

DESERT KNOWLEDGE CRC

Attracting and retaining
skilled and professional staff
in remote locations

Fiona Haslam McKenzie

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Dr Fiona Haslam McKenzie

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Art Studio, Silverton, New South Wales
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Abbreviations/Acronyms

ABARE	Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Commission
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACC	Area Consultative Committees
AGPS	Australian Government Publishing Service
ARIA	Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia
ASGC	Australian Standard Geographical Classifications
BRS	Bureau of Regional Sciences
BTRE	Bureau of Transport and Resource Economics
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects
DIMIA	Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
LMPs	Labour Market Programs
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ORD	Office of Regional Development
RBPP	Regional Best Practice Program
RDAs	Regional Development Agencies
RDC	Regional Development Commission
RDO	Regional Development Organisation
RDP	Regional Development Program
RDS	Regional Development Strategy
REDOs	Regional Economic Development Organisations
RFDS	Royal Flying Doctor Service
RHSET	Rural Health Support Education and Training
ROCs	Regional Organisations of Councils
RYIS	Rural Youth Information Service

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***Disclaimer:** While every attempt has been made to use current and accurate information, the researchers make no representation to any person with regard to the completeness and accuracy of the data or information contained in this document and, to the extent permitted by law, disclaim all liability for any loss or damage (including indirect, special or consequential loss or damage) incurred by any person organisation arising from the use of, or reliance upon, the data or information contained herein.*

Executive summary

Attracting and retaining skilled and professional staff is a problem not limited to remote, or even rural and regional locations in Australia. There is strong evidence to suggest that it is increasingly a global problem and organisations throughout the world are seeking innovative strategies to attract and develop new talent and develop other strategies to retain that talent.

The attraction and retention of skilled and professional staff to a community is critical if it is to remain vibrant and self-sufficient, and hence able to sustain itself into the future. Attracting skilled and professional staff to Australian remote conditions has not been made easier by the Australian government policies which have been oriented to stringent neo-liberal economic policy for the last three decades. This has meant that services and infrastructure have been rationalised based on efficiency rather than equity. The under-provision of infrastructure is a hallmark of non-metropolitan Australia and its lack both pushes people out of communities and turns people off going there for any length of time. It was apparent in this project that attraction and retention strategies continually fall to community and industry groups.

The first two sections contextualise this report. Of particular concern is the dearth of appropriate training opportunities and facilities for people living in remote locations. Attaining skills requires educating and training in non-remote locations which is potentially disruptive, expensive and even frightening for those who have never left their community. Section 3 addresses jobs and career opportunities in remote locations and identifies a number of positive strategies that are being utilised by a number of organisations to successfully attract and retain skilled and professional staff to remote locations; in particular health, education, police, mining and community workers. The absence of these services in a community is often the cause of potential employees resisting taking a job in a remote location. In addition, the inadequacy of taxation incentives, issues of social isolation and lack of career development opportunities are highlighted.

Housing was found to be a key determinant for attraction and retention of skilled and professional staff and their families. Section 4 focuses on the importance of housing and appropriate accommodation in what are often harsh environmental conditions. Housing in remote locations is often old or 'transient', expensive to maintain, lacking in aesthetic character, inappropriate for the climatic conditions and often in short supply. Appropriate housing for Aboriginal employees is also an enduring problem that thwarts employment opportunities in remote places.

This research found that the provision of adequate utilities such as power, telecommunications and water was also important. Section 5 discusses the challenges of providing essential services to a sector of the population which has, in all likelihood, been educated and employed, at least for some time, in an urban setting and therefore has city-centric expectations in a remote setting. Government has encouraged industry to invest in towns where they conduct business and there has been significant infrastructure developed from government/private/community partnerships. However those towns and communities with no significant industry are least likely to attract infrastructure and are therefore least attractive to newcomers.

Section 6 addresses specific lifestyle and community trends in remote locations. The demographic data that describe remote locations of Australia are unlike other regions. Generally, there are more men than women, the median age is younger and there is greater chance of mortality in remote locations. It is accepted that it is not possible to compete with urban expectations and that there are

other, unique and often very appealing, features of remote locations that are not well known, and therefore not appreciated. This section considered how remoteness impacts on men, women, young people and Aboriginal people. It is clear that a welcoming community that embraces newcomers and is tolerant of change is likely to not only attract new people to town, but that those people are likely to stay, or return after going away for whatever reason. The residents become the community's marketing instruments.

Successful strategies for the attraction and retention of professional and skilled staff revolved around giving potential residents a 'suck it and see' experience. For example, the collaboration of the University Department of Rural Health in New South Wales with the medical training program in Broken Hill requires that doctors have block experience of several months in the town. Many of the myths and less than congenial image of remote towns and remote service are 'busted' by the diverse medical experience, the warm welcome given the visitors and the varied social experiences offered by a remote community.

A number of organisations and government agencies are working to improve the preparation and specific training provided to staff **before** staff are sent to a remote posting or location. This includes better cultural training and improved support networks both in the location and with head office.

'Growing your own workforce' also has potential, particularly for Aboriginal people. It is important however that there are opportunities for Aboriginal to work and to have appropriate training and educational opportunities that enable them to compete when work opportunities arise. For example, the mining industry presents a diversity of work opportunities for Aboriginal people but unless their numeracy and literacy skills are of standard that they can be trained, the opportunities go begging. 'Growing your own workforce' is not limited to Aboriginal people. Mentoring young people who live in a remote community, keeping in touch with them when they go away for university or secondary school education through newsletters and e-links, providing vacation work when they have university or school holidays and 'talking up' the opportunities of the region makes an impression that adults often overlook.

Financial incentives are effective lures used by some industries and the public sector to attract and retain employees in remote locations. However, not every business is able to offer financial incentives and the practice is not sustainable. There are other practices that could be effective that have been overlooked. For example, remote experience is likely to give an employee a diversity and depth of experience which is useful and highly adaptable in a variety of work conditions. Too often, remote experience is discounted rather than valued by employers. Promotion opportunities should be offered for remote experience. Similarly, remote service often comes at a financial cost, so taxation benefits, district allowances and financial support by government should be a priority. The cost of living and re-location expenses should reflect the true monetary cost of working in a regional area.

Finally, remote and desert Australia is diverse. There is no best answer. Financial incentives alone will not achieve long term employee tenure in remote communities, and social incentives alone cannot be sustained in a tight economic and employment market. While the word 'partnership' is over-used, it was very evident that government recognition of its responsibility to the needs of remote communities which is equally matched by corporate sector investment and community commitment is likely to reap long term benefits and a sustainable future. However, without that mutual and equal commitment, the attraction and retention of a professional and skilled workforce in remote locations will remain a significant challenge.

1 Setting the scene

1.0 Introduction

Diverse work and research is undertaken in remote, including desert, locations throughout Australia, employing an equally diverse labour force. Settlement sizes are varied, ranging from small Aboriginal communities to major regional service centres, such as Alice Springs, Broken Hill and Kalgoorlie. Across that range of communities there is also a broad assortment of business types and sizes. Increasingly it is evident that the rapid turnover of professional and experienced staff can lead to a loss of knowledge of conditions, people, opportunities, needs, challenges and cultural differences in remote locations. This can cause significant economic, social and environmental costs and frustrations for all tiers of government and the private and public sectors.

Many businesses and public-sector organisations throughout Australia find it difficult to attract, let alone retain, staff. This ‘problem’ is exacerbated in remote and ‘desert’ Australia which is far removed from the attractions of the cities as well as the comprehensive infrastructure and services that are available in high population centres. Reasons for the attraction and retention problems are complex.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that some remote locations suffer from a poor reputation regarding future career opportunities, as well as often difficult living conditions for those who might otherwise be well qualified to work in the area and contribute significantly to the social, economic and environmental sustainability of remote, and in particular, desert locations. It is suspected that a contributing factor to these inefficiencies may be due to a paucity of awareness of the realities of remote and desert conditions, cultural misunderstanding of Aboriginal work practices and social needs, and limited understanding of the environmental challenges of remote locations. It is also acknowledged that a range of work has been undertaken to investigate the ‘push–pull’ factors contributing to these scenarios, as well as some useful strategies for dealing with the issues, both in Australia and internationally. These factors measure the extent to which solutions are driven by policy makers, or by local residents impacted upon by policies. The outcomes of push-pull analysis are often contradictory, depending on the perspectives of different stakeholder groups: for example, mining company workers and Aboriginal peoples of a particular area will often have conflicting ideas, demands and sense of obligation. It is difficult to introduce a range of policies to remote regions when the underlying information is contradictory, scattered or not available in a cohesive format.

It is the intention of this report to pull together a range of data and information sources about working in remote, particularly ‘desert’ locations, as well as focusing on attraction and retention issues. Specifically, the research will focus on:

- developing an understanding of the key driving forces behind staff attraction and retention problems in remote and ‘desert’ Australia
- developing an understanding of the characteristics of successful attraction and retention practices
- identifying the significant research issues resulting from this analysis
- developing an understanding of the magnitude and significance of the problem.

Throughout the report, potential interventions and recommendations are made, based on the information gathered during the field visits, interviews and focus groups conducted for this project. Many of the interventions required are on a ‘big picture’ scale which is often beyond the capacity of small dispersed remote communities and therefore require the understanding, commitment and

leadership of government to spearhead. Nonetheless, the participation of, and collaboration with, the community level is vital if the potential interventions and recommendations are to be actioned and meaningful.

1.1 Data sources

This research project focuses on gathering disparate sources of information and synthesising data and trends analyses regarding developing and maintaining a diverse work force in remote regions of Australia. A comprehensive review of the existing material used by both the private and public sectors to explore long-term solutions has been reviewed which has also served to guide further research effort. Specific data sources have included the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Regional Development Commissions (RDCs) and Regional Development Authorities (RDAs), local government economic strategies, mining company publications, and government reports, as well as independent research from consulting companies, research students, private companies and public sector documents. This was not limited to published material, but also included working papers and other material from Commonwealth, State and Territory agencies as well as local government and non-government organisations (NGOs).

An important phase of the research was visiting and speaking with local people who are living the remote and ‘desert’ experience on a day-to-day basis. The intention was to be as participatory and inclusive as possible to determine the meso-, micro-, and macro-level understandings. This was crucial given the nature of the topic under discussion, and also because experience shows that community members will consider their contribution in the light of the research team’s own ethics and practice. It was important to involve all spheres of government and all the obvious key stakeholders, such as local Chambers of Commerce, relevant regional development commissions, area consultative committees, employment agencies, formal and informal Aboriginal groups, local government and other governance agencies.

1.2 Report structure

Brief overviews of various strategies designed to increase attraction and retention of skilled and professional staff in remote and desert locations that have already been implemented (both successful and unsuccessful) have been collated.

Those that have been successful are included as ‘snapshots of good practice’. These highlight innovative strategies and their efficacy from socio-cultural, economic and environmental perspectives. Strategies include Aboriginal employment initiatives as well as those adopted by other private and public organisations nationally. As well, strategies that have been implemented but identified by remote communities as not particularly successful are included in the report.

Section 2 provides an overview of the population changes that have occurred over the last century and the influences the demographic and public policy trends of the last few decades have had on remote communities generally. The pressing issues that recur throughout remote communities are identified and their influence on attraction and retention issues reviewed.

Section 3 examines the labour market demand and supply issues in remote communities. The role and provision of key professions such as health and education in remote communities are considered. Various strategies that have been developed to encourage longer term tenure are presented. Aboriginal employment is discussed, with particular focus on ideas that have had meaningful success for Aboriginal workers.

Housing and appropriate accommodation has been identified as a critical determinant for the attraction and retention of employers and employees in regional and remote locations. Section 4 discusses the role of housing and its provision in remote communities.

Infrastructure has been identified in Section 5 as having a significant influence on workforce tenure. The provision of key infrastructure such as water, telecommunications and power is often problematic due to the substantial installation and subsequent maintenance costs, and yet without them both the private and public sectors struggle to attract and retain staff, but more particularly, their accompanying families. The family support is often pivotal for a worker in an isolated or challenging remote location.

Lifestyle and a sense of community however, is probably the most important feature for a worker and their family. A community with housing and infrastructure but no sense of community or social capital is likely to struggle to retain a workforce whereas a remote community with a sense of place and inclusiveness but limited infrastructure will keep people for much longer. The influence of lifestyle and community is discussed in Section 6.

Section 7 summarises the key findings of this research project, and a comprehensive bibliography and reference list follows.

Throughout the site visits and ‘fact finding’ exercises, community leaders, service providers and residents of remote locations suggested to us potential solutions to the complex issues associated with the attraction and retention of skilled and professional labour. These are highlighted throughout the report as ‘Potential Interventions and Recommendations from Site Visits’.

1.3 Report definitions

There is a variety of ways of classifying sub-groups of the population who live outside the capital cities in Australia. Terms such as metropolitan/non-metropolitan, urban, rural, regional and remote are not defined in discussion, or have been defined differently in different classifications. Consequently, confusion can easily arise unless it is made clear which classification is being used in each instance (Haslam McKenzie & Lord, 2001; ABS 2001a). The Census is the principal ABS statistical instrument that collects data for every geographical location in Australia. Throughout this document, definitions have been used which are based on Australian Standard Geographical Classifications (ASGC) (see AGPS 2001. 1216.0) and on guidelines provided by Bray (2000). Specifically:

- **Major Urban Area** – urban centres with 100,000 or more people. (This category includes all eight capital cities and larger regional cities such as Wollongong).
- **Other Urban Area** – Urban Centres with between 1,000 and 99,999 people.

An approach that has had increasing utility is the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) developed by the National Key Centre for Social Applications of Geographic Information Systems. This provides useful guidelines for this particular research document. ARIA classifies localities by their ‘remoteness’, defined as the distance along road networks to service centres (a hierarchy of urban centres with a population of 5,000 people or more). The ABS has developed a Remoteness Structure based on the ARIA scores. Generally it is assumed that ‘remote’ is four hours’ or more drive from an urban centre. ‘Very remote’ is usually more than four hours’ drive from a range of services and is generally inaccessible by ordinary car. (This implies a non-bitumenised road.)

At the last census, an estimated two-thirds (66.3%) of the total population resided in major cities as at 30 June 2001. The rest were mainly residents of Inner and Outer Regional areas (31.1%) with only 2.6% of people in either Remote or Very Remote areas (ABS 2001a).

The terms ‘Outback’ and ‘desert’ are not easily defined. Complex scientific definitions as well as colloquial references are used to describe them. Holmes (1997) has defined ‘Outback’ based on land uses and Stafford Smith suggests that some characteristics are generally shared by all ‘Outback’ locations while in other cases, characteristics differ throughout the Remote and Very Remote ‘Outback’ regions. However, as identified by Stafford Smith et al. (2003), the common features are:

- low population densities
- high environmental variability
- remoteness from markets and centres of power
- high proportion of Aboriginal people in the local populations.

‘Desert’ can be a nebulous description but the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre (2007) defines it as the areas that are arid or semi-arid – that is, areas which receive an average rainfall of 250mm (arid), or areas which receive an average rainfall between 250–350mm (semi-arid). Guenther et al. (2005) provide a comprehensive précis of the Australian desert region. As shown on Figure 1, the desert regions cover a large part of Australia. As the driest habited continent in the world, 69% or 7.7 million km² of Australia is classified as desert. These areas are naturally unlikely to support high numbers of human or animal populations although 3% of the Australian population (574,000 people) live in desert Australia, many of whom are Aboriginal people living in as many as 1,300 discrete communities widely distributed across their traditional lands (Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre, 2007). As a consequence, the distribution of goods and services across the region is patchy.

