many mining activities, fly in fly out (FIFO) employment practices are the most widely used option for the mining industry¹⁰. Regions in Western Australia that are affected by FIFO include the Kimberley, Gascoyne, Pilbara, Mid West and Goldfields. FIFO threatens the viability of mining communities in regional Western Australia as it often results in reduced financial and structural investment in the communities by mining companies and their employees. Little research has been done into the social impacts of FIFO employment practices¹¹. However, Ngala, Meerilinga and Murdoch University are currently undertaking research into families that are involved in FIFO employment practices in Western Australia. For more information on this project contact Danielle Gallegos at Murdoch University on (08) 9360 7642.

Housing and homelessness

- *The lack of affordable housing options, and particularly the severe contraction in the low cost end of the private rental market* - Although housing tends to be less expensive in non-metropolitan areas when compare to metropolitan areas, these figures are not necessarily indicative of the quality of the housing or its affordability in relation to average incomes in the different areas¹². A reduction in the investment and provision of public housing by the State Government in many regional areas means that the majority of low-income earners must look to the private market to meet their accommodation needs. However, a scarcity of private rental properties exists in many regional areas and subsequently rental prices in many of these areas are significantly high when compared to metropolitan prices¹³.
- *High rate of homelessness* - While nearly half of all homeless people in Western Australia are located in Perth, the homelessness rate increases considerably with remoteness from the metropolitan area. For example, Perth has a homelessness rate of 42 per 10,000 residents compared to the Pilbara 169 and the Kimberley 555¹⁴.

⁸ Department of Local Government and Regional Development (2003). *Indicators of Regional Development in Western Australia*. Government of Western Australia Perth, pg. 53

⁹ Department of Local Government and Regional Development (2003). *Indicators of Regional Development in Western Australia*. Government of Western Australia Perth, pg. 63

¹⁰ Lambert, D. (2001). *Long Distance Commuting in Western Australia: Problems and Perspectives*. <http://www.mp.wa.gov.au/rchapple/issues/fifo/fifo.rtf> (Accessed April 2005).

¹¹ Lambert, D. (2001). *Long Distance Commuting in Western Australia: Problems and Perspectives*. <http://www.mp.wa.gov.au/rchapple/issues/fifo/fifo.rtf> (Accessed April 2005).

¹² Hiller, C., et al. (2002). *Rural Housing, Regional Development and Policy Integration: An evaluation of alternative policy responses to regional disadvantage*.

http://www.ahuri.edu.au/attachments/final_ruralhousingregdevelopment.pdf (Accessed April 2005). pg. 3.

¹³ Hiller, C., et al. (2002). *Rural Housing, Regional Development and Policy Integration: An evaluation of alternative policy responses to regional disadvantage*.

http://www.ahuri.edu.au/attachments/final_ruralhousingregdevelopment.pdf (Accessed April 2005). pg. 14.

¹⁴ Pendergast, P. (2004) *No Place Like Home: Homelessness in Western Australia*.

http://www.shelterwa.org.au/publications/resandproj/homeless_report.pdf (Accessed April 2005). Pg. 4.

Indigenous issues

Over 75 per cent of the Indigenous population of Western Australia is located in regional areas¹⁵. The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in health, education, employment and housing continues to widen, particularly in regional and remote areas. This is demonstrated by the following statistics:

- Life expectancy for Indigenous males is 56 years – 21 years lower than for non-Indigenous males, and for Indigenous females, 63 years – 20 years lower than for non-Indigenous females.
- Indigenous infants are around 4 times more likely to die before their first birthday and 5 times more likely to succumb to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.
- Indigenous students are half as likely as non-Indigenous students to continue to year 12.
- Unemployment is 2.8 times higher among Indigenous people compared with non-Indigenous people.
- Suicide rates for Indigenous people are nearly three times that of other Australians.
- Hospital separation rates for assault are more than 13 times greater for Indigenous Australians compared with non-Indigenous people.
- Indigenous people are 15 times more likely than non-Indigenous people to be in prison.¹⁶

Policy issues

- *The negative impacts of metro-centric policies and programs and the lack of consultation around policy and program development* - Too often, policy and decision-makers develop ideas and strategies that largely ignore the disadvantages that face rural community sector workers and rural communities at large¹⁷. This 'metro-centricity' is evident across the various policy spheres in which both state and federal governments are involved, from health and education through to social and economic policy.

There is clearly a need to develop strategies which target regional communities, and which acknowledge and address the very real differences between metropolitan and non-metropolitan communities and between various regional communities. It is critical that communities are supported to meaningfully participate in decisions that affect their region.