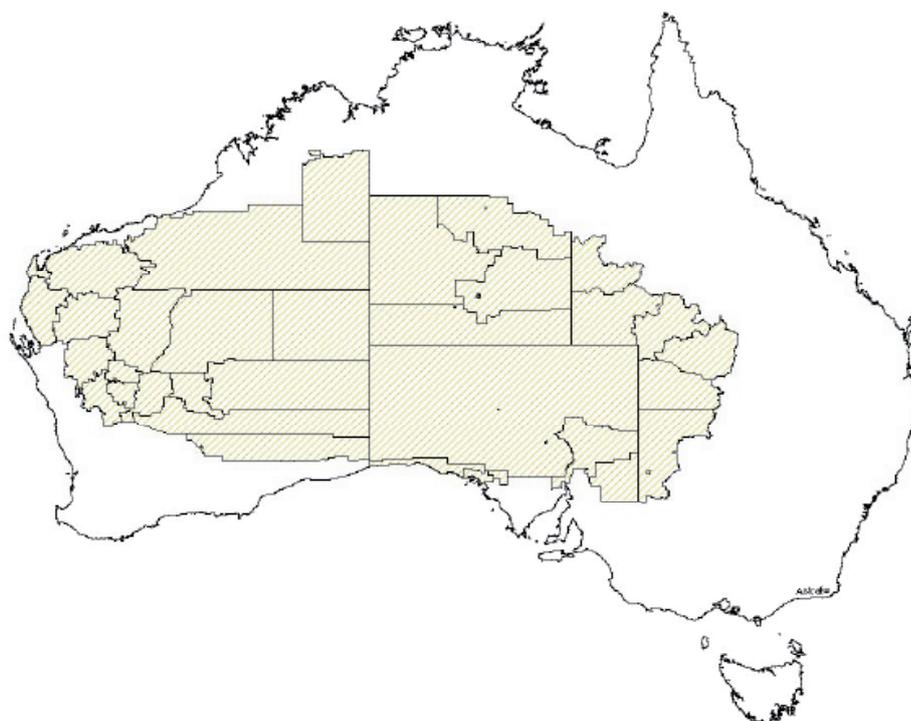


Figure 1: Extent of Arid Zone (Desert Region) used in analysis by 2001 ASGC
Source: Taylor (2002a) and ABS (2003) in Guenther et al. (2005).

Finally, a word about semantics. A number of words throughout this report are used interchangeably, for example, the words ‘desert’, ‘outback’ and ‘remote’. The reason for this is that data is rarely collected for the ‘desert’ or the ‘outback’ regions but it is collected on the basis of the already discussed Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia. Based on the map in Figure 1, the conditions described for remote communities generally coincide with the desert and outback conditions. Similarly, the word ‘community’ has different meanings for different people and agencies in various parts of non-metropolitan Australia. For some, ‘a community’ means a grouping of Aboriginal people living together in a small urban setting. In this report however, ‘community’ is used in the sociological sense; a community is a place where social institutions reside and social processes are generated between people (see Edgar 2001; Ife 1999). A central concern of this report is how individuals and society fit together when people come together and live, work and socialise in a particular location and what the essential elements of that place are that attract people to it.

2 An overview of attraction and retention issues in remote Australia

2.0 Introduction

This section of the report will identify the key impacts of shifting populations between and within remote and non-remote areas. As shown in Figures 2a and 2b, the distribution of the population has significantly changed over the last 100 years with a general population redistribution from the hinterland to capital cities on the coasts and a fringe spanning about 100 kilometres along the Australian coastline (Figure 3).

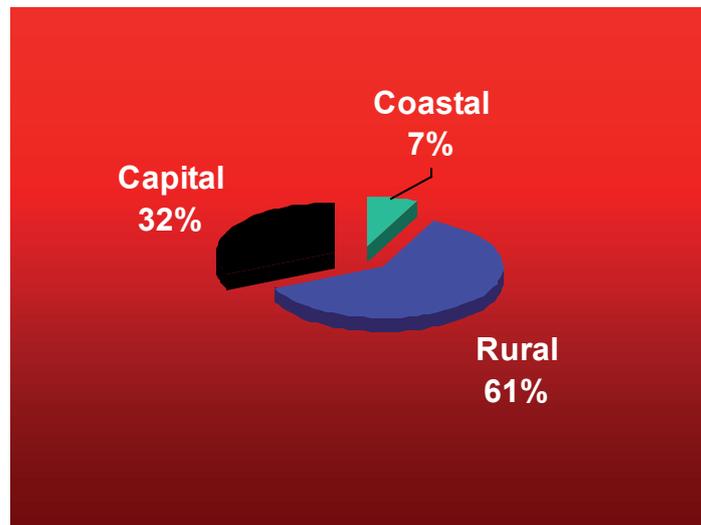


Figure 2a: Australian Population Distribution 1901
Source: ABS 2003; Salt 2001

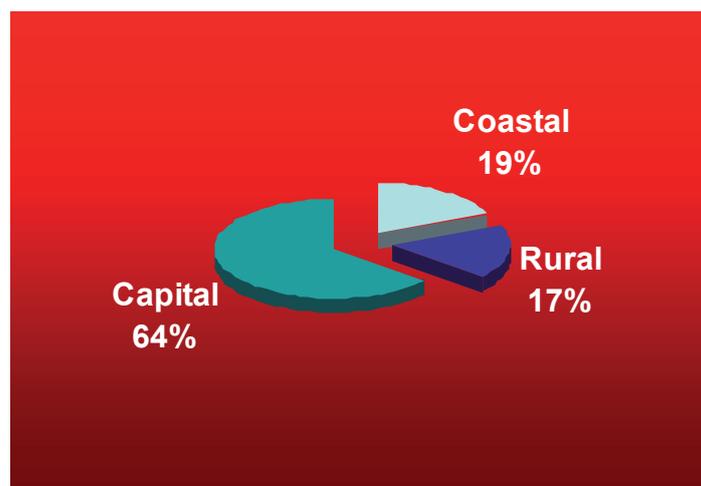


Figure 2b: Australian Population Distribution 2001
Source: ABS 2003; Salt 2001

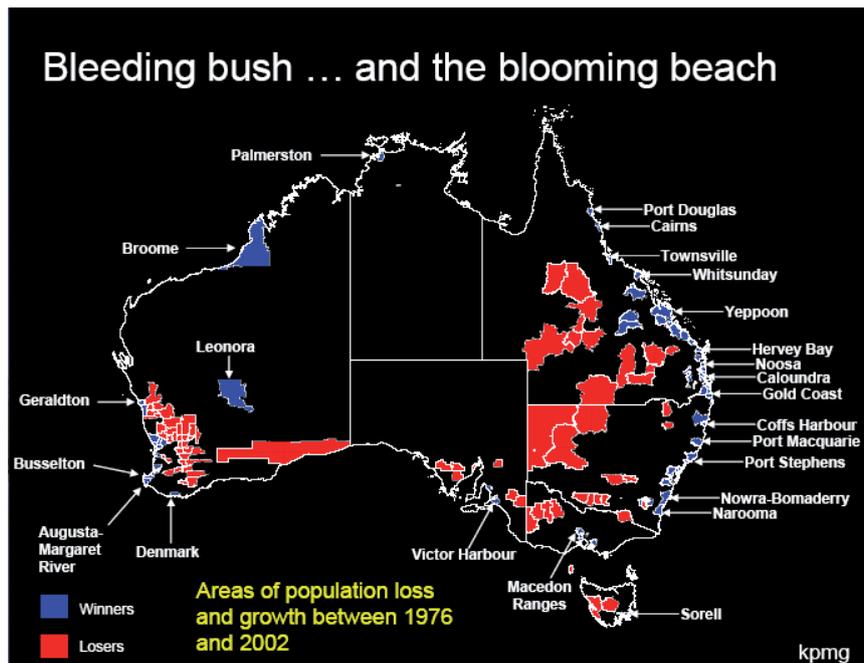


Figure 3: Areas of population loss and growth between 1976 and 2002
Source: Salt 2004

The Regional Development Council (2004) categorises the many reasons for population change in remote areas into six broad ‘theatres’, namely:

- Jobs and career opportunities
- Housing
- Infrastructure
- Perceptions of lifestyle and community
- Education and training
- Health.

These ‘theatres’ – also known as ‘links in a chain’ (Hillier, Fisher & Tonts 2002) – will act as the basis for analysis in this report. A brief delineation of remote and non-remote issues within these ‘theatres’ will be given forthwith as an introduction to and overview of the detailed analysis.

It must also be recognised that this report is not a rigorous analysis of all remote areas in Australia and of the strategies being developed to more effectively attract and retain skilled and professional staff to remote locations. Rather, it should be used as the initial step in understanding the complexity, depth and interconnectedness of issues found in these areas for community members, public and private sectors. Recommendations to emerge out of this report are a synthesis of new and existing strategies aiming to address strong demand for skilled and professional workers in remote areas of Australia.

2.1 Remote and non-remote population movements

The challenge of attracting and retaining populations in remote Australia has been intensified over the last three decades with the shift towards a market-led allocation of resources and government policies that have encouraged rationalisation of services and devolution of services to regional and city centres.

Over that time, there has been a continually declining population in numerous non-metropolitan locations (Haslam McKenzie & Stehlik 2005; Taylor 2003; Institute for Sustainable Regional Development 2002; Storey 2001; Beer & Keane 2000). This is particularly evident in the youth cohort and many young people drift to cities for education and work and usually stay there. As shown in Figure 4, there are now more Aboriginal people living in cities than there are living in remote communities (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2003; ABS, 2001a). In 2001, 30% of the Aboriginal population lived in Major Cities, 26% in remote areas (ABS 2005). This structural social shift has an impact on the economic health of a community as well as diminishing the sense of wellbeing and future for the regional and remote communities from which they left. At the same time, there have been significant population increases in cities and in locations around Australia on the coast (Salt, 2004). While there are examples of remote and near-remote areas characterised by population growth (ABS 2006a; Haslam McKenzie & Tonts 2005; Randolph 2004; Hugo 2002; Curry, Koczberski & Selwood 2001; Stimson 2001; Ford 1999), the concern is for the majority of remote settlements experiencing continual depopulation and/or influxes of transient populations from industries such as mining and tourism in locations separated from major non-remote centre services and natural resources.

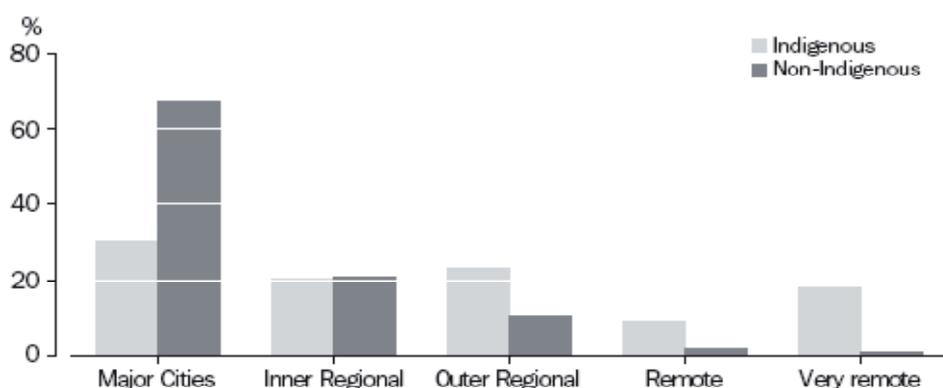


Figure 4: Estimated Resident Population by Remoteness Areas 2001
Source: ABS Data available on request, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

The location of remote areas is dynamic, and thus sometimes unclear (Murphy 2002). As Salt (2004) notes, in 2003 70,000 people moved to coastal areas – seven per cent more than the previous year. As disposable income and leisure time has increased for some, and transport and road access has improved, coastal areas that are within a three- to four-hour drive from capital cities are now affordable for a proportion of the population who have benefited from the buoyant economy. In addition, the desire for a sea change is now a recognised phenomenon with many people of diverse ages and socio-economic circumstances leaving the city seeking to live an ‘arcadian’ existence in rural, regional and remote locations (Budge 2005; Hall & Muller, 2004; Burnley & Murphy, 2004). At one level, population movements could represent a potential workforce, but transient populations also put additional demands on local economies communities (Yates, J., Randolph, B., Holloway, D. & Murray, D. 2005, Murphy, 2002; Meetham, 2001).

The centralisation of Australia’s work force and supporting services in non-remote areas can, in part, explain the decline of remote areas (Tonts & McKenzie 2005; Jones & Tonts 2003; Murphy 2002). However, it is of significance to note that the natural resource boom in remote parts of Australia is also reinforcing sustained growth in non-remote locations such as Mandurah in Western Australia, the outer-Melbourne area and the coastal regions of Queensland (Parker 2006; Holmes 2002; Storey 2001; Miles, Marshall, Rolfe, Noonan n/d). Statistically, there has been

sustained growth in mining communities over the last decade, however, there is strong anecdotal evidence to suggest that while the net effect is growth, there are significant population turnovers in many of these locations in the inter-censal periods. This indicates that people are unable to settle easily into these towns or that there are inadequate services to satisfy a long term resident's needs. A transient population often detracts from the long term socio-economic viability of a community and as a consequence, communities are keen to develop strategies that will encourage longer tenure in remote and regional centres.

2.2 Remote and non-remote jobs and career opportunities

O'Connor, Stimson and Baum (2001) describe how the centralisation of services, and hence, employment, is shaped by flexible global economies and businesses. In this present information age, land, services, infrastructure and employment hubs of technology and innovation are in high demand as the knowledge economies expand. Consequently, services have clustered in high volume centres such as the coastal cities of Australia. Competition for the provision of these services (educational facilities and so on) drives the economies in particular geographical locations to the exclusion of other locations (remote areas).

The population growth in Australia is no longer sustained by natural increase. Immigration is the main contributor to Australia's population growth (ABS, 2006b). A proportion of this migrant group is drawn to jobs in remote communities, but their tenure in these places is irregular due to limited cultural and family support and perceived career opportunities.

Positively, recent international and local demand for cultural and lifestyle experiences and research and development prospects in Australia have driven economic demand in remote places. Tourism and mining in particular have seen the growth of many small communities. As this report will explore, this kind of job growth is laced with concern as growth can often be temporary and detrimental to the existing community and businesses if improperly integrated. Cooperation between existing communities, business and government bodies in the provision of services, coupled with appropriate funding and job advertising, has the capacity to sustain jobs and career opportunities in remote areas.

Remote and non-remote areas are similar in that both increasingly need external skilled workforces to fill vacant jobs and career opportunities. Both regions are also increasingly driven by external market forces. Australia's mineral resources are predominantly in remote locations however labour demands are patchy and closely linked with world markets for resources and the availability of technological interventions. As well, while the resources are mined in remote locations, much of the resource business activities are conducted in city locations. The most significant difference between remote and non-remote service provisions is that the supply of essential services in non-remote areas has sustained growth of sufficient size whereas in remote areas, the supply of essential services is inadequate due to a variety of factors. These include the wide dispersal of a relatively small population over large areas, the unevenness of jobs and labour force numbers and a diversity of service needs, ranging from chronic Aboriginal health conditions, education for all ages, policing and housing.

2.3 Remote and non-remote housing

Housing has historically been a critical link in the creation and establishment of services and communities, yet there is a lack of research and active policy regarding remote housing in Australia in recent times (Jones & Tonts 2003; Hillier et al. 2002). Measurable community housing outcomes

such as affordability, quality, crowding, home-ownership rates, the socio-economic characteristics of neighbourhoods, the availability and quality of local services and the proximity of housing to employment together contribute to the qualitative notion of a shelter-based indicator. The issue of housing interconnects with additional economic, socio-cultural and environmental indicators, such as health, education, the natural and built environment and social connectedness, which have important bearings on the quality of life determinations of healthy, liveable and sustainable communities. Garnaut's (2001) findings that housing availability and the 'interplay between housing costs, employment opportunities and amenity values' are important influences on peoples' decisions to remain or leave regional Australia.

The most recent studies (Berry 2003; 2002) have indicated that there is a need to intervene in remote housing markets as public sectors are increasingly forced to rationalise their expenditure to areas of more certain occupancy with less construction and maintenance costs – resulting in diverse and unmet housing needs (Jones & Tonts 2003; Hillier et al. 2002; Stilwell 1999; Gething 1997). Moreover, remote communities dependent on industry-funded housing collapse as markets driven by international demand shift (Hillier et al. 2002; Warner-Smith & Brown 2002) – resulting in relocation disincentives for prospective immigrants that could potentially provide necessary services (health staff for example) (Jones & Tonts 2003). As shown by Hillier et al. (2002, p. 20):

The key role of adequate housing (in terms of both numbers and quality) is obvious ... The inadequate supply of housing for purchase or rent not only drives up prices, but prevents key worker relocation and stymies investment in the area. Quality housing is required for people at all lifecycle stages and not simply the child-rearing stage.

Remote communities such as the Pilbara region in Western Australia have experienced persistent housing shortages for more than a decade.

Aboriginal housing is a critical and complicated attraction and retention issue for remote areas. Usually Aboriginal residents have a deeply embedded psychosocial and psycho-environmental attachment to a locality in a way that Western society barely understands (Taylor & Kinfu 2005). Neutze (2000) explains that the availability, affordability, suitability and tenure type of current Aboriginal housing is inextricably linked to rationalist market forces and government policies. While demand for appropriate Aboriginal housing exists, the process of requesting and occupying suitable houses is culturally different from the European model (Jones & Tonts 2003; Taylor 2002a; Neutze 2000; Bell & Ward 2000). As well, Aboriginal residents in remote communities, particularly those in a community where the economy is influenced by the resource sector, have critical financial needs. The degree of individual financial elasticity in remote and non-remote areas dictates the location and growth of new regional housing and employment service centres.

Jones and Tonts (2003), Murphy (2002) and Hillier et al. (2002) describe how counter-urbanisation – changing lifestyle choices and the lack of affordable housing – in capital cities has a ripple effect that impacts on remote communities. As people move away from the cities to regional and remote communities for work and lifestyle reasons, social and economic polarisations inevitably occur in remote areas, with those who are least advantaged likely to be most marginalised when it comes to housing availability (Wulff et al. 2005; Yates et al. 2005; Marshall et al. 2003). Apart from public housing, the supply of which is contracting rather than expanding throughout Australia, the availability of affordable housing is limited (Darby 2005).

Comparative to remote area studies, extensive literature exists on non-remote housing. The amount of research is unsurprising as most new housing issues emerge in places where the majority of housing activity is occurring. It is clear, however, that issues and problems regarding housing supply, availability and affordability for remote and non-remote areas are inextricable (Yates et al. 2005; Berry 2003). Berry (2003) suggests that 'locational disadvantage' and population transition emerge in non-remote areas as a result of decreasing housing affordability and diversity of tenure near places of good service provision. The author continues to outline that the need to accommodate disadvantaged groups in places outside of service centres is difficult to economically rationalise in a political environment that is heavily influenced by neo-liberal policy. This 'spiral' is denoted as an Australia-wide 'crisis' (Berry 2003). Aboriginal housing problems in non-remote areas reflect those of remote areas (Cooper and Morris 2005). It should also be understood at a public policy level that housing issues in remote and non-remote locations are likely to be inter-related (Wulff et al. 2005; Yates et al. 2005; Marshall et al. 2003; Berry 2003).

The development and design of forward-looking community engagement, planning and innovative housing solutions are considered crucial to the future of Karratha and other communities like Karratha. Effectively and holistically addressing the dynamic and short- and long-term housing needs of the communities of Pilbara communities will involve considerable cross-sectoral collaboration requiring innovative, action-based management, and engagement approaches to facilitate a forward-looking and sustainable development outcome for the locality.

2.4 Remote and non-remote infrastructure

Developing an accurate picture of Australian rural population and labour market status is difficult because in the past, many of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics (ABARE) statistical classifications are reported at a State-based, rather than small area (Statistical Sub-division or Local Government Area) level. The classification 'other urban' is a catchall label for rural, regional and remote categories that include small rural towns, larger rural centres and regional cities (Garnett & Lewis 2000). Even more difficult to analyse are the definitions and measurements of change in the provision and maintenance of infrastructure and services and there has been little research in these areas. Infrastructure expenditure by the Australian Federal Government has declined from 9 per cent of GDP in 1960 to about 4 per cent in 2004. In the last decade, a dominant neo-liberal policy agenda has been the driving force of Australian government policy at all levels. Fiscal restraint by government is evident in contracting public expenditure budgets and the increased use of so-called market forces (Cheshire & Lawrence 2005), rather than government intervention, to drive change (Beer et al. 2005; Australian Catholic Welfare Commission 2000). As outlined in Section 2.2, in small remote communities, market forces of demand are comparatively negligible and consequently, the widely spread population and community groups are overlooked. From a neo-liberal perspective this can be viewed as economically efficient and therefore responsible government but from a humanist perspective, these policies have been at the expense of social equity.

Remote and non-remote areas are highly dependent upon infrastructure networks (Zimmerman 2001). In remote areas, especially discrete Aboriginal communities, there is often a stark under-provision of basic infrastructure. The provision of critical services such as potable water, road networks and regular health checks can have significant impacts on the health and sustainability (physical and economic) of communities (Taylor 2006). Infrastructure provision in some remote areas is substandard and inadequate for sustainable human habitation (lack of potable water and health facilities for example). It was suggested by a Western Australian politician, the Hon

Sheila McHale (then Minister for Community Development), that communities of less than 200 residents should be closed due to the costs of infrastructure provision. A cut-off of 200 residents would mean that the majority of remote communities would be closed as well as many in the Western Australian rural sector. To date, this suggestion has not been actioned.

The rationalisation of infrastructure in remote areas is a significant challenge as infrastructure is interdependent on the existence of other forms of infrastructure. As an example, a nursing post is dependent on running water for hygiene and electricity to operate medical instruments. Removing one form of infrastructure will impact on other forms of infrastructure and, consequentially, on economic, social and environmental sustainability. Greater effects are felt when the community is dependent on a small range of these community needs.

The provision of adequate health and education facilities, (particularly for post-primary aged children), is often a deciding factor whether a family will move from a remote community or stay, even if they are enjoying the community and the lifestyle offered to them.

The availability of child care is also very important. It was stated at several focus groups during the conduct of this study that for young mothers removed from family support networks, childcare provided relief, while for working parents without family networks, childcare services were often essential if parents were to continue to work.. The lack of childcare services in remote communities was found to be a strong 'push' factor in this research project, meaning that the lack of childcare support for some families was enough to prompt them to leave a remote location.

2.5 Remote and non-remote perceptions of lifestyle and community

A number of authors recognise a large gap in the research concerning lifestyle and community needs in remote places (Miller, Buys & Roberto 2005; Warner-Smith & Brown 2003, 2002; Pretty et al. 2002; Gething 1997). Significantly, each of these authors reports that perceptions of lifestyle and community are strongly linked to the dwindling provision of health services. The predominant issue in remote rural areas which differentiates them from non-remote issues is a sense of loneliness kindled by isolation and a subsequent under-provision of health services (Pretty et al. 2002; Gething 1997). The authors suggest that these detriments to subjective wellbeing could be reversed through stronger formal and informal social networks with other community members and a greater knowledge and use of local facilities amongst the community and, in particular, health service providers (Pretty et al. 2002; Gething 1997).

Leisure through social interaction is fundamental to enhancing wellbeing. Sport and sporting facilities are therefore extremely important. However, these connections are restricted by the lack of population, employment opportunities and transport infrastructure in remote places (Warner-Smith & Brown 2003; 2002). Mining communities have been significantly affected by the transition from eight-hour shifts to 12-hour shifts. This has meant that sporting team participation is not predictable and there is a marked decline in the number of adults available to assist with junior sport coaching and team management. Nevertheless, mostly women continue to provide essential voluntary social services within their communities, although the 12-hour shift in many mining companies in remote communities is threatening their participation and rate of volunteerism (Alston 2002; Pritchard & McManus 2000). This is a shifting cultural and economic trend that will affect the future cohesion of remote communities.

Remote community interviewees for this project suggested that the attrition rate of children to higher education institutions and employment in capital cities contributed to a sense of community disruption. Keeping teenage children occupied was reported as a 'challenge' by a wide range of interviewees from a variety of remote communities. Interviewees for this research reported that young girls in particular want to shop and socialise, and even in larger centres like Alice Springs, felt constrained by the lack of social variety in the town, contributing to a sense of isolation and boredom.

Gray and Lawrence (2001, p. 188) argue that the challenge for regional Australia 'is not just to fix its social and economic policies, but rather to build socially, economically and environmentally strong communities which have the necessary linkages with global capital that extends beyond the short-term view'. They go on: 'what has been missing is an appreciation of the interconnections between biophysical and social phenomena at the catchment or regional level; connections which either act to facilitate, or to hinder, sustainable development'.

Fly in/fly out, described by a Western Australian politician as 'the cancer of the bush' has done much to undermine a community of long term residents. It was also reported that employees recruited from the city often had unreal expectations of services available in a remote community and this contributed to a sense of disenchantment and desire to 'go back'. Several Northern Territory and Western Australian government agencies are working to minimise the 'shock' of remote living and have prepared marketing material including DVDs and brochures to better familiarise potential newcomers.

2.6 Remote and non-remote education and training

It has long been recognised that improved educational outcomes can increase employment opportunities (Birrell 2001; National Centre for Vocational Education Research 2000; Norris & Wooden 1996), but it is also accepted that non-metropolitan education facilities are worse than those available in metropolitan areas (Garnett & Lewis 2000); (Collins, Kenway & McLeod 2000). In remote environments, the availability of appropriate schooling is highly variable.

The centralisation of education and training services in non-remote areas has made it necessary for people in remote areas wishing to undertake study to temporarily relocate into cities. Higher transportation and social costs (time away from family, etc) are incurred by students in remote areas compared with those in non-remote areas.

The social impacts of distant education facilities on Aboriginal people are particularly important. Extended periods away from family, friends and cultural settings can disconnect Aboriginal people from their community. Participating in two different societies can have negative mental health consequences (such as depression) which can lead to violence and substance abuse (Biddle & Hunter 2005; Altman & Gray 2005; Haslam McKenzie & James 2002). Community displacement is common for both remote and non-remote Aboriginal people. However, Aboriginal people in remote areas are generally more acutely affected by the radical changes in lifestyle and setting resulting from greater geographical space between school and home. Problems are exacerbated by the lack of adequate health services (including education centres) to support them in remote and non-remote areas. Both remote and non-remote settlements have difficulty attracting and retaining Aboriginal people in education systems because learning formats and methods are often not culturally appropriate (Balatti & National Centre for Vocational Education Research 2005). The highly transient nature of Aboriginal people and the current inflexibility of class formats in secondary, tertiary and vocational courses exacerbate impediments to Aboriginal education and wellbeing (Avery 2005).

The Western Australian Education department has developed a program where Aboriginal teacher's aides can participate in teaching training based in their own community. All of the learning is done locally but all assessment and practical examinations are done outside the community. While this can put strain on an Aboriginal person who has rarely left their community for a prolonged period, it is important that the student teachers are examined externally so that there is no suggestion of nepotism or inferior qualification.

Remote and non-remote education and training systems are similar in their need for students who are willing to train and work in professions such as teaching. There has been a long term shortage of mathematics and science teachers for more than a decade throughout Australia and a dearth of male teachers in the education system. This scenario is exacerbated for schools in rural, regional and remote locations. The attraction and retention of graduates who are job ready and willing to work in remote locations has always been challenging but with a buoyant economy and particularly high paying work in the resource industries, the job situation is aggravated for the service professions. Medical practitioners (particularly nurses and specialists), teachers and other community developers (town planners, social workers etc) are in high demand. The level of knowledge about non-remote practice for each of these (and other) professions is higher than it is for remote practice. During interviews for this project, the South Australian and Western Australian education departments indicated they are dedicating more time to preparing graduates for service in regional and remote locations. In Western Australia, this has included cultural awareness training, mentoring new graduates, linking new teachers with experienced teachers who have served in remote communities and a better resourced liaison unit at the Department. There has been persistent media and anecdotal reporting that regional and remote locations are poorly funded with an under-provision of support, services and infrastructure which act as a disincentive for graduates to participate in remote-area professions. As a consequence, the health of the community deteriorates because of few staff, leading to such places developing the stigma of a location that is deleterious to personal and professional health. In turn, 'demonised' remote communities find it more difficult to attract and retain staff than non-remote areas.

It was reported that mentor or buddy systems have been improvised in some communities and generally they have had success in assisting retention rates. Mentor and buddy programs help to ease new recruits into the organisational culture of a remote organisation, help to introduce them into the community, and provide guidance about formal and informal networks that can so often be puzzling or even threatening for newcomers.

2.6.1 Tertiary health learning

Dunbabin and Levitt (2003) emphasise the need for more doctors in remote places, however, they present evidence to show that the shortage is not peculiar to Australia. Their international review of the phenomenon shows that employing skilled and professional workers who have been raised in a remote location and/or have had previous experience in remote areas during training significantly increases the likelihood of staff retention. There is also evidence to support that the location of the educational institution determines the general area of practice. In Australia, there is a dearth of tertiary institutions located in non-metropolitan locations.

Staff in remote locations can have a significant impact, both negative and positive, on the attraction and retention of new staff and locums. When students and recently placed staff are given meaningful duties and responsibilities, their attitude to the general community is usually more

positive according to Vella and Bryg (2002). Poor preparation of new graduates who are often sent to non-metropolitan postings soon after graduation contributes to lack of understanding and the ‘steep learning curve’ that new staff face when moving to remote areas – especially those with a high density of Aboriginal people (Armitage and McMaster 2000). For some, the experience is so confronting they leave before their first contract has been completed and are unlikely to engage with remote locations again.

Similar to general practitioners, mental health staff are sparsely distributed across remote Australian communities (Hodgins et al. 2004). Unlike poor physical health, mental illnesses can take longer to detect, and require regular visitation by the patient to their advisor. However, transport costs, high culturally-based (unpredictable) mobility, low job satisfaction and high turnover of staff culminate in worsening health conditions. These detractors from community amenity create disincentives for medical staff to be attracted and retained in remote practices. Hodgins et al. (2004) suggest that training clinicians to detect specific mental illnesses in patients without relocating them to non-remote training colleges would be beneficial. Public, and increasingly private, health providers in all states are providing telehealth training and services. The advent and use of telehealth services has been important for ancillary medical assistance, and particularly important for training support and diagnosis and treatment of mental health issues in remote locations.

Potential interventions and recommendations from site visits

- It is essential that government commits to establish medical training facilities within an accessible distance of remote areas to facilitate ‘remote location’ training experience. This has the additional benefit of enabling students to have a ‘suck it and see’ experience for future employment in remote communities. (See Case study 3).
- Health training institutions including teaching hospitals, universities and TAFE, should focus their curriculum on family health care.
- Remote health providers need appropriate cultural and practical education. It is essential that people working with remote communities understand the social operation of Aboriginal communities.
- The government could offer students incentives to work in remote locations by reducing/removing HECS debts in return for practicing in a remote location for several years (possibly five to seven).
- There is a need to increase government support for programs such as the National Rural Health Network and placements for registered nurses in remote locations.
- Remote schools should be provided with the facilities and support to offer a fast track correspondence education system for promising students looking for entry into medical professions. Opportunities to extend this program into other fields of work could also be provided.

2.6.2 Vocational training

Guenther et al. (2005, p.6) explain that ‘the desert context provides unique challenges for the delivery of vocational training and adult and community education programs’ which is supported by Kilpatrick et al. (2001). Providing comprehensive Training and Further Education (TAFE) and Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs in remote areas is unlikely because of the limited infrastructure capacity and the existence of many small communities dispersed over large areas (Dockery, Strathdee & Ying 1997).