¹⁵ Department of Indigenous Affairs (2004). *Consulting Citizens: Engaging with Aboriginal Western Australians*. Government of Western Australia, Perth, pg. 9

¹⁶ WACOSS (2004). *Turning the Tide: The "Trickle-Up" Effect – WACOSS Pre-Budget Submission to the State Government 2005 / 06*. WACOSS, Perth. Pg. 42.

¹⁷ WACOSS (2005) *Regional Issues*.

<http://www.wacoss.org.au/index.php?option=displaypage&Itemid=233&op=page> (Accessed April 2005).

WHAT IS REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

The University of Western Australia Institute for Regional Development defines regional development as:

“A holistic process whereby the natural and physical environmental, economic, social and cultural resources of a region are harnessed for the betterment of people in ways that reflect the comparative advantage offered by the inherent and geographically different characteristics of the area.”¹⁸

Regional development practitioners and service providers are found in the community, in industry and business, in the trade unions and in the three spheres of government. Across Australia the activities undertaken as an integral part of regional development include:

- Labour market research and employment generation
- Education, training and professional development
- Industry policy and industrial relations
- Transport and communications
- Trade, business and industry promotion and support
- Provision of infrastructure and community services
- Indigenous community development.

Western Australian State Government Regional Development Policy

In November 2003 the State Government released its Regional Development Policy, *Regional Western Australia – A Better Place to Live*¹⁹. The policy details how the Government will work with regional communities in helping them to achieve their social, economic and environmental aspirations. In accordance with this policy, the Western Australian State Government’s vision for regional areas in Western Australia is that:

“Western Australian regional communities will be healthy, safe and enjoyable places to live, offering expanded educational and employment opportunities for their residents and a high standard of services.

They will be healthy, safe and enjoyable places to live and work, offering expanded and improved educational and employment opportunities for their residents and a high standard of services.

Regions will have robust, vibrant economies based on the sustainable use of economic, social and environmental resources and a strong partnership approach within and between regional communities, industry and Government.”²⁰

¹⁸ University of Western Australia Institute for Regional Development (2005). *Regional Development Definition*. <http://www.ird.uwa.edu.au/about/definition> (accessed April 2005).

¹⁹ To access the Regional Development Policy document go to <http://www.dlgrd.wa.gov.au/publications.asp?passthrough=true&cat=3>.

²⁰ Department of Local Government and Regional Development (2003). *Regional Western Australia – A Better Place to Live: Regional Development Policy*. Government of Western Australia, Perth, pg. 6.

In an effort to achieve this vision the government has implemented a number of structures and strategies for regional development. These include:

- *Cabinet Standing Committee on Regional Policy* - The committee is comprised of the Premier and the four Ministers having responsibility for regional development through the nine Regional Development Commissions.
- *Regional Development Commissions (RDCs)* - The RDCs are central components in regional development in Western Australia. These organisations are responsible for encouraging and promoting economic and social development of regional areas in Western Australia. They play a key role in facilitating networks and partnerships across agencies operating in the regions. They have a strong commitment to improving the quality of services in their regions and the contribution those services make to better environments for their communities.
- *Regional Development Council* - This council is comprised of the Chairpersons of the nine RDCs, two representatives from local government and an independent chairperson. It provides advice on regional development to government through the Cabinet Standing Committee on Regional Policy, provides advocacy for regional development and promotes partnerships with local government.
- *The Department of Local Government and Regional Development* - The Department provides a number of services to the RDCs and the Council including program and project support, liaison on Federal regional development matters, coordination of regional responses, information and analysis; and training, professional development and capacity building. For more information on the Department of Local Government and Regional Development go to <http://www.dlgrd.wa.gov.au>.
- *Department of Premier and Cabinet - Regional Policy Unit* - The Regional Policy Unit is responsible for State Government regional policy development, review and monitoring. The Unit also provides policy support for the Premier in his roles as Chair of the Cabinet Standing Committee on Regional Policy.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Federal Government

Department of Transport and Regional Services (DOTARS) - Regional development is coordinated at a federal level by DOTARS. Under the Regional Development section of DOTARS, the Federal Government aims to ensure that regional communities have better access to opportunities and services and are able to take the lead in their own planning and development. DOTARS coordinates a number of grant programmes, forums and events, advisory groups and committees to assist Australia's regional development.

For more information on the Regional Development section of DOTARS go to <http://www.dotars.gov.au/regional/index.aspx>.