Kilpatrick et al (2001) identify poor numeracy and literacy skills in remote communities, coupled with often inexperienced educators and workplace trainers, as major contributors to substandard educational institutions in these places. Access to remote vocational learning institutions for Aboriginal people is usually problematic (Bowman 2004), and language and cultural diversity add another barrier to learning (Avery 2005; Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs 2000). The poor retention of post-compulsory schooling for Aboriginal people makes transition into TAFE difficult. The high mobility of families for cultural and social activities (which results in student absenteeism) is not effectively compensated or acknowledged by the education system as currently offered. There is a certain amount of shame for Aboriginal people if they are an adult (early teens) and attending a primary school. Culturally appropriate teaching and learning is shown to occur in an environment where the educator is known to the students (Chamberlain 2005). However, the poor retention of non-specialised teaching staff has impeded the development of area-specific and culturally aware/appropriate teaching methods.

It is clear that improving learning outcomes from TAFE cannot be done through the improvement of a single TAFE institution. Nevertheless, small class sizes in remote areas coupled with unique economic, environmental and social processes provide opportunities for specialised learning outcomes where attention to individual students can be granted for specific skills outcomes.

On-the-job training is often not profitable for a business (Dockery, Stromback & Ying 1997). During a workshop conducted in Broken Hill for this project, it was reported that a four-year apprenticeship commitment was a considerable risk for the employer. The cost of job training, health and safety awareness, travel insurance, worker's compensation, payroll tax, work-cover and superannuation expenses with limited guarantee that the apprentice will stay on completion represented too great a risk. It was explained that it is easier for tradespeople to operate as lone operators than taking on young staff. It was also reported that there was often conflict between institutional trainers and business trainers. Business owners argued that time away from the business for TAFE training caused a disruption, and 'block' time away usually involved considerable costs associated with travel and accommodation. Employers were keen for government to have a better understanding of the cost and challenges associated with apprenticeship programs. Government and large mining companies have the infrastructure and political resources to lead skills training programs and drive whatever changes need to be implemented in order to facilitate youth apprenticeship schemes. It was suggested that if there were incentives for government or business to employ apprentices in the trades, then the community at large would benefit from the flow through of skilled tradespeople. It would also provide opportunities for future apprentices to be taken on because of the larger pool of qualified tradespeople available to supervise them (Ferrier 2005). Skills are in high demand but until there are less risks and costs for employers, there will be limited training opportunities.

During the focus groups conducted for this project, it became clear that vocational training requirements and the schemes supporting vocational training differ in each State. This made it difficult for both employers and apprentices in places such as Broken Hill which is serviced by vocational training organisations in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia. It was reported that there was limited co-operation between the States making it confusing and frustrating for employers and employees regarding training and assessment requirements. There was a clear need to improve integration of training needs and awards across State boundaries.

The apprentices on the other hand, saw their institutional learning experiences as valuable for career support, friendships and culture (Dockery & Strathdee 2004). Both the employer and apprentice groups agreed that a strong work ethic and community support were very important for the attraction and retention of staff. Both groups also agreed that in an increasingly knowledge-based economy where career changes are frequent, the application of 'general' workplace skills is essential, most particularly basic numeracy and literacy skills.

The focus group discussion in a number of locations highlighted the potential opportunities associated with pre-apprenticeship and traineeship programs. These programs provide work experience, opportunities to work with local skilled employers and opportunities for employers to showcase their trade and the workplace options. Once again, it was reported that the State Education and Training agencies were not particularly enthusiastic.

Potential interventions and recommendations from site visits

- Culturally appropriate numeracy and literacy skills programs for adults are essential. It is therefore very important that universities, TAFE and other education facilities provide the appropriate training and cultural awareness programs for teachers who will work with Aboriginal students.
- It is essential that new teachers to remote communities are provided with appropriate orientation to the community and specific training for working in remote locations.
- More incentives and employer support should be provided by government policy makers to encourage employers to employ apprentices.
- There should be a reduction in state discrepancies in apprentice training guidelines.
- There should be continuity of apprenticeship conditions and greater cooperation across state boundaries.
- There should be a one-stop shop apprenticeship scheme. Currently, the state and Commonwealth governments have different schemes and subsidies, with very little cooperation between them, making it confusing for employers.
- Increase high schools' ability to supervise VTEC pre-apprenticeship and traineeship courses. Local work experience is very important for the skilled workforce.

2.6.3 Community-based training

This section of the report will focus primarily on the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme. This Australian Government scheme is Australia's largest 'mutual obligation' operation for Aboriginal people receiving welfare packages. Employment, training and enterprise supports are provided to approximately 40,000 participants, 73% of whom are in remote areas (Altman et al. 2005). The program's goal is to assist unemployed Aboriginal people to develop work skills and experience to facilitate their movement into employment. It also aims to meet community needs through the availability of a workforce undertaking public works such as community maintenance, small building projects and road construction. The overall aim of the program is to support Aboriginal Australians to achieve skills development and economic independence.

One criticism of the CDEP scheme is that it normalises its operations as standard employment for Aboriginal people, and for this reason, the Commonwealth government has developed guidelines to break the dependence on CDEP for employment (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 2007). For example, CDEP is no longer provided in cities or regional centres but as of 2006, is only provided in remote communities. Altman and Gray (2005, p. 3) state that 'the scheme is most prominent in remote and very remote communities where 70% of CDEP participants are

located'. Altman and Gray go on to claim that CDEP is an important source of work for many in remote and very remote locations but that its potential is not fully realised in remote locations because of the lack of training providers available to build skills of use in remote contexts.

Altman and Gray (2005) report that many Aboriginal people in remote locations would like a full time job but when this is not possible, participation in CDEP is better than unemployment. There is also the suggestion that involvement in CDEP is often a response to a 'snowball effect' whereby one family member joins and other family and community members follow (Biddle & Gray 2006). As such, the scheme presents an opportunity to create Aboriginal employment in remote areas. Providing necessary services and infrastructure to support new areas of employment helps to sustain those populations.

CDEP has also been instrumental in providing accredited qualifications and apprenticeships. However, the transfer into vocational education from CDEP projects is low in remote areas due to the lack of infrastructure and training facilities. Altman et al. (2005) suggest that one of the primary benefits of CDEP is an improvement in individual wellbeing and community development. This has a positive influence on the reduction of crime, alcoholism and mental illness. In turn, a reduction in social problems improves the lifestyle experience and image of an area. This helps to attract and retain populations.

Although the CDEP scheme is undergoing changes, there were a variety of comments made about its appropriateness and how it could be improved in terms of facilitating a more 'work ready' Aboriginal workforce.

- Several reports from the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at the Australian National University recommend (Biddle & Hunter 2006; Altman et al. 2005; Biddle 2002) that both the community development and mainstream employment objectives of the program should be maintained in all areas, although the relative emphasis should differ according to labour market opportunities.
- According to Altman et al. (2005) and Biddle (2002), in areas with very limited labour market opportunities, additional funding should be made available to increase the number of CDEP places to provide productive work while allowing the maintenance of cultural practices and participation in the customary economy. This would also reduce competition with social security and make implementation of the 'no-work/no-pay' rule easier to administer.
- There have been concerns (Biddle & Hunter 2006; Altman et al. 2005; Morphy & Sanders 2002) that the CDEP has been viewed as an opportunity for an income by some young Aboriginal people and therefore, there should be initiatives put in place to encourage young people to stay in education rather than seeing the CDEP scheme as a desirable alternative which results in a higher income in the short term. Biddle (2002) suggests that 'carrot and stick' mechanisms such as those used for the mainstream youth allowances could also be applied to young Aboriginal people who see CDEP as a way to avoid the education system.
- Altman et al. (2005) also recommend that CDEP schemes that are performing well should be rewarded with funding, possibly by way of profit-related loans.
- Altman et al. (2005) recommend that qualifications should be accredited wherever possible and in remote areas where there are few mainstream employment opportunities, training should develop 'practical skills' which are of direct use to the local communities. Contentiously, they also suggest that individual CDEP organisations should have autonomy over the type of work they provide to participants and how they operate (Altman et al. 2005, p. x).

There have been businesses established by Aboriginal people who started their employment and training careers through CDEP programs. However, in this research project, many people, non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal, bemoaned the lack of support for Aboriginal people starting out in business. The Business Enterprise Centres in Western Australia have assisted some of the businesses, but these are rarely located in remote or very remote locations and are therefore relatively inaccessible. Many Aboriginal people do not know of the service. Various state agencies such as the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in New South Wales and the Department of Industry and Resources in Western Australia promote Aboriginal economic development but with limited resources and with minimal 'stretch' to remote locations.

Potential interventions and recommendations from site visits

- Whatever changes are made to the CDEP program, policy and decision makers should be mindful of the merits associated with keeping Aboriginal people in their communities, and should facilitate worthwhile work sponsorship schemes that enable the positive influences of family and role models.
- Successful Aboriginal businesses which have been developed by people who emerged from the CDEP scheme should be used in promotional material by government agencies such as the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations to encourage others to understand the benefits of full time employment.
- An active promotion by local government, area consultative committees and regional development organisations to promote Aboriginal business enterprise and wherever possible, encourage patronage.
- The provision of business and enterprise contact persons who regularly interface with local people through the CDEP program. This way, guidance is provided by people who are known to local people or whose networks can be trusted.

2.7 Remote and non-remote health

Australia's rural, regional and remote population has poorer health than the metropolitan population with respect to several health outcomes (Edgar 2001; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2000; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1999; Anderson & McDonald 1999; Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission 1998). Although the incomplete recording of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status in administrative records and the experimental nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian population estimates remain barriers to the production of a true picture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and welfare in Australia, the available evidence suggests that Aboriginal people continue to suffer a greater burden of ill health than the rest of the population (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2007). Mortality and illness levels increase as the distance from metropolitan centres increases (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2000). Relatively poor access to health services, lower socio-economic status and employment levels are all typical descriptors of Australian remote populations. Residents of remote communities are more likely to be exposed to comparatively harsh environments (such as greater exposure to accidents and violence, long hot summers with limited potable water supplies for part of the year, isolation, poor nutrition and inadequate housing). Government policy has not addressed these contributors to high Aboriginal mortality. While all Australians have access to free public health cover, people in rural, regional and remote locations face considerable barriers accessing free services due to distance and isolation.

Remote Aboriginal health issues are varied and often complex. Diabetes, heart and kidney ailments and other chronic diseases are rarely adequately treated in remote locations. Hospitalisation usually requires temporary or even permanent removal from communities which causes tremendous stress that undermines the formal medical treatment.

The health status of people living in remote locations cannot be isolated from:

- Jobs and career opportunities
- Housing
- Infrastructure
- Lifestyle and community
- Education and training issues.

As previously discussed, the rationalisation of infrastructure is concentrating Australia's workforce to non-remote areas which is resulting in an inequitable provision of services and facilities to people in remote areas. These services and facilities, which include the formal health system, directly impede human health.

Apart from resources available to be directed to health issues in remote and non-remote areas, the unique environmental, social and economic setting in remote areas does not significantly differentiate its efforts from that in non-remote areas. For example, local community solutions to health problems are being advocated in both places – as well as the use of alternate medicines and innovative solutions to gaps in health education systems. There are three key issues (that are not mutually exclusive) that differentiate remote and non-remote areas. These are:

- Policy makers are more familiar with the health conditions of the non-remote population than they are about the health problems of those who live in remote location. Part of the problem is that data has not been accurately collected (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2007; 2003) and there has not been continuity in health status reporting by health professionals.
- Comparative to non-remote areas, remote regions suffer from more health problems per person – lives are statistically shorter for example due to a variety of conditions including, long distances to access health professionals and services, uneven provision of health services, poor follow-up care and limited health education facilities.
- Medical conditions in remote areas can differ and/or be more severe than in non-remote communities due to the lack of services and infrastructure to support them. For example, malnutrition and hunger have been noticed in discrete Aboriginal settlements where the cost of access to food, and the cost of food itself, is higher than in non-remote areas.

Community research and development organisations in the public, private and community sectors in both remote and non-remote settings are increasingly directing concerted effort into attracting, retaining and sustaining non-remote areas through holistic planning and coordination (Australian Department of Health and Ageing 2005).

Remote medical services in New South Wales actively advertise job vacancies to expatriate Australians serving in Third World locations and in services such as Red Cross and Mediciens Sans Frontiere. This has been very successful. Their recruits are keen to maintain a sense of 'frontier medicine' (rather than easy city living), while also enjoying the relative safety of Australia and the improved living conditions. As well, remote medicine provides a variety of medical experiences. (See also Case study 2.)

2.8 Recommendations and conclusions

An overview of social and economic issues in remote Australia provides an insight to the complexities and variety of conditions in different parts of remote Australia. It is irresponsible to presume that such a large area is uniform or even similar in conditions. Therefore a ‘one size fits all’ response to attracting and retaining skilled and professional staff in remote Australia is naïve and unhelpful. However, an overview does provide an understanding of the diversity of desert Australia and identifies key issues that might influence future strategies to attract and retain skilled and professional staff. The provision of adequate infrastructure across a large area with a sparse distribution of population is particularly challenging but innovative use of technology and the development of ‘whole of government’ strategies have the potential to go some way to meeting needs. A key recommendation is for:

- Government, non-government organisations and the private sector operating in remote locations to dedicate sufficient funds to underwrite the recommendations and findings of research regarding social and economic conditions in remote locations. Of particular concern is the need to understand the interrelatedness of remote-area problems and the lack of commitment to solve the issues identified.
- Government at all levels to collaborate and cooperate to maximise infrastructure coordination and efficiency of service delivery to remote locations, regardless of the policy and political cycles.
- Government services to be funded and staffed to achieve long term outcomes rather than short term ‘quick fixes’.

The provision of health services, education and training in remote conditions requires innovative strategies and a clear understanding that citycentric practices are both inappropriate and inefficient in remote environments. Importantly it is vital that there:

- is ongoing research into understanding the dynamics of remote education and health needs in remote locations but perhaps more importantly, that the findings are broadly disseminated and acted upon by both the private and public sectors.
- is acceptance by key decision-makers and government agencies of innovative recruitment and operational practices that meet regional needs in remote locations. (See next section).

While health, education and to some extent housing are ‘big ticket’ government responsibilities, it is very important that their influence on the social viability of remote communities is understood. Conversely, many researchers (ABS 2006b; BTRE 2005; Bush and Baum 2001; OECD 2001; Kawatchi et al. 1997) have suggested the benefits of social capital for individual outcomes in areas such as health, education and family wellbeing, and also in fostering community strength and resilience. It is therefore suggested that:

- the inter-relationship between social capital and the optimal functioning of remote communities be better understood by policymakers but also local government and community leaders. It is important that community development strategies of varied scales be appropriate and encouraged through funding and in-kind contributions by all community members.

3 Jobs and career opportunities

3.1 The labour market

The Australian labour market has been ‘lumpy’ for a decade with high Aboriginal unemployment, evidence of under-employment in some rural, regional and remote areas and long term vacancies in numerous skilled and professional positions. This situation is not limited to non-metropolitan locations but is exacerbated by distance from the city and the perceived disadvantages of non-metropolitan living. The range of vacant positions is broad, and affects the public and private sectors. There are regular complaints of ‘skills poaching’ with limited net gain of skills and people into a region. To meet the need the skills and professional needs of the Australian labour market the Commonwealth and State governments have initiated skilled migration schemes.

3.1.1 The Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS)

Through the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMIA), the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS) aims to assist the economic development of regional Australia by attracting skilled migrants into positions that employers have been unable to fill from the local labour market. Under this scheme, employers may nominate people from overseas, or temporary residents in Australia to fill permanent vacancies within regional areas of Australia. The benefits of using RSMS include a two-year commitment between the employer and employee to obtain permanent residency and streamlined processing by DIMIA ensuring quicker arrival in Australia.

In Western Australia, the Regional Development Commissions (RDCs) are the regional certifying bodies for DIMIA’s regional migration initiatives. The RDCs and their government department counterparts in other states have been approved to certify regional migration applications under the RSMS and the Regional 457 (Temporary Business Visa).