Area Consultative Committees (ACCs) - The network of ACCs work in partnership with DOTARS to identify opportunities, priorities and development strategies for regional areas throughout Australia. They provide an important link between the Federal Government and regional and metropolitan Australia. As volunteer community based organisations they are uniquely placed to respond to issues in their

regions and provide an important link to government on local social and economic conditions. In Western Australia ACCs have been established in the following areas: Goldfields-Esperance, Great Southern, Kimberley, Mid West-Gascoyne, Peel, Perth, Pilbara, South West, and Wheatbelt.

For more information on the ACCs go to <http://www.acc.gov.au/index.aspx>.

State Government

Several departments and agencies of the Western Australian State Government are also key stakeholders in regional development in WA. These include the Department of Local Government and Regional Development, the nine Regional Development Commissions, the Regional Development Council, the Cabinet Standing Committee on Regional Policy, and the Regional Policy Unit of the Department of Premier and Cabinet. These have been briefly outlined above.

Local Government

Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) - WALGA is a membership-based group representing and supporting the work and interests of over 140 Local Governments state wide. The importance of WALGA in regional development in WA derives from their vision that Local Governments in Western Australia will have the capacity to provide economically, socially and environmentally sustainable services and infrastructure that meet the needs of their communities²¹. In an effort to achieve this vision, WALGA provides a vast range of services to Local Government including: strategic partnering, providing guidance on purchasing and tendering issues, insurance services, and conducting commercial negotiations on behalf of members. These services provide direct and flow on benefits to WALGA members and to the communities that they serve.

For more information on WALGA go to <http://www.walga.asn.au>.

Local Government Community Services Association of WA (LGCSA (WA)) - LGCSA (WA) is the association that represents community service staff working in Local Government throughout Western Australia, in a number of fields including community, cultural and economic development. The Association provides a range of services including the provision of information and advice on a comprehensive range of matters, professional development, and networking opportunities. The LGCSA (WA) has also initiated a program of developing strategic partnerships with key public sector, non-government and private sector organisations, and other Local Government peak and regional bodies.

For more information on LGCSA (WA) go to <http://www.lgcsawa.asn.au>.

The Non-Government Human Services Sector (NGHSS)

Organisations and agencies in the NGHSS provide invaluable support to communities throughout regional Western Australia and are vital to ensuring social, economic and environmental wellbeing in the regions. WACOSS has an extensive database of community service organisations and agencies and can provide further information on those located within regional areas in Western Australia.

²¹ Western Australian Local Government Association (2005). *Western Australian Local Government Association Strategic Plan Chart*. http://www.walga.asn.au/about/documents/strategicplan/file/at_download (Accessed April 2005).

Members of the community

Engaging regional communities in regional development initiatives is vital. Local people are best placed to identify their community's needs, contribute ideas and solutions to deal with problems, and implement strategies appropriate to their local area. By working in partnership with State, Federal and Local Governments; community service organisations; and the private sector, the people of regional areas can develop and implement regional development initiatives that will improve services and programs available in regional Western Australia.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUNDING SOURCES AND INITIATIVES

Federal Government

Department of Transport and Regional Services (DOTARS)

There are two main funding programs through DOTARS:

1. *Foundation for Regional and Rural Renewal* – The Foundation provides a mechanism for the private sector to work with communities in regional Australia through grants for community capacity building, project facilitation and seeding grants for community and economic development initiatives. The *Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal* aims to encourage innovative collaboration between business, community and government in philanthropic endeavours that will boost the economic and social well being of regional Australia.

For further information on the Foundation for Regional and Rural Renewal go to www.frrr.org.au.

2. *Regional Partnerships* – This program focuses on four areas:
 - Strengthening growth and opportunities by investing in projects that strengthen and provide greater opportunities for economic and social participation in the community.
 - Improving access to services by investing in projects that, in a cost effective and sustainable way, support communities to access services. It will give priority to communities in regional Australia with a population of less than 5,000.
 - Supporting planning by investing in projects that assist communities to identify and explore opportunities and to develop strategies for action.
 - Assisting structural adjustment by investing in projects that assist specifically identified communities and regions adjust to major economic, social or environment change.

For further information on the Regional Partnerships program go to www.regionalpartnerships.gov.au.

State Government

Department of Local Government and Regional Development (DLGRD):

Regional Investment Fund – In 2001, the Western Australian Government established a Regional Investment Fund. This has provided \$75 million over four years to assist with the economic and social development of regional Western Australia or improve the access by regional communities to services. An additional \$80 million over four years has been allocated to the fund through the May 2004 State Budget process with funding becoming available in 2005/2006. The funds will continue to assist with the economic and social development of regional Western Australia or improve the access by regional communities to services.

Funding will be available through five financial assistance schemes:

1. *Regional Infrastructure Funding Program (RIFP)*
RIFP will provide grants from \$100,000 to \$5,000,000 for capital infrastructure projects that will assist in attracting investment and increasing jobs in regional areas or improving the access of regional communities to services.
2. *Regional Headworks Program (RHP)*
RHP will provide grants from \$5,000 to \$200,000 for projects involving the connection to providers of the essential services of water, electricity, telecommunications, gas, drainage and sewerage.
3. *Indigenous Regional Development Program (IRDP)*
IRDP will provide grants from \$10,000 to \$500,000 for projects that assist in strengthening the governance, confidence, economic capacity and sustainability of Indigenous communities.
4. *Western Australian Regional Initiatives Scheme (WARIS)*
WARIS will provide grants from \$10,000 to \$250,000 for non-capital works projects designed to deliver benefits across more than one region in areas such as capacity building and leadership, youth support, population retention, arts and culture, environmental and natural resource management and research and development on regional issues and opportunities. Applications for 2005 WARIS grants close on Tuesday May 24. For further information about the scheme, including project eligibility criteria, contact the Department on (08) 9217 1500.
5. *Regional Development Scheme (RDS)*
RDS will provide grants of up to \$150,000 for a mix of capital works projects and other projects which may include feasibility studies, regional and local marketing programs as well as festivals and events. Each of the nine Regional Development Commissions administers its own RDS scheme.

The Department also produces an annual Grants Directory. The directory is a compilation of grants and other assistance programs available to communities and local governments in regional and metropolitan Western Australia. The Directory contains programs provided by the Western Australian and Commonwealth Governments as well as private sector organisations. The directory for 2005 is not currently available. Upon its release, it will be available on the DLGRD web site.

For further information on the Regional Investment Fund go to www.dlgrd.wa.gov.au/regionDev/financialAssist/RIF.asp.

For further information on the Grants Directory go to <http://grantsdirectory.dlgrd.wa.gov.au>.

Regional Development Commissions

Each of the Regional Development Commissions have schemes and funds which provide funding to projects that will enhance social and economic development of the regions.

For further information, go to:

Gascoyne Development Commission – www.gdc.wa.gov.au
Goldfields Esperance Development Commission – www.gedc.wa.gov.au
Great Southern Development Commission – www.gsdc.wa.gov.au
Kimberley Development Commission – www.kdc.wa.gov.au
Mid West Development Commission – www.mwdc.wa.gov.au
Peel Development Commission – www.peel.wa.gov.au
Pilbara Development Commission – www.pdc.wa.gov.au
South West Development Commission – www.swdc.wa.gov.au
Wheatbelt Development Commission – www.wheatbelt.wa.gov.au

Lotterywest

Lotterywest is Western Australia's state lottery. They have a number of grant opportunities that support the Western Australian community. Among the grant areas, Lotterywest has a series of grants with a specific regional focus, which are designed specifically for regional communities and organisations and can be used for a number of different purposes. These include:

- Grants to provide emergency relief - *Emergency Relief Grants* are made to community agencies to support individuals who are experiencing financial crisis. To ensure equitable access to emergency relief, these grants are allocated on a regional basis throughout the State. Eligible community organisations and Local Government Authorities can submit applications to provide an Emergency Relief service in the designated regions.
- Grants to support organisational development of the NGHSS - The *Extending the Capacity of Non-Profit Organisations Grants* promote and support the organisational development of organisations and agencies of the NGHSS. The scope of these grants for regional areas includes sending staff, committee members or volunteers of non-government organisations to Perth or other areas for training, or helping an organisation gain professional expertise to provide organisational development activities.
- Grants to strengthen community service delivery - The *Strengthening Community Service Delivery Grants* support community based services in Western Australia. Grants may support organisations that provide support to disadvantaged groups and proposals that will provide broad community benefit.
- Grants to support community development - The *Enhancing Community Development Initiatives Grants* support projects that improve the wellbeing of a community and help address important issues. Grants may support people who are linked because they come from a particular geographic area or because they share a common interest or connection.
- Grants to conserve our heritage - The *Valuing our State's Heritage Grants* support the conservation of important aspects of Western Australia's heritage. These grants recognise Western Australia's unique natural environment and heritage places and acknowledges our diverse cultural identities.