These government agencies support migration via activities that include:

- Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme
- 457 Temporary Business Sponsorships
- Accessing the Skills Matching Database
- Providing details of job vacancies from employers willing to sponsor nominees from overseas.

RSMS also allows state agencies (as Regional Certifying Bodies) to consider requests to certify exceptional appointments on certain grounds. This is considered on a case-by-case basis and certification is not guaranteed. People under the age of 45 years with English language skills and people with formal qualifications and particular technical skills are favoured.

3.1.2 The Temporary Business (Long Stay) Visa 457

The Temporary Business Visa allows employers to nominate people from overseas to fill vacancies within their companies. Advantages of using this scheme include quicker processing times for this visa, enabling nominees to commence work with the employer quickly.

In regional areas further exemptions to skill and salary thresholds may apply. An exemption would need to be sought from the appropriate RDC that has coverage of the area in which the nominee will work. These exemptions include the occupations in the Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO) range 5 to 7, and on rare occasions below the salaried gazetted rates.

The regional certification, if the visa is granted, is done on the basis of the nominee working in the region from which certification is obtained. If the nominee is found to be working and/or living outside of this location then the visa may be cancelled.

3.1.3 The challenges of skilled migration

Skilled migration has met some skills needs in remote locations, however the challenge is to successfully integrate the immigrants to the local community (Durey 2005; Han & Humphreys 2005). Rarely does a skilled migrant come to Australia without a partner and/or family, and unless all members of the family are made to feel comfortable then the initiative is unlikely to be successful and the skilled migrant is lost to the community. As well, it was reported during the field trips undertaken for this project that, inevitably, prejudices are not left behind in their countries of origin and this can cause employment issues in Australia. Managers may need new skills to help immigrants work with the existing staff, and with other immigrants. For example, it was reported in both Kalgoorlie and Broken Hill that employing white South Africans and black South Africans in the same relatively small company had presented problems that management were not well equipped to deal with. In both instances, managers had sought guidance to deal with the conflict.

Case study 1: Welcoming the Whole Family

The Goldfields Esperance Development Commission, the Broken Hill Chamber of Commerce, the Broken Hill City Council and the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission have prepared promotional material that focuses on the whole experience of working in a remote community. This is presented in a comprehensive booklet with an accompanying CD, and includes lifestyle, leisure opportunities, personal growth and social activities as well as local services. The Broken Hill material is focused on making new residents feel welcome to the City and to the region.

Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission takes care to explain the challenges of living in a small – often two or three family – location as well as the potential advantages. To minimise turnover, they are keen for employees and their families to have a good understanding of the conditions before taking a job.

The Western Australian Goldfields region has a diverse economy although the resource industry currently dominates. Like many regional and remote communities, the attraction and retention of key service providers is very important. To assist in attraction of staff to the region, the Goldfields Esperance Development Commission and other key agencies and private enterprises have worked together with companies/organisations to develop a ‘one- or two-day package’ to specifically target each family member of a candidate for a highly valued position (for example, the attraction of a new doctor to the community). The age and interests of each family member are researched and then a profile of local groups and clubs is provided in the hope of enthusing every family member about a future move to the Goldfields region. As well, when the family arrives in the region, arrangements are made to meet and greet the family and introduce each of them to their respective interest groups.

Case study 1 cont'd: Welcoming the Whole Family

This initiative was developed some time ago although its practice has been irregular. It has been reported that while this initiative was time consuming and expensive, it had some positive impacts on community and industry integration and tenure. It has been particularly successful when a specific skill set has been targeted. For example, this initiative was used to introduce a medical doctor to the region and this person was subsequently successfully recruited.

3.2 The public sector

Public sector employment has witnessed significant labour relations changes in the past decade (Bailey et al 2000). Increases in service privatisation and out-sourced work have resulted in a highly competitive work environment in both the private and public sectors and this scenario is exacerbated in remote environments where employee choices are significantly limited. Public sector employment has traditionally meant security of tenure, however, for the last two decades, neo-liberal government policies have caused the public sector to shrink and more services to be outsourced to the private sector. There has been a trend towards increased part-time public sector employment in remote places, particularly as the viability of services has been assessed on economic and efficiency terms rather than more broadly on a socio-economic basis. Consequently, many services are deemed 'unaffordable' and are either downsized or withdrawn all together. As such, less and less opportunities for public sector employment exist. As well, further inefficiencies such as gaps and overlaps in service provision develop with a lack of 'joined up government'.

Numerous government agencies, local governments and private organisations have attempted to lure people to remote communities with significantly increased salaries. While this can be effective in the short term, the development of a 'here for the money', rather than 'here for a long time' mentality creates a community that lacks social capital and the positive features that make it robust and resilient. The willingness of public sector employees to take positions in remote locations with all the perceived inconveniences of such a move is not rewarded in the promotion or career progression schedules of the public sector. In fact, it was reported by research participants that the reverse occurs; public sector employees are not rewarded for their remote area experience. The diversity of the experience and the development of enhanced networks and expertise is not recognised and it is often presumed that by taking remote postings their expertise is in some way lessened.

There was regular criticism that too often decisions are made by bureaucrats in cities who do not have remote location experience and therefore do not understand the nuances of remote communities. Information provided by local public sector employees in remote locations is perceived to be discounted or marginalised in the decision making process.

Potential interventions and recommendations from site visits

- A public sector employee should be positively rewarded in future promotion and career appointments for the broader experience and expertise gained through remote location experience.
- It is very important that adequate communication technologies are available and adequately maintained in all remote areas by all employers.

- There should be accurate identification of public services required for specific locations. Cross-agency communication should be facilitated and encouraged by public sector senior management to optimise opportunities and service provision.
- Decisions for remote locations should be made by public sector employees in the region.
- Public sector promotion policies should overtly recognise and reward remote location service.

3.2.1 Nurses

Hegney et al (2002) identify a high turnover of ageing nurses (predominantly female) in remote Queensland who are not being replaced. This is usually because there are insufficient resident younger nurses in the community. Nurses are fundamental to providing necessary health care to the population and are essential to ensure the sustained growth of communities. The authors identify that the inability to retain nurses is not due to poor job satisfaction, lack of demand or few medical facilities. On the contrary, these researchers suggest that the ‘remoteness’ is in fact a significant attractor of nursing staff from metropolitan regions in search of ‘adventure’. However, there is high level of uncertainty about what remote nursing entails – particularly how it differs from non-remote nursing and what the options are to professionally progress (Huntley 1995). This lack of certainty is a barrier to nurses looking for more permanent employment and the communities often report a merry-go-round of transient nurses ‘passing through’. It has been reported that the range of remote nursing promotional material from educational institutions has been largely ineffective in communicating the attributes of remote nursing and the potential advantages of remote postings (Cramer 1998). As well, the profession has not viewed remote nursing experience as something to be valued and there is no perceived career advantage in undertaking remote postings.

New South Wales’ remote medical services, particularly the Royal Flying Doctor Service, have found that mobile or transient Aboriginal health workers have not been particularly successful. Their experience has been that some Aboriginal communities are suspicious of someone from an unrelated Aboriginal community, or there have been unresolved family disputes hindering communication. An alternative service has been developed whereby Aboriginal workers from within the community are trained by the Royal Flying Doctor Service and they assist remote medical staff when they visit. They act as interpreters, both literally and figuratively, as well as medical monitors after the remote medical staff have left the community.

Case study 2: Country Health South Australia

Earlier in 2006, the South Australian government established One Country Health Region, replacing the existing seven regions in Country South Australia. A key aim is to enhance coordination of health services and support health professionals in country South Australia. To assist retention, systems that will support and develop the local workforce are being developed. This includes the establishment of Clinical Networks which aim to improve the coordination of clinical services through cooperation, integration and interaction between service providers and other enabling stakeholders. It involves professional inter-relationships, referral and support structures between units with emphasis on clinical management and partnerships.

Case study 2 cont'd: Country Health South Australia

To address the shortage of appropriately trained health professionals, the Region has implemented a number of strategies including undergraduate and postgraduate scholarship schemes. The South Australian Rural Health Undergraduate Scholarships are offered to full-time students already studying or about to commence an undergraduate degree in disciplines which will gain employment within a rural health unit, for example, allied health, medicine, nursing, dentistry, business management and Aboriginal affairs. There are two postgraduate scholarship schemes managed by Country Health SA. Both of these scholarship schemes are only open to Department of Health rural and remote ongoing employees.

In addition, there has been considerable investment in workforce and business planning with an emphasis on proactive strategies rather than continually reacting to workforce crises. Over the next five years there are plans to develop models that facilitate multiple career pathways; explore and influence regulatory arrangements to facilitate required workforce supply and innovative solutions to workforce and workplace design; and actively target Aboriginal and other minority groups as potential health workers. To this end, positive relationships are being forged with the tertiary, education and training sectors to develop career pathways for rural students across a range of health disciplines. This is a tacit recognition that employees with a non-metropolitan background already understand rural and remote communities and are likely to have an established affinity with them. As well, rural, regional and remote practicums are undertaken in non-metropolitan settings to develop improved understanding of communities, rural health opportunities and to 'myth-bust' some of the poor images of rural job opportunities. This requires trainees to live and work in a location and has the added advantage of introducing them to the community which is increasingly focused on making health professionals welcome.

Potential interventions and recommendations from site visits

- Improve marketing strategies by the nursing profession for nursing opportunities in remote communities, focusing on incumbents who have experienced job satisfaction, lifestyle opportunities and varied professional experience.
- Preferential placements in nursing courses should be offered to students with a remote background.
- Regional universities should be given HECS-sponsored quota for nursing and ancillary medical programs.
- Regional and industry-based scholarships should be provided for nursing undergraduates and postgraduates who commit to working in remote communities for an extended period post graduation.
- HECS debt relief from government should be given to those who work in remote communities for an extended period.
- Promotional material that does exist should avoid promoting remote nursing as an escape from the negative elements of non-remote nursing. Both remote and non-remote places have staff shortages. Discouraging nursing within any of these areas is seen as a hindrance to national progression.

- Compulsory (paid) nursing training in remote areas should be provided through government subsidies. Instead of compulsory placement, students would be able to select how far they are placed from non-remote areas. As the distance significantly increases, so does the rate of pay.
- In-depth induction to remote nursing postings from medical professionals, police, community leaders and where appropriate Aboriginal leaders should always be provided to nurses working in remote locations. This would include cultural awareness, community knowledge and general remote medicine expertise and knowledge.
- Personal conduct training for new and existing staff with compulsory and regular feedback assessments should be undertaken by all nursing employers. Supportive workplaces are fundamental to attracting and retaining nursing staff.
- Nurses in remote places develop multitasking and use a broad range of skills. This should be recognised by the profession and given commensurate career recognition.
- A comprehensive and highly accessible intranet service that provides medical staff with the history of patients travelling between and within regions should be developed and made available to all health workers.

3.2.2 Doctors

The shortage of doctors in remote locations has been a cause for concern throughout remote Australia for decades. Regional and remote experience has been viewed as a ‘backward step’ professionally with limited, if any, recognition of the variety of medical experiences and expertise developed in a non-metropolitan environment. Regional and remote doctors are usually in high demand with inadequate relief, causing burnout in relatively short periods of time. The inability to work with the community through lack of time to address endemic community health problems, such as alcoholism, domestic violence, aggressive behaviour and poor nutrition can be frustrating and enervating. Doctors often cannot easily escape their medical clients in small communities and it can be awkward socialising. Equally, it can be embarrassing for patients to socialise with their doctor who often knows intimate details about them.

From a community perspective, the lack of medical continuity and having to repeat a medical history over and over again is also frustrating and potentially undermines medical care.

A rewarding and very successful collaboration between a remote New South Wales community and the Sydney University has had outstanding outcomes for both the doctors and the community. See Case study 3.

Case study 3: Royal Flying Doctor Service – Broken Hill

The not-for-profit organisation of the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) based in Broken Hill had experienced high staff turnover and retention issues in the past. The RFDS is based in remote New South Wales, providing emergency and primary health care to remote patients, with the closest tertiary level hospital 500 kms away in Adelaide, South Australia.

Previously, the culture in the organisation used to be a ‘swoop and scoop’ attitude, where the service had an accident and emergency nature rather than fitting in with surrounding health services. The staff of this era preferred the iconic and insular nature of the organisation. They were not interested in working with a university or other health services such as preventative health or women’s health programs.

Case study 3 cont'd: Royal Flying Doctor Service – Broken Hill

The change in the organisation was made about 10 years ago, by taking on a primary health paradigm and university partnership, which resulted in attracting a different group of health professionals. The change in culture resulted in doctors who were well rounded and able to deal with emergencies, but had an interest in Aboriginal health and research. The RFDS changed to a rural-based focus rather than a transport service to the city, hence, putting services back into remote areas.

Increasingly, regional service in remote New South Wales is no longer seen as a sign of failure for health professionals, but rather an experience which offers a variety of medical and emergency experiences and training.

Strategies targeting staff attraction and retention

The strategies implemented by RFDS in Broken Hill, together with industry incentives, address a range of needs and motivations of staff, rather than just targeting one aspect of an employee's position, such as remuneration.

Strategies implemented by RFDS

- The most successful doctors have had third world experience, although many are Australians. Many communities around Broken Hill have third world health indexes. RFDS has targeted staff who have worked under these conditions.
- Ongoing education is very important and the link with a university training hospital in Broken Hill enables RFDS staff to take a teaching position there. This opportunity is very useful for future career progression and professional credibility. As well, the connection provides staff with an outlet to teach, research and publish papers and has served to increase academic publications and research dedicated to remote medicine.
- The RFDS provides leave without pay for medical staff wanting to continue training and study. The current Chief Executive Office at RFDS in Broken Hill came to the RFDS as a pilot, and decided to do further study in accounting and management, to further his career with the RFDS. He was given leave to manage his study commitments and training, he achieved an MBA and then the RFDS welcomed him back. The RFDS views this as an efficient practice; the corporate knowledge is not necessarily lost from the organisation and it takes less time to familiarise a previous employee with organisational practices than the time and commitment required to inculcate an entirely new recruit.
- RFDS in Broken Hill is the only post that provides corporate services such as human resource and financial management services in a remote area.
- Housing is important in attracting and retaining staff to Broken Hill, but it is not the sole issue. Career opportunities and a welcoming community is also viewed as very important to RFDS employees.
- The key is to provide an environment and resources for staff to be happy to stay overnight in a remote community and to provide clinics.

Case study 3 cont'd: Royal Flying Doctor Service – Broken Hill

Strategies implemented at industry level

- In collaboration with the University of Sydney medical school, the RFDS and Broken Hill Hospital have devised a comprehensive remote medicine training program.
- Midwifery schools require that regional experience must be included in their training before granting midwifery certification.
- Increased incentives for medical students are offered to those students who spend time in a regional community. For example, students can complete a postgraduate medical degree in four years (rather than five), if 25% of their time (one year) is spent in a remote community.
- Medical students are expected to have extended time blocks in Broken Hill. This means that students are located in Broken Hill for three month periods and longer. It has been found that rather than medical students simply ‘doing their time’ and visiting, longer periods in the region engender greater commitment to the community and a deeper understanding of the complexities and inter-relatedness of remote medicine and health service delivery in remote locations. In addition, longer stays in a place encourage people to integrate with the local social networks and **really** get to know a place.
- Medical students are made welcome by the RFDS, hospital staff and most particularly by the Broken Hill community.
- The University of Sydney has a Broken Hill campus, based at the RFDS-owned facilities in Broken Hill. The RFDS owns the building which is very important should the university withdraw from the arrangement, in which case another training institution can be found. There are 40 staff at the medical campus and nine doctors in Broken Hill.
- It has been reported that the length of staff tenure has improved due to the linkage with a training hospital and the university partnership.
- It has also been reported that there is a higher rate of qualified doctors returning to Broken Hill because they have had a positive training experience in the region.
- The university training partnership with the RFDS and local hospital is about growing the region’s own medical staff. RFDS doctors take students out on the job as part of their placement which is great for organisation–university relationship building.
- The benefits are the remote experience provided to students. In turn, students report back to the mainstream medical student population positive reports about the training and experiences in remote communities.