- Grants to encourage participation in community life - The *Advancing Participation in Community Life Grants* support initiatives that encourage broad community involvement in social, cultural or recreational activities, particularly for people who face barriers to their participation. A range of proposals may be supported including community facilities, community events, and cultural group activities.

For further information on Lotterywest grants with a regional focus go to <http://www.lotterywest.wa.gov.au/asp/index.asp?pgid=454>.

For further information on other Lotterywest grants go to <http://www.lotterywest.wa.gov.au/asp/index.asp?pgid=390>.

OVERVIEW OF WACOSS' WORK

WACOSS has an important role in ensuring that the voice of regional Western Australia is heard and that the diverse needs of regional areas are equitably addressed. WACOSS' work in the regions falls into three broad categories:

- Initiating and responding to social policy issues to address inequities of opportunity for people living in regional areas.
- Supporting agencies in the Non-Government Human Services Sector (NGHSS) to ensure their ongoing viability and sustainability, so that they can continue to deliver high quality, cost effective services to the community.
- Supporting the development and maintenance of regional community services networks to act as focal points for collaborative work in the sector, especially in relation to social planning, sector development and advocacy.

In recent years, WACOSS' work in the area of regional development has included the following activities:

Establishment of WACOSS Regional Networks

WACOSS has facilitated the formation and development of Community Services Networks in regional areas throughout Western Australia. This has included the establishment of networks in the Mid West region and South West region; and networks in the Great Southern and Goldfields regions are in the early stages of development. The Mid West Community Services Network has been particularly successful. The Network holds regular meetings and during the past 18 months, the group has developed the *Mid West Community Services Network Strategic Plan: June 2004 –2009*, which outlines the future vision and direction of the Network²².

The WACOSS Corporate Plan 2005 – 2008 recognises the importance of these networks and the support that they provide to regional community service organisations²³. Subsequently, in accordance with the Corporate Plan, WACOSS will establish and maintain regional networks in the Great Southern, Mid West, Kimberley and Goldfields.

²² To access a copy of the Mid West Community Services Network Strategic Plan go to http://wacoss.mironet.com.au/images/assets/SP_Regional_Issues/MWCSN%20Strategic%20Plan%202004-2009.pdf.

²³ To access a copy of the WACOSS Corporate Plan 2005 –2008 go to http://wacoss.mironet.com.au/images/assets/Documents_Other/final%202005-2008%20corp%20plan%20.pdf.

The South West Community Services Network is currently in abeyance however WACOSS is keen to re-establish this network in the near future.

WA Regional Initiatives Scheme (WARIS) Project

In 2003, WACOSS received State Government funding through the WA Regional Initiatives Scheme for concurrent projects in the Murchison, Gascoyne and Kimberley regions. The projects aimed to facilitate regional networks and deliver training to strengthen the capacity of the not-for-profit agencies in these regions. The project has been completed in the Mid West and Gascoyne regions, and is due to be completed in the Kimberley region by April 2005. Final Reports for each component of the project can be provided upon request.

Delivery of training workshops, seminars and forums

WACOSS Organisational Development Services regularly provides training workshops and seminars in regional areas. During the 2003/2004 financial year 62 publicly accessible training events were held. Over half of these were delivered in regional areas and attracted approximately 350 participants. During the year workshops on topics such as “*Management Committees and Organisational Governance*”, “*Successful Submission Writing*”, “*Leadership Development*” and “*Beyond Survival: Fundraising for the Future*” were held in regional communities throughout the State including Port Hedland, Esperance, Denmark and Kalgoorlie.

In addition, special projects have further enabled WACOSS to deliver a vast range of training workshops, seminars and forums to those involved in the NGHSS in regional areas in Western Australia. These include:

- *Creative Volunteering* - A project funded by Regional Arts Australia to deliver Nationally Accredited training packages for volunteer agencies across regional Western Australia.
- *EmployRight* - A project funded by the Department of Community Development to provide a range of invaluable management tools to assist community organisations with recruitment, screening and selection of staff; staff management and creating child safe organisations.
- *Emergency Relief Sector Support Project* - Supported by Lotterywest, this project provided a range of support, training and resources to Emergency Relief agencies throughout the State.
- *Emergency Relief Volunteer Learning and Development Project* - This project supported by the Department of Family and Community Services was developed to provide Emergency Relief agencies with resources and skills to train the large number of volunteers working in the sector.
- *WACOSS 2005 State Pre-Election Campaign* - An important component of the campaign involved a series of Social Issues Forums, which provided an opportunity for local candidates from each Party to articulate their social policy commitments to members of the community. Forums were held at metropolitan and regional locations throughout the State including Geraldton, Bunbury, Albany and Kalgoorlie.