Scholarships

- The prestigious John Flynn Rural Medicine Scholarships require that all recipients must spend part of their time with the RFDS.
- The John Collins Medical Scholarship gives students some experience with the RFDS.
- For enrolled nurses, there is a Midwife Scholarship, sponsoring nurses to do midwifery with a bonded placement in a remote community. This means that the scholarship recipient is expected to work for a specified period of time in a remote location as a midwife.

Case study 3 cont'd: Royal Flying Doctor Service – Broken Hill

Strategies implemented at community level

- The local university actively engages with local students and the high school, encouraging local secondary students to stay on in school and be involved in university programs that have an application in Broken Hill.
- When students are received in Broken Hill for their professional placement, an effort is made by the community to show off the positive social side of living in a smaller community and the lifestyle benefits.
- The provision of women's health services and other programs in a community usually rely on access through the doctor's surgery, requiring the cooperation of the GP to share their facilities. In situations where the doctor has not been amenable to sharing facilities, the CWA has mounted a campaign to encourage GP co-operation. This has had a positive outcome, especially for women's health programs.

Issues impeding nurse retention in remote communities

- The nursing program will not expand its campus to Broken Hill. The clinical side of the training is conducted in Dubbo.
- The nursing profession does not recognise 'remote nursing' as a separate discipline.

Case study 4: Mid West Aero Medical Service

The Mid West Aero Medical Service commenced two years ago. The business grew from the coming together of a nurse whose dream it was to fly around the Western Australian Mid West region, a doctor with a pilot's licence and remote communities which showed a willingness to support a private fly in/fly out medical service. The Mid West Aero Medical Service now regularly visits a variety of remote communities, including the Abrolhos Islands and desert communities. The nurse is able to provide women's health checks, asthma education and chronic illness support and the doctor provides general medicine, X-ray, pathology and procedural intervention services. The service also conducts medicals at mine sites, and when the service is not in the local centre, 24-hour consultations are available over the phone. The Mid West Aero Medical Service has been welcomed for a number of reasons but most particularly because it has provided continuity of medical service.

It is planned that the business will recruit new staff in the future, and it hopes to attract staff with the bonus of learning to fly as part of their employment package.

The business has been underpinned by private and local government support but Commonwealth support would provide additional security. Thus far that has not been forthcoming. (For more information, go to RRR Network News (Winter 06, Edition 36 <http://www.dlgrd.wa.gov.au/RegionDev/RRRNetwork.asp>)

3.2.3 Social service and community workers

Remote locations are less likely to have regular and accessible care and respite services. This is especially critical for women in both the paid or unpaid workforce because they are most usually the primary carers. For those women who have a primary care role of a disabled, aged or chronically unwell person, the lack of care services limits their ability to work out side the home, and hence their skills cannot be used by the community.

Green (2003) supports Bailey et al. (2000) by stating that the health, welfare and education of people living in remote Australia is significantly worse than that of those in non-remote areas as a result of economic rationalisation. Social service and community workers in remote areas are, generally, poorly paid, often geographically dispersed and subject to unique and challenging political and social pressures, such as preserving confidentiality, maintaining personal privacy and safety in places where an intimate knowledge of the place and people is essential for success. These challenges, and especially the perception of these problems, can hamper the attraction and retention of essential community-building expertise. Conversely, 'social planning, service coordination, community development and networking' (Green 2003) are strengths that remote workers gain from the isolation and under-provision of infrastructure and services, as well as lifestyle, autonomy and flexibility benefits, which add to their capacity as effective community health resources.

Potential interventions and recommendations from site visits

- Local government and community groups should assist social service and community workers develop local knowledge. Practical assistance by these groups could be the development of local induction programs that inform and educate social service and community workers in local cultural traditions.
- A mentor from the local services (for example, police), community and industry sectors could assist the transition of newcomers into a local community. A diverse mentoring base means that interpersonal 'allegiances' are avoided and professional practice is, in turn, supported. Mentors should be selected so as to provide real and perceived safety and security to the employee.
- The development of a marketing campaign by public sector agencies that educates the community that social service and community workers are trained to be scrupulous in the management of personal information.
- Community members, organisations and public sectors could select and sponsor candidates from within the community to study social work under a contract that stipulates a term of service within that community.
- Remote and rural practice could be a core unit of all social work and related courses Australia-wide.
- The development of community involvement strategies through partnership programs between local government, the community, private and public sector agencies. Initiatives such as a common fund to be directed into:
 - holding youth activities
 - developing vocational care and truancy programs
 - information campaigns about community activities
 - the establishment of safe refuges. (Men, women and young people all have different needs of refuges from time to time).

- Social workers with remote area experience should be promoted by government agencies to inform other professional staff how to engage the community in an appropriate manner. To ensure that this happens, government agencies should actively engage with undergraduate and post graduate education programs. In addition, professional in-service programs should also recognise the unique challenges of remote service and provide regular and adequate support opportunities for social service and community professionals to meet together to raise problems and and ‘workshop’ solutions to them.

3.2.4 Police

All remote communities struggle to balance the need to attract and retain a strong policing presence while also overcoming numerous problems associated with isolation, loneliness and workloads intensified by large distances and cultural clashes. These issues significantly impact upon the health and wellbeing of police in remote communities. The ability of police to respond to crimes in remote areas is hampered by staff issues and a highly diffused, sparse population. The availability of Aboriginal police staff is critical as they have valuable insights to cultural issues and facilitate communication with traditional Aboriginal groups through their knowledge of local language. However, police staff from local communities and police who stay for a long period in a particular location often feel compromised by personal relationships. Additionally, remote area crimes differ from non-remote area crimes:

... machinery damage and theft, stock theft, large scale drug importation and cultivation, illegal fishing and shooting, and other environmental crimes [are a few of the examples] (Hillier, cited in Pennings 1999).

More recently, illegal immigrants and stealing of traditional Aboriginal marine stocks, such as trocus shell, has been an additional pressure. Such crimes require local police to mobilise and coordinate specialised staff which can detract resources from other important police work. The need for a greater police presence is highlighted by the impacts of local crime on the wider region and nation (large scale drug importation, for example). The close-knit communities in remote areas make such places attractive to visitors but also make essential policing (covert surveillance, for example) difficult. Crimes with high degrees of associated guilt and shame (by both victim and perpetrator) may go unreported due to the large social impact news of crime may have on local neighbours, friends and family. ‘Hiding’ crimes suppresses the negative perception of communities. Such crimes include domestic violence which requires coordination across multiple government departments. Police and law enforcement representatives interviewed for this research were concerned that the community inevitably viewed police as ‘stick wielders’ rather than potential ‘community builders’. It was their perception that there needs to be a consistent marketing campaign that assures the community that police and law enforcement workers are trained to be scrupulous in the management of personal information.

Husband and wife police teams are not uncommon, however female police officers are reportedly particularly vulnerable in drunken brawls and assaults. Nonetheless, female police are valued for their communication skills, particularly with female community leaders, female victims of crime and in domestic violence events. Distrust of police by Aboriginal people is common, and improved and targeted campaigns working with Aboriginal communities have been effective. It has been reported that police with a ‘country background’ have often gone to school with Aboriginal people. Some have entrenched prejudices while others have valuable insights to Aboriginal communities. These issues are not necessarily well understood by police agencies and need to be addressed.

Graeme Adcock, a senior detective sergeant in the South Australian Police Force and recipient of a Churchill Scholarship in 2001/02 investigated non-metropolitan policing (Adcock 2002). He advocated much greater care be taken by police recruitment offices regarding the selection of police for non-metropolitan duty and the training given to future country police personnel. He suggests that this will have a significant advantage to the police as individuals, as well as to the organisation overall. In particular, he recommends that there should be training modules in non-metropolitan locations and that young recruits should be mentored by experienced remote police personnel. His research found that despite all the technological changes, good country policing revolves around excellent communication and negotiation skills. He also advocates a greater focus on the development of problem solving skills and the valuing of key life skills in police training.

Throughout this project, there was concern raised by a variety of public sector workers that they were financially compromised by remote country service. Adcock's (2002) research also highlighted this issue. He suggests that police should have taxation breaks similar to salary sacrificing. He argues that this would be particularly useful for encouraging police and law enforcement officers whose partner might be concerned about the impact of a 'career break' due to country or remote location service. For example, it would be advantageous for a police family if one of the partners chooses to place their career on hold while the other partner undertakes country service, to be able to divert tax-free funds from the wage earner's salary to the non-wage earner's superannuation fund.

Adcock's research also suggested that international experience has shown that monetary incentives are important but more meaningful, intrinsic rewards such as recognition in promotion and selection processes are more likely to encourage greater willingness and commitment to remote location service. Combined, these incentives send a strong message to law enforcement employees of the importance and value of the experience.

Family support is critical for police and law enforcement employees. As noted above, law enforcers are not always trusted and are often viewed as 'stick wielders' and developing social networks can sometimes be compromised by living in close proximity to the community being 'policed'. Family and other supportive networks outside the police environment are therefore very important. Family and personal issues can be significant factors for police personnel decisions regarding undertaking remote and country service and this needs to be overtly acknowledged by law enforcement agencies. It was suggested by several interviewees that family of law enforcement officers often need support too but that is rarely available.

Case study 5: The Western Australian Police Force – Remote Policing

While the Western Australian Police do not claim to have solved the challenges of remote policing, they have initiated a number of strategies that have assisted in the attraction and retention of police officers in remote communities:

- substantial rent assistance or the provision of housing
- increased leave allowances
- paid return airfares to the city
- increased allowances and financial incentives.

Potential interventions and recommendations from site visits

- Each state and territory police force should develop local induction programs that inform and educate police and law enforcement workers in local cultural traditions, particularly Aboriginal issues. It is critical that there are sufficient resources to ensure that localised information is developed and made available.
- Resources should be directed to police and law enforcement agencies to establish mentoring programs (police officers who have previously worked in remote communities) to assist and support current serving personnel.
- A marketing campaign should be funded by government that educates the community that police and law enforcement workers are trained to be scrupulous in the management of personal information. This should be consistently reinforced by police and law enforcement agencies.
- Remote policing service should be valued by police agencies. Preferential treatment should be given to personnel who undertake country service in remote locations regarding future postings, promotion opportunities and similar incentives.
- Federal and State treasuries should ensure that police and their families are not financially compromised by remote country service.
- It is imperative that police families are made welcome by the community.
- Law enforcement families should be supported. The provision of adequate support might include electronic networking, education support, information and education programs prior to relocating to a remote posting and e-counselling. This would require considerable investment by law enforcement agencies.
- Positive marketing is important. Showcasing police and police families who have had a positive remote service experience has a powerful impact on other police considering the remote service option.

3.2.5 Teachers

Jarzabkowski (2003) highlights that, similar to nursing, disincentives to teach in remote areas are based on negative perceptions emerging out of both misinformation and lack of information. The prevailing perception of remote Australia is an area detrimental for ‘professional and personal health’. It has been suggested that the attraction and retention of teachers could be sustained by developing the practice and recognition of teacher collegiality – particularly by those teachers who have previously worked in remote communities lending support to relatively young and inexperienced teaching staff. Such actions would assist in building the resilience of new staff to remote living and teaching. A positive teaching attitude based on a better knowledge of the place and people is reflected in higher performance by the students – a significant contributor to developing and retaining the local skills-base of the area and region.

Important problems in remote Australian schools include student absenteeism, truancy, transience, illiteracy and substance abuse with an underlying assumption that teachers cannot affect radical change to deal with these issues. Inevitably, these problems require a whole-of-community, often in partnership with a whole of government approach to identifying the cause of the issues and providing solutions that will have long term positive outcomes. For example, while conducting this project, the researchers were taken to a primary school whose student population was 90% Aboriginal. For many years the school has had poor student learning outcomes. Staff, some of whom were also Aboriginal, reported that poor nutrition, domestic violence, parental substance abuse and general disinterest in education had contributed to poor achievement by students. It

was agreed by staff that many issues were inter-related and solutions would require a whole of community and numerous agency commitment to working through the problems. Representatives from the Departments of Community Development, Health and Education and Training together with local government representatives, representatives from the Chamber of commerce, a service group and two local private companies met to discuss potential strategies. A variety of initiatives have been developed. A community group is now working with older students and parents making low tables so that children can serve themselves food at home. Another group has started a cooking class with children of all ages and their parents using donated food. This food is served at recess time twice a week after assembly and joint parent/student reading classes. Community representatives take four students, nominated by their teacher for improved class room performance, each week for an evening ‘out bush’ which is extremely popular. ‘A walking bus’ roster has been established with ‘bus monitors’ who take responsibility for ‘finding’ absent friends. The school principal has evidence to show that there is improved attendance and school and she believes that the academic results will follow. Local government and business proprietors report that the incidence of graffiti and petty vandalism has dropped. It is difficult to ascertain the relationships, nonetheless, there appears to be positive outcomes all around

The Western Australian Education Department reported that remote location teachers have a diverse range of demands placed on them, both as educators and community workers, and they need additional support. Consequently, they are given additional leave loadings, paid leave allowances and salary loadings. But money and extrinsic rewards only go so far. Professional and community support and understanding cannot be underestimated.

Gossip and small mindedness is a concern for many moving from cities and large towns to small communities (Collitts 2000; Salant & Marx 1995). Teaching staff in a remote Pilbara mining community of about one thousand people have been dogged by malicious gossip. Teachers are not the only victims in the community but because new teachers are usually young women from the city, they are particularly vulnerable. As a consequence, there has been a high turnover of staff which has had a negative impact on the students and town generally. The issues are a community issue for which it must take responsibility. The principle mining company working in the town has invested in community development strategies and is working with community leaders to combat the issue. In addition, the school principal has commenced a mentoring and support network for all teachers in the town but most particularly for younger new teachers.

Aboriginal teachers’ aides in remote communities with a high proportion of Aboriginal students are very important for language and cultural reasons. The Western Australian Education Department has developed a program whereby aides are able to upgrade their qualifications with minimum disruption to their living arrangements, see case study below.

Case study 6: Bachelor Conversion to Teaching (WA)

Access to tertiary education usually requires remote students to leave their communities for a significant period of time, after which they may not necessarily return to their original communities. Within remote Aboriginal communities, this may result in loss of a potential long-term skilled community member as well as a role model for younger generations.

Case study 6 cont'd: Bachelor Conversion to Teaching (WA)

The Department of Education in WA, in conjunction with Curtin University has provided a strategy to encourage existing Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEOs) to pursue a teaching career by providing an alternative pathway to a Bachelor of Education qualification. The Bachelor of Education Conversion course is targeted at rural and remote teaching aides working at primary and pre-primary levels. The course is delivered in block release of four weeks each semester, over two years (4 semesters), with the remaining training taking place on-the-job, using distance education tools such as on-line learning and local school resources.

'S' took part in the pilot program of the Bachelor Conversion, using her previous teacher's aide qualifications (Certificates III and IV) and employment experience at a remote area primary school to gain entry to the course. The training was completed partly in a block release mode, away in Perth, with the remaining study conducted at home-base using outcomes learning objectives from the classroom. This involved achieving prescribed learning tasks and then applying them in a practical setting. Outcomes learning encourages a holistic and integrated approach to education and aims to avoid tension between vocational and academic perspectives. The framework is easily adapted to local needs and emphasises the relevance and validity of outcomes. The course also requires an assessable practical component, whereby the student teachers are sent to another primary school, located in another region, to teach for a short period where they are independently assessed.