Western Australian Local Government Association Social Research Project

In collaboration with the Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) and the Local Government Community Services Association of Western Australia (LGCSA WA), WACOSS has developed a project proposal entitled “*Cross-sectoral frameworks for community development: An investigation of the relationship between local government and the non-government sector in the design and delivery of community development and community services in Western Australia*”. This project

will investigate the relationship between the non-government human services sector and government service providers in the delivery of community development initiatives and the provision of community services to Western Australian communities. An intended outcome of the project is that it will provide the foundation for cross-sectoral collaboration in planning and development of community development and community services in Western Australia.

A Lotterywest Social Research Grant application has recently been submitted by WALGA to fund this project.

Other areas of regional development work in which WACOSS is involved include:

- Dissemination of information such as funding sources, media statements and minutes via regional networks and WACOSS Enews.
- Ensuring regional representation at conferences and forums by providing, where possible, financial assistance or subsidies to people from regional areas who wish to attend WACOSS events such as the biennial WACOSS Conference. In 2004, support provided by the Department of Local Government and Regional Development enabled WACOSS to broadcast select presentations from the WACOSS Conference to telecentres throughout the State. This further increased the accessibility of the WACOSS Conference to people in regional areas.
- Ensuring regional representation on the WACOSS Board.
- Networking with stakeholders both within and external to the NGHSS.
- Lobbying politicians and other decision-makers; and influencing and shaping state and national policy on issues of concern.

WACOSS' CURRENT POLICY POSITIONS

WACOSS has developed policy positions that address a number of the issues faced by regional Western Australia. Details of our current policy positions are provided below.

Mental Health

Mental health services in the regions are extremely under-resourced. In addition, there is widespread evidence in regional areas of the poor outcomes associated with the lack of an integrated community model of delivery. To date there has been little real progress in the area of mental health and regional services continue to struggle to provide much needed services.

WACOSS recommends that the State Government commits funds:

- To increase the level of mental health services in regional Western Australia;
- To community agencies to enable an integrated model of service delivery including supporting better linkages between mental health services and other key agencies

Workforce Development

The regions continue to be effected by workforce issues both in the government and non-government sector. In the government sector, a significant number of government positions remain unfilled in all communities, which in turn results in a lack of services to people in the area. In addition, there is extreme concern with

regard to recruitment, retention and support/supervision of professionally qualified staff in regional, rural, and remote non-government services.

WACOSS recommends that the State Government commit funds to develop models to enhance collaboration between government and non-government agencies including government departments sharing infrastructure with the non-government sector whilst respecting the importance of agencies' maintaining their independence.

Regional, Rural and Remote Young People

Young people living in regional, rural and remote communities have the same right to share in resources and have their needs met as any other person in our society. Currently, very few resources go into addressing issues for young people living in these communities. Without appropriate, available and accessible resources, negative community outcomes are likely to result. These are likely to include: high levels of migration away from rural areas, an increase in the incidence of crime and juvenile delinquency in rural areas, and the exclusion of young people from the communities they live in.

WACOSS recommends That the State Government, in consultation with relevant stakeholders develop and implement programs to encourage opportunities for regional, rural and remote young people to access education, employment, and support services within their local community

Developing Regional Housing Strategies

A high percentage of community housing dwellings located in regional WA are joint venture projects managed by community housing providers including local government authorities. However, it is evident that the lack of a coordinated approach to housing development in regional areas contributes to a competitive, rather than a cooperative approach between providers. Local government tend to focus their efforts on housing seniors, whilst people with complex needs may have limited access to crisis or supported accommodation. Expansion of the role of local government in community housing would be greatly facilitated by the appointment of 'housing workers'.