After completing the qualification, 'S' has remained in her community, even though her family has relocated, taking up a teaching position at the primary school. 'S' is enjoying the work and is dedicated to her students. 'S' says the literacy and numeracy skills of the students are on track and she has very good attendance in the class, hinting at the dual benefits for the local community in obtaining a qualified Aboriginal primary school teacher. The school principal verified her excellent results with the students.

In the past, most Aboriginal students wanting a similar qualification went away to Perth to study through traditional channels of tertiary education. The years in Perth are often very stressful without family support network. As well, homesickness often interrupts study.

Issues identified as critical in successfully training remote Aboriginal teachers included:

- Being able to complete the training/study in the region without having to relocate was important. Moving family to access training was not an option, with just leaving family to study even for one week being stressful.
- Starting at a new school if the role change of an Aboriginal teacher aide to a teaching position is difficult for the children and parents to accept.
- Accepting aides for the Conversion program if fluent in a local language. This almost creates a bonded placement, as the graduates will be most useful in a school that uses their local language.

Other barriers to remote students completing tertiary study include geographical location, financial pressures, relocation after finishing study for a new job, and pressure in upper high school to succeed and complete TEE, rather than the vocational stream.

Case study 6 cont'd: Bachelor Conversion to Teaching (WA)

Other incentives for obtaining a teaching qualification include a teaching cadetship, scholarships available from the Department of Education, as well as personal incentives such as dual language skills and being a role model for students and in community.

This program has been very successful and has greatly assisted in Aboriginal teacher training completion rates. As well, local Aboriginal teachers are likely to have longer tenure in their remote communities.

Teachers are also important for imparting positive impressions about the local community. While it is unrealistic to expect that students will not ever leave the community, it is important that the positive attributes of the community are appreciated by teaching staff and communicated to students. To continually send a negative message about a place and to claim it has no future is a powerful disincentive for future staff attraction and retention programs, but most particularly for students who might go away to qualify and ultimately return. If the local community is committed to attracting back the younger residents in the future, it is important that teachers are made welcome in the community and shown the positive features of the locality. Attracting back former residents has a range of advantages. They already understand both the negative and positive attributes of the place but they have clearly perceived a net gain. They already understand many of the local nuances and probably have many local networks and contacts, enabling them to quickly integrate into the community.

Case study 7: Targeting a new type of teacher (WA)

The Western Australian Education Department has identified that many younger graduate teachers leave the Department within two or three years and travel overseas. Rather than losing them altogether, the Department is actively targeting older teachers who have taken a career break and have developed incentives whereby they don't lose some pay entitlements or promotion opportunities by taking a career break. The feedback has been that the older 'fresher' teachers are more settled in their career, have renewed enthusiasm for teaching and their maturity works to both their and the Department's benefit in country and remote community service.

Building on this positive feedback, the Department has now initiated a marketing campaign targeting potential teachers who are in their late 20s and older. This is having some success. As well, the teaching training program is being addressed to better accommodate mature aged students.

Potential interventions and recommendations from site visits

- Teaching staff must understand and practice collegiality with particular attention given to supporting and encouraging new and younger staff. This should be a pervasive theme throughout all teacher education programs.

- Teaching staff should be encouraged and rewarded by their employer and the community sector to develop innovative teaching programs for local conditions.
- Regularly rotating teaching staff in remote schools through professional learning programs would increase the skills-base of teachers by connecting them with new teaching resources.
- Communities should make an effort to make teachers welcome in a community.
- Practicum placements in remote locations should be an integral part of teacher training programs.
- A mentoring program that connects new teachers to experienced teachers – particularly Aboriginal Teaching Assistants – should be funded by government, thus decreasing the time it takes for trainees to understand the unique situation in remote schools and for newcomers to integrate into the community.
- Access to social networks and professional support systems for teaching staff provided by their employers would assist in overcoming the real and perceived isolation experienced in remote communities.

3.3 The private sector

3.3.1 Aboriginal Employment

Participation in remote economies is an important issue for Aboriginal communities. The Aboriginal population is rising and there is an increased expectation about the role that Aboriginal people will play in their local economies. In general, Aboriginal communities have a high proportion of young people who are dependent on welfare, detached from the labour market, and ill-equipped to engage in it.

A high proportion of resource industry activities occur in remote locations where, until mining commenced, the majority of the population was Aboriginal. The cost of living in remote locations is always significantly higher than regional and city centres and when industry moves in, competition for basic infrastructure and services inevitably escalates. Inevitably, Aboriginal people are significantly affected and unless they can participate in the labour market they are likely to be marginalised.

Daly and Hunter (1999) identify that casual and part time employment with other Aboriginal people is often more attractive to Aboriginal workers than full time employment with non-Aboriginal workers, and results in a greater retention of workers. The cohorts most dependent on social security were young, single Aboriginal people living in remote areas with characteristically low levels of education and extended periods out of the workforce. Moreover, the cost of job loss to Aboriginal people was higher than for the rest of the working population because, characteristically, their networks were less likely to have sufficient financial resources to support them during unemployment. The study undertaken by Daly and Hunter revealed a higher concentration of involvement in Community Development Employment Projects in remote areas with most participation from older people with low levels of education. It was acknowledged that involvement in this scheme expanded the skills base of Aboriginal Australians and acted as a ‘springboard’ into paid employment. In turn, paid employment can alleviate other social pressures such as securing permanent, appropriate and affordable housing which improves general health (Neutze 2000). Attraction and retention of a workforce would be supported by diversifying the operations of Community Development Employment Projects according to Memmot, Long & Thomson (2006).

Mining companies have devised programs to both train and employ local Aboriginal employees but it is now recognised that success in increasing and enhancing Aboriginal participation in the workforce will only be achieved by balancing family and cultural values with the needs of the mainstream economy. Housing and appropriate accommodation for Aboriginal employees is increasingly being recognised as an important feature of the job. Cultural differences have required considerable time and understanding but mining companies consider it an investment if they are able to enhance Aboriginal employee retention rates. Aboriginal workers present some advantages including:

- They are usually already resident so do not have to acclimatise to the local conditions that newcomers often struggle with.
- They often have family support networks.
- They usually have a strong sense of place.

Case study 8: Argyle diamond mine

Aboriginal employment strategies developed by Argyle Diamond Mine in response to the Miriuwung Gajerrong Corporation negotiations for the Native Title agreement enabling Argyle to take their mining operations underground in 2007 have been hailed as a breakthrough. An outcome of the negotiations was creative Aboriginal and local employment strategies which have been positively received by East Kimberley Aboriginal elders and their communities. The company's intention is to have 40% Aboriginal employment and 80% overall local employment by 2008. Argyle has initiated a number of programs under the Miriuwung Gajerrong Corporation Agreements that target the retention of specialised teaching staff to assist Aboriginal training both at TAFE and in the company. Small class sizes in remote areas coupled with unique economic, environmental and social processes provide opportunities for specialised learning outcomes where attention to individual students can be granted for specific skills outcomes. The Miriuwung Gajerrong Corporation has negotiated the Native Title agreement for both the Argyle Mine and also the Ord River Stage 2. Ord River Stage 2 is a joint undertaking by the Western Australian and Northern Territory governments to convert another 99 000 hectares into intensive agricultural land. The Agreement with the Miriuwung Gajerrong Corporation resolves native title and heritage issues affecting approximately 65,000 hectares around Kununurra and Lake Argyle. The employment initiatives will mean significant investment in Aboriginal training by Argyle Diamond Mine with employment opportunities flowing back to Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley.

Argyle Diamond Mine is keen to change the health status of Aboriginal people to enhance their work readiness. The company is keen to develop community-wide job-readiness strategies which include teaching children from a young age about nutrition and assisting parents with enhanced parenting skills. Childcare facilities are targeted as an important focus area where these strategies can be developed.

In addition, Argyle Diamond Mine agreed to shift as many senior management and staff as possible from a fly in/fly out arrangement to permanent residency in Kununurra. This could be up to about 25% of senior management; however, it is unlikely to occur for some time due to acute housing shortages throughout the region.

The success of these employment and regional development initiatives for the East Kimberley region now serves as a benchmark for future developments in the region.

In general, Aboriginal employment in the Pilbara region of Western Australia is higher than in other regions of Western Australia, mostly because of the increased mining activity in the region. Pilbara Iron currently accounts for approximately 18% of Aboriginal mainstream jobs and the resources sector accounts for at least 30% of all Aboriginal people in mainstream work in the region. A particular challenge for employers is the need to expand the pool of ‘fit for work’ Aboriginal workers. Reasons for lack of work readiness include health issues, poor nutrition, substance abuse, inadequate housing, poor parenting skills, high levels of incarceration and low education levels. As noted elsewhere in this report, the lack of regular transportation, and hence, access to work, presents a challenge for some Aboriginal employees. The cost of petrol, particularly in the last two years has also been an additional cost that local residents have had to bear when driving to and from work over long distances.

Case study 9: Newmont Mining

This mining company works with people from local Aboriginal communities both as employees and as sub-contractors providing services such as camp support (catering, cleaning, etc.), environmental services and general staff.

Those staff employed in the company are allowed a job-sharing arrangement to enable more flexibility for Aboriginal cultural commitments. Potential recruits are given a literacy/numeracy test to apply.

Skills training focuses on life skills (washing clothes, budgeting, eating habits and diet, etc.), useful work skills (forklift, car and heavy vehicle licence, crane, first aid, surveying and reverse cross-cultural awareness). The training is accredited and successful trainees are offered a position with the company in a labour pool, starting on a job rotation process. This requires recruits to complete a two-week rotation in each of the departments on mine (camp services, administration, environmental stewardship, milling, maintenance, underground) and then nominate an area in which they would like to work when a position becomes available. Further training is given in one-on-one support in literacy and numeracy.

The company aims to recruit some local elders to help stabilise recruits during pre-vocational training and to talk through issues that may be pressuring recruits to go home before the end of the training period.

A particular issue that does not suit Aboriginal workers is the current 12-hour shift arrangements and the long periods at work before days off are given. The company is working with Aboriginal employees to reach a compromise that will work for both parties.

Newmont Mining has established the Tanami Trust in lieu of paying royalties to the Aboriginal community. This Trust is directed towards providing Aboriginal education programs.

Pilbara Iron has developed an award-winning Aboriginal Training and Liaison unit and the company has had moderate success in creating education, training, job and business development opportunities for Aboriginal people. But while there have been individual successes, the company recognises that Aboriginal people are generally marginalised. BHP Billiton has also targeted Aboriginal employment strategies in the Pilbara region. These too have had moderate success, but work readiness and health issues continue to undermine the success of the programs. In response

to the fundamental health and education needs of this remote location, the company has developed memorandums of understanding with the State health and education agencies. The outcomes of these agreements have been considerable company investment in additional health and education resources that benefit not only Aboriginal people but all residents in the region. It is anticipated that these programs will have positive employment benefits in the long term.

There have been isolated successes where Aboriginal businesses have supplied services that are closely aligned to traditional occupations, such as seed collecting and propagation, environmental stewardship and artistic endeavours.

Case study 10: The Aboriginal Employment Strategy

The Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES) was founded by Moree resident and local cotton farmer, Dick Estens. Moree has a population of approximately 11,000 people, 20% of whom are Aboriginal. This town has had an ugly history of crime and racial tension. Dick Estens' determination to turn around the negative social image of his home town, Moree, in north-western NSW, has resulted in the country's most successful large-scale Aboriginal employment program. Estens initiated the employment program when Aboriginal unemployment rate was approaching 50 per cent and the crime rate was escalating. The AES began in 1997 with federal government and cotton industry funding and since then over 600 jobs have been filled. The idea was initially scorned by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, but there has been a dramatic drop in Moree's crime rate and a new-found respect for police.

The AES identifies work opportunities for Aboriginal people. It started small, mostly in the cotton industry but now it has extended to local retail outlets, banks and service industries. When the program expanded to Tamworth, 140 people registered in the first eight days and 41 employers wanted to engage Aboriginal people.

No government money has been directed to businesses employing Aboriginal people because Estens believes it's more motivating for Aboriginal people that this doesn't happen, and that dollars are better spent on well-trained Aboriginal mentors who diffuse workplace conflict. There's a high job turnover, but Estens says the AES is building a career mindset as well as sustainable leadership in the Aboriginal community. Everyone employed in AES is Aboriginal and it particularly targets Aboriginal men who often are those most marginalised.

In 2001, the cotton industry handed over management of the AES to young Aboriginal leaders. The AES now places approximately 450 Aboriginal people into employment each year. The strategy not only provides employment for Aboriginal people, but also builds partnerships and provides mentors to ensure success for the employer and the employees. The success of the AES relies on building self-esteem and pride, and also on peer pressure to succeed, from within the Aboriginal community. The program has expanded to Tamworth and is proposed for Dubbo.

For more information, go to:

<http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/files/cic/dickestensspeech2005.pdf>

<http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/files/cic/dickestens2005.pdf>

Potential interventions and recommendations from site visits

- Solutions to entrenched Aboriginal social issues cannot be solved in isolation but are the responsibility of whole-of-government, industry and community working in collaboration with Aboriginal communities to develop workable strategies.
- Cultural understanding by employers is critical for future employment success. This needs to be initiated at the earliest opportunity (commencing in primary school) and should not be limited to remote locations.
- It is critical that work programs and shifts are developed by employers that meet the needs of Aboriginal families and Aboriginal culture.
- Development that targets a high degree of Aboriginal and non-resource business participation is important for community development, individual autonomy and the development of social capital.
- Employment agencies such as the AES in Moree, New South Wales, that works exclusively with Aboriginal clients builds community and personal pride with significant community benefits. The private and public sectors have potential gains by working with Aboriginal employment agencies in remote communities.

3.3.2 Tourism and hospitality

As noted by the Western Australian Tourism Commission (1991, p. 6) ‘tourism makes a major contribution to employment, can help develop isolated regional areas and it can improve Australia’s balance of payments. Importantly, it can be counter-cyclical to our resource and agricultural export industries’. There is government support for tourism partnerships, and these are encouraged through Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) which assist in garnering significant investment and expertise for large projects.

Public Private Partnerships

Public Private Partnerships, or PPPs, can be basically defined as the sharing of responsibility between the private sector and government. The intent relates to ‘designing, planning, financing, constructing and/or operating projects which would be regarded traditionally as falling within the remit of the public sector’ (McCann FitzGerald Legal Briefing 2002). State and Federal governments lack the capacity to fully fund infrastructure to meet the needs of present and future generations and it is often contended that they cannot deliver as effectively and efficiently as the private sector. For these reasons private companies are playing an increased role in infrastructure provision. PPPs enable government to work collaboratively with private enterprise. This ideally provides funding options, enhanced community benefit and enables the risks to be better managed and apportioned between public and private enterprises.

The Western Australian Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources is keen to promote tourism opportunities in national parks and protected areas through successful partnerships between stakeholders. In a report aimed at outlining government policy objectives for PPPs, it is noted that partnerships are often complex. ‘They can involve arrangements between two partners, such as private landowners and tour operators, or they can be multifaceted involving the public and private sector, community, Aboriginal and conservation groups, the education and volunteer sectors, and others. The common thread is benefits for the partners that result in some public good, principally conservation’ (Department of Industry Tourism and Resources 2003).

A successful partnership has been the King's Canyon Resort at *Watarrka National Park* in the Northern Territory which is owned by a consortium, a mix of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal business groups (Voyages Hotel and Resorts Pty Ltd, Centre Corporation, Aboriginal Business Australia, and the Ngurrutjuta Association) with clear commercial objectives. Aboriginal employment in this facility is relatively marginal, however the resort draws in a large number of Australian and international tourists, many of whom are keen to enjoy Aboriginal ranger presentations and Aboriginal cultural experiences in the National Park.

Tourism is by nature a complex and dynamic industry. Tourism emerged in the 1980s as the Western world's largest, and Australia's second largest industry as people with better access to credit and a desire to see the world travelled extensively, looking for places with special environments and cultures. Much of this increase has focused on nature-based tourism as tourists sought experiences unique to localities, and consequently national receipts from tourism increasingly depended on the effectiveness of small local businesses and on the integrity or perceived integrity of local cultures and environments.