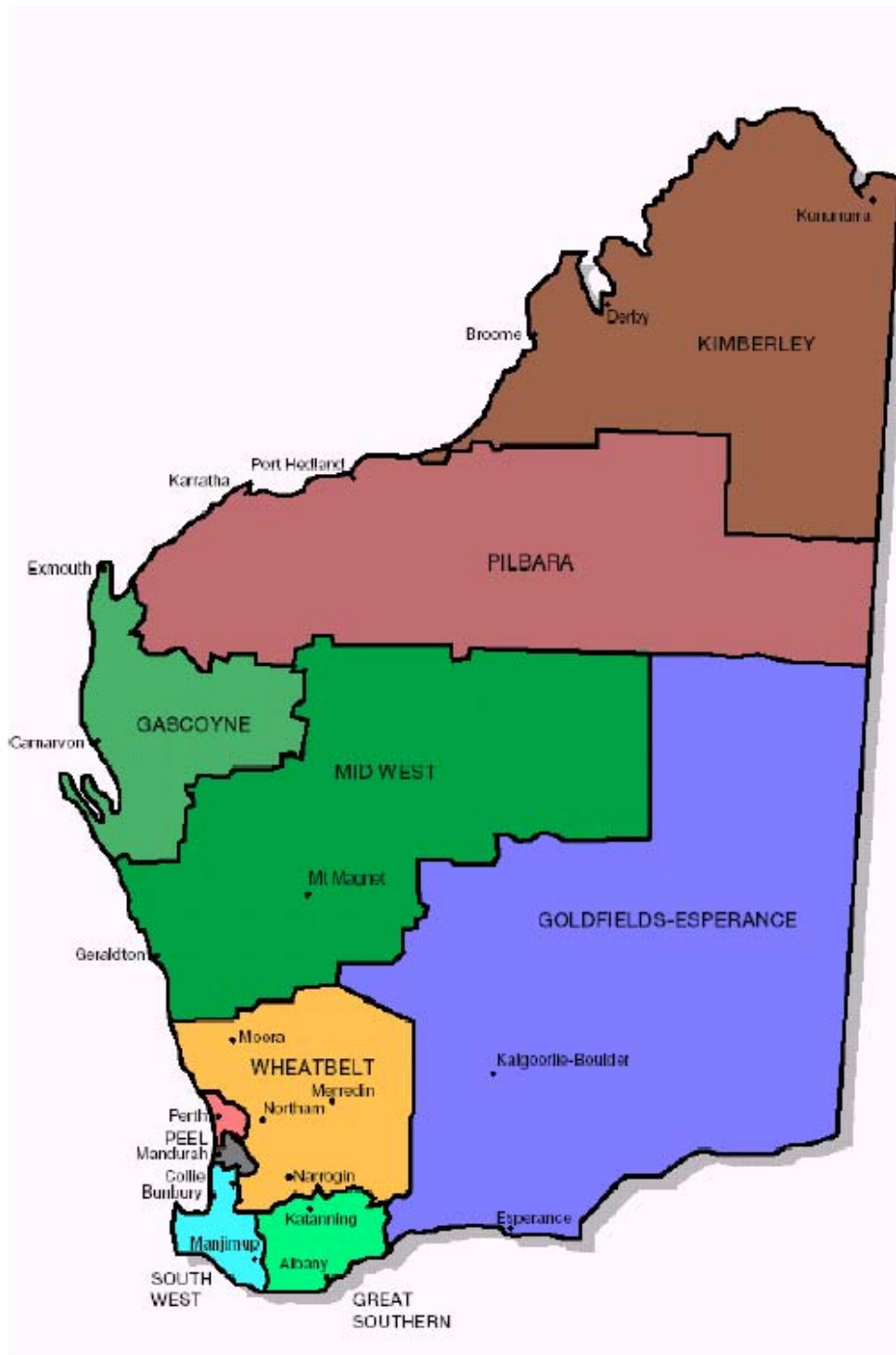
WACOSS recommends that:

- That Regional Housing Associations be established progressively in all regional areas of WA.
- That funding is provided for a housing policy position to assist in the development of Regional Housing Strategies.
- That Regional Development Commissions be adequately resourced by the State government to ensure extensive consultation across a broad range of stakeholders in the preparation of regional housing strategies.

CONCLUSION

The development of regional Western Australia to overcome current issues experienced by people living in the regions is a shared responsibility and WACOSS will continue to advocate for a coordinated approach. WACOSS will continue to provide support to agencies in the Non-Government Human Services Sector, and will remain committed to working with all stakeholders in an effort to counteract the inequities that exist in the opportunities and services currently available to people living in regional Western Australia.

For further information of WACOSS work in this area, please contact Phillip Torrissi, Policy Officer on (08) 9420 7223 or via email: phillip@wacoss.org.au.



APPENDIX 1: Western Australian Regions.

Source: Department of Industry and Resources (2005).

http://www.doir.wa.gov.au/documents/businessandindustry/Appendix_A_-_RDC_Regions_and_LGA_Maps.pdf (Accessed April 2005)

REGION	GEOGRAPHICAL AREA	POPULATION	SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS	KEY INDUSTRIES	MAJOR COMMODITIES	NATURAL ATTRACTIONS
Gascoyne	137,938 square kilometres	10,308 (2002)	53% male – 47% female, 16% of population born overseas, 17% Indigenous population, 9% of population aged 65 and over, median age of population – 33 (2001).	Tourism, fishing, mining, horticulture, pastoral and seafood processing.	Prawns, salt, bananas and beef.	Zuytdorp Cliffs, Ningaloo Reef and Marine Park, Shark Bay World Heritage Area and Mt Augustus National Parks.
Goldfields-Esperance	770,488 square kilometres	54,855 (2002)	53% male – 47% female, 15% of population born overseas, 10% Indigenous population, 6% of population aged 65 and over, median age of population – 31 (2001)	Mining, manufacturing, agriculture and tourism.	Gold, nickel, wheat and livestock.	Sandy and Gibson deserts, Great Australian Bight, Recherche Archipelago, Pink Lake and Fitzgerald National Parks.
Great Southern	39,007 square kilometres	53,794 (2002)	51% male – 49% female, 16% of population born overseas, 4% Indigenous population, 13% of population aged 65 and over, median age of population – 37 (2001).	Agriculture, tourism, plantation forestry, fishing and retail.	Wine, crops, wool, livestock and woodchips.	Stirling Ranges, Porongurup National Park, Walpole-Nornalup National Park.
Kimberley	424,517 square kilometres	33,705 (2002)	53% male – 47% female, 11% of population born overseas, 47% Indigenous population, 4% of population aged 65 and over, median age of population – 28 (2001).	Mining, tourism, aquaculture, horticulture and pastoral.	Diamonds, zinc, pearls, crops and cattle.	King George Falls, Bell Gorge, Bungle Bungles, Buccaneer Archipelago, Geike Gorge National Park and Cable Beach.
Mid West	466,766 square kilometres	50,318 (2002)	52% male – 48% female, 12% of population born overseas, 10% Indigenous population, 10% of population aged 65 and over, median age of population – 34 (2001).	Mining, agriculture, fishing and tourism.	Gold, nickel, mineral sands, wheat and rock lobsters.	Moresby, Weld, Nicholas Dividing, Montague and Robinson ranges, Chapman, Irwin, Murchison and Greenough rivers, Kalbarri National Park, Batavia Coast, Abrolhos Islands, Murchison Outback and Coalseam Reserve.

APPENDIX 2: Western Australian Regional Profiles

Source: Department of Local Government and Regional Development (2003). *Regional Western Australia – A Better Place to Live: Regional Development Policy*. Government of Western Australia, Perth.

REGION	GEOGRAPHICAL AREA	POPULATION	SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS	KEY INDUSTRIES	MAJOR COMMODITIES	NATURAL ATTRACTIONS
Peel	5,648 square kilometres.	78,854 (2002)	50% male – 50% female, 20% of population born overseas, 2% Indigenous population, 16% of population aged 65 and over, median age of population – 40 (2001).	Mining, manufacturing, agriculture, equine, tourism and retail.	Bauxite, alumina, beef cattle and apples.	Peel Inlet, Harvey Estuary, Lake Clifton, Yalgorup National Park, Serpentine and Murray rivers, Gooralong Brook and the forests of the Darling Scarp.
Pilbara	507,896 square kilometres	39,441 (2002)	55% male – 45% female, 18% of population born overseas, 17% Indigenous population, 2% of population aged 65 and over, median age of population – 29 (2001).	Mining, pastoral and tourism.	Iron ore, gas, oil and beef cattle.	Karijini and Millstream-Chichester National Parks, Fortescue Falls and the Dampier Archipelago.
South West	23,998 square kilometres.	132,026 (2002)	51% male – 49% female, 15% of population born overseas, 2% Indigenous population, 11% of population aged 65 and over, median age of population – 36 (2001).	Mining, manufacturing, tourism, agriculture and retail.	Coal, mineral sands, alumina, wine and beef cattle.	Blackwood River, Karri Forest, Gloucester Tree, Beedelup, D'Entecasteaux and Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Parks and Lake, Mammoth and Ngilgi Caves.
Wheatbelt	155,256 square kilometres	72,282 (2002)	52% male – 48% female, 13% of population born overseas, 5% Indigenous population, 12% of population aged 65 and over, median age of population – 37 (2001).	Agriculture, mining and fishing.	Wheat, wool, livestock, gold, mineral sands and lobsters.	Dryandra State Forest, Wave Rock, the Pinnacles and Avon Valley National Park.

APPENDIX 2: Western Australian Regional Profiles

Source: Department of Local Government and Regional Development (2003). *Regional Western Australia – A Better Place to Live: Regional Development Policy*. Government of Western Australia, Perth.