Carlsen, Getz and Ali-Knight (2001) recognise that remote businesses, communities and individuals are increasingly responsible for the establishment of tourism and hospitality services. The longevity of these services, and the populations sustaining them, depend on the quality of environmental stewardship undertaken by business operators and the communities surrounding these operations. This creates an employment opportunity for Aboriginal people whose understanding of environmental stewardship, particularly in remote and desert communities through traditional practices, is increasingly appreciated by economic development agencies, mining companies and tourism operators.

Successful tourism and hospitality services in remote places are generally small, locally -owned and -operated by experienced owners and staff, and well integrated with the local economy and lifestyle. However, approximately 75% of small businesses close within the first five years of operation – becoming a net cost to the economy and community, and an inhibitor to the attraction and retention of people in a remote locality. If tourism is to be an employment and economic opportunity in remote and desert regions, tourism operations need to attract savvy commercial operators who can at the same time integrate the attributes of the traditional landowners and other tourism professionals to build robust businesses that give the tourists what they are looking for.

Case study 11: Models of Aboriginal Tourism Enterprises (1) Karijini National Park Visitors' Centre (based in the Pilbara, WA)

This Centre provides cultural and environmental interpretation in the Karijini National Park and associated cultural tours. The Park is one of Australia's most remote, and its natural and cultural values are of a high standard partly because of its isolation. The Centre is managed by Karijini Aboriginal Corporation.

Getting started: The visitors' facility was established on a temporary basis using a marquee. This tent structure was about 16m wide and 20m long, and it has been steadily upgraded with components such as treated pine floor and PVC walls. The original tent was unfortunately destroyed by cyclone early in 1996, but has since been replaced.

Case study 11 cont'd: Models of Aboriginal Tourism Enterprises (1) Karijini National Park Visitors' Centre (based in the Pilbara, WA)

Developing the product: The Wakuthuni community, consisting of about 60 people some distance from the Centre, provides the Centre with staff and tour guides, and with artefacts to sell. Some training of staff has been provided through TAFE. Karijini Walkabouts is a tour operation linked to the Centre. The business was started over 4 years ago as a private enterprise, but is now owned by the Karijini Aboriginal Corporation. The Corporation is looking at extending the available range of one-hour or half-hour walks which provide insight to Aboriginal culture, use of medicinal and poison plants, and bush foods.

Networking: There is a very strong alliance between the project and the mainstream tourism industry, both in operations and in the future planning of the Park. Karijini National Park is one of several locations identified as a high priority for tourism development by the Western Australian Government.

Marketing: About 50–60,000 visitors (based on road count) visit the Centre each year. Half of these are visitors from WA, 12% are international visitors and the rest are interstate visitors. The Centre's income is principally from sale of artefacts, with 5% of the gross artefact sales going to the State Government. Marketing of the Centre relies on promotion of the National Park as a whole.

Problems that have been encountered: The temporary Centre is a very tough and isolated living environment for the employees. It is very hot in summer, and employees need access to an adequate water supply and living areas. The recent experience of cyclone damage has created a setback in the Centre's development, and made the development of a permanent building more urgent. Problems which need to be resolved in any redevelopment are unclear ownership and management (who owns what, who is responsible for what). This is seen in some other cultural centres where the building is government owned but the exhibition materials and staffing are provided by Aboriginal communities.

Future prospects: The initial lessons learnt from the operation of the Centre were very positive, in that it was possible to achieve a credible tourism product with minimal capital investment, even in one of the most remote areas of Australia. But more recent events have called into question whether a strategy that depends on temporary structures is advisable in areas vulnerable to cyclone damage. As a result of the success of the temporary Centre a new permanent building is now being planned. It is also likely that accommodation will be provided in the Park in the future, and this will create new opportunities for the Centre.

As noted in a variety of tourism literature (Crouch & Brent Richie 1999; Hall 2003; Haslam McKenzie & Johnston 2004; Meetham 2001), the backpacker and upmarket food and accommodation sectors appears to be the most profitable provided the businesses focus on value, meaning that patron expectations are either met or exceeded. Consistency of service and attention to detail are key to a successful tourist business at all levels of the market. There is increased market demand for Aboriginal oriented eco-tourism (see Case Studies 11, 12 & 13). Hence, there are opportunities for increased cultural awareness and sharing of experiences and lifestyles while simultaneously providing unique Aboriginal business prospects and employment.

Case study 12: Models of Aboriginal tourism enterprises (2): Kimberley Regional Tour (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission 1998)

This tour was developed by the Kimberley Aboriginal Tourism Association (KATA) as a nine-day trip, involving visits to five different Aboriginal communities.

Getting started: The tour took two years to develop, and was trialled for a further year before being commercially marketed. Various Aboriginal communities were involved in consultation and discussion about the type of tourism involvement that they wanted. Infrastructure needed along the route (toilets, water supply, accommodation) was carefully planned. Two different drivers, each with their own vehicle, were contracted. The vehicles comfortably carry 8–14 tourists.

Developing the product: The Aboriginal communities participating in the tour identified the features of the environment and their culture that they want to present to tourists, and the individuals who were best able to act as guides. Some dance performances were developed for tourists. Initially, much of this participation was supported by CDEP payments. All the participants received guidance and training, though much of this was on-the-job given the remoteness of the communities from training institutions. Some key Aboriginal people with experience in the tourism industry were involved from the start in providing advice and in training others. A separate commercial organisation was established to operate the tour, with involvement of the participating communities. The tour was originally planned as a single nine-day event starting in Broome and ending in Kununurra, with a maximum of 300 kms being travelled each day. However, there were options for it to be split into two separate five-day tours, which could be linked together for some tourists.

Networking: KATA works in cooperation with the Kimberley Tourism Association, and therefore has good links with the mainstream tourist industry. There is a great deal of industry support for the development of Aboriginal tourism in the Kimberley region. There has been some success in attracting corporate sponsorship for some components of the infrastructure being provided for the tour. The tour has included use of mainstream accommodation and restaurant facilities along the route. However, it is expected that in time more of the accommodation will be provided by the individual communities.

Marketing: The tour is seen as appealing to the international market, as well as to educational markets in Australia (including universities, mining companies and others). Some markets may prefer the shorter five-day tours rather than the full nine-day tour.

Problems that have been encountered: The main problem was securing funding support over the length of time that it took to develop the tour. It was necessary to proceed at a pace which suited the communities involved, and to ensure that everything was fully tested before marketing it.

Future prospects: This tour is seen as only one component of each community's tourism involvement. Individual community groups are seen as being free to pursue their own tourism operations on a day-to-day basis and in conjunction with other (mainstream) tour operators, as they gain skills and confidence. Other community groups are expressing interest and wanting to become participants in the tour. However, there is a practical limit on manageable numbers. It is possible that other tours may be developed with different communities in due course.

Backpackers visit Australia for extended periods, stay in locally owned, reasonably priced accommodation, shop in local stores and consume tourism products from local operators, significantly contributing to local economies. Backpacker tourism tends to produce more local opportunities for employment and has less economic leakages than conventional mass tourism because backpackers stay in locally owned accommodation (which they consider to be more environmentally

sustainable), purchase food and other items in local shops, participate in locally owned tours and recreate in locally owned entertainment facilities. Backpackers tend to visit a variety of locations in a region rather than visiting a single destination, thereby spreading their spending across a region. This has significant regional economic benefits. It is calculated that backpackers spend an average of \$62.30 on day-time activities, food, drinks and further travel, but limit their spend on accommodation to about \$15 per night (Wood & Carlsen 2004). Backpackers and their relatively modest demands are therefore highly suitable for remote locations.

Case study 13: Kooljaman at Cape Leveque (via Broome)

Kooljaman at Cape Leveque is a wilderness camp established in 1986. It is situated on the Dampier Peninsular, about 200 kilometres north of Broome. Goombading Aboriginal Boat Tours was established in 2000 and operate the 'Ultimate Experience' charter vessel, offering day trips to the beautiful Sunday Island, part of the Buccaneer Archipelago. The trip is a full day and includes activities such as swimming, snorkelling, fishing, reef walking and visiting the remains of the Sunday Island mission. Special attractions include huge tides which cause gigantic whirlpools as water cascades off ledges.

Accommodation facilities range from luxury safari tents, cabins, beach shelters and tents in the camping ground. There is a seasonal restaurant, shop/kiosk.

As well, Sunday Island boat charters, dinghy hire, and informal bush tucker/cultural tours, and mudcrabbing (when the tide allows) are offered.

Importantly, this tourism operation is owned by two Aboriginal communities, Djarindjin and One Arm Point. Befriending one of the locals is an advertised highlight of this operation, promising to give tourists insights and a much bigger appreciation for this beautiful slice of the outback. The promotional material declares that local Aboriginal people know this land and they share their knowledge and the cultural history of the area with visitors.

Potential interventions and recommendations from site visits

- Partnerships among stakeholders should be actively encouraged by both government and community for more effective local action to adopt sustainable tourism principles.
- Promotion of partnerships between traditional owners and commercial operators by government through incentives in order to establish tourism enterprises around niche markets.
- Eco-tourism operators should be licensed to ensure adherence to sustainable tourism practices.
- Eco-tourism training facilities must be provided in remote locations by tourism industry trainers and educational facilities.
- Eco-tourist guides should be qualified in sustainable development and cultural awareness principles.
- Tourism operations in remote communities should be provided with incentives by government and industry peak agencies to recruit and train local employees.

3.4 Taxation and allowances

There is a tax rebate, commonly referred to as the zone allowance or zone rebate, which is paid to taxpayers resident in prescribed areas (see Figure 5 Map of Zone Allowance Area). This is paid in 'recognition of the disadvantages that taxpayers are subject to [in remote areas] because of the uncongenial climatic conditions, isolation and high costs of living in comparison to other areas of Australia' (Australian Taxation Office 2001). The two zones; Zone A for taxpayers living in remote areas and Zone B for those living in less remote locations. It comprises a base amount plus a percentage of other applicable rebates. It has been argued that the increases over time in the base amounts of the zone rebate have not been sufficient to offset the effect of inflation. The base amount has not increased since 1993–94, although the value of the rebate to taxpayers with dependents has increased because of the linkage with dependent spouse and sole parent's rebates which are subject to annual indexation. More pertinent in the current labour market is the claim that the allowances do not sufficiently compensate families who must choose between the comforts and services available of a regional or urban setting and the relative discomforts and costs associated with living in a remote location. It was also vigorously argued by the National Rural Health Alliance (2006) in a submission to the Australian Taxation Office that the failure to update the base amount contributed to iniquitous conditions for those working in remote locations. 'The geographic application, structure and level of the rebates are thoroughly out of date. They should be modernised in the light of the government's intention to reduce the burden on taxpayers. If the beneficiaries of reform are to be those who are currently most heavily taxed, people in remote areas must be near the top of the list: but for the zone rebates, they pay the same rates of tax but have access to far fewer tax-funded services and facilities' (National Rural Health Alliance, 2006, p. 2). This contributes to economic and quality of life discrepancies by virtue of remoteness.

Resource companies, local government and lobby groups such as the National Rural Health Alliance have all made submissions to the Commonwealth requesting that the value of the rebate be raised to adequately reflect the current additional costs of accessing goods and services in remote and very remote Australia. They have also made it clear that it is essential to provide incentives to individuals and businesses to settle in more remote areas.

There has also been wide concern that the Zone rebates are based on boundaries originally drawn up in 1945 with only small variations since then. Based on research undertaken throughout the 1990s, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has incorporated a remoteness structure based on the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) into the Australian Standard Geographic Classification (ASGC). The ABS intends to review the classification based on census information. This remoteness classification has been widely accepted and used by government agencies and researchers because it is based on the most current population and economic data. Currently, residents of large urban and regional centres such as Darwin and Townsville receive the rebate as those living hundreds of kilometres into the very remote desert areas. The ASGC classifications would therefore be more accurate and equitable than the current zone rebate boundaries.

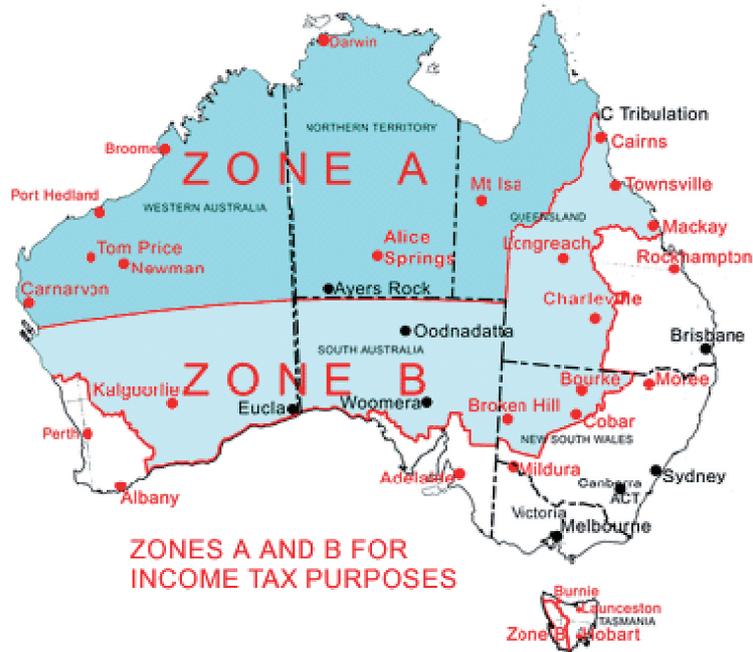


Figure 5: Map of zone allowance area
Source: NATMAP NMP/84/002.24

Nonetheless, in the interviews undertaken for this project with various government agencies, the zone allowance is an important ‘lure’ to some employees. Others reported that if extra money is paid as an incentive it gets gobbled up by tax. In these situations, money is not always a suitable incentive. Fringe benefit tax makes it difficult for employers to help with housing purchase for employees or mortgage repayments. Fringe benefit tax was described in a submission to the Regional Business Taskforce (Department of Transport and Regional Services 2003) as ‘the tax that killed regional Australia’ and was cited as a major factor in the promotion of fly in/fly out arrangements. Under existing tax laws there are some concessions given based on remoteness including:

- Housing provided to employees in remote areas
- Remote area residential fuel
- Remote area home ownership schemes
- Some relocation costs
- Some motor vehicles.

It was noted by the Taskforce however that these concessions are not particularly well known and could be better promoted by government agencies and organisations such as regional development organisations. There are also disincentives. For example, an employee can have accommodation provided by the employer and not incur any adverse costs but if the same employee was to build a house in a remote community, the benefits and taxation relief is not the same. It was argued by several interviewees for this project that legislation and tax rulings hinder employment in remote locations. It was strongly suggested that the zone allowance should be re-assessed and updated regularly to properly reflect the costs associated with living in remote areas as well as providing an incentive to move to remote locations.

4 Housing

4.1 Aboriginal housing

The mobility of Aboriginal people is a cultural phenomenon which is vital for the maintenance of Aboriginal kinship and place relationships (Memmot, Long and Thomson 2006). It is noted that the main reason for Aboriginal mobility is for social reasons (maintaining family ties, culture, sport, hunting, shopping, and collecting bush resources), rather than to access services (health facilities, post offices, banking, housing and so on). Movement patterns are discernable and generally localised within particular tribal and language boundaries, particularly in remote locations. It is within these regions that regular and fairly rapid change of domicile characteristically occurs. Aboriginal mobility often undermines job tenure, particularly as kinship patterns extend to distant locations.

Living in townships is unappealing to some Aboriginal populations due to the excessive crime and pollution, while to others it is required for its proximity to services and social interactions. Of the 21,287 dwellings managed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisations, it is estimated that approximately 8% require replacement and 19% require major repairs (ATSIC 2001). Schooling, particularly for secondary education is inevitably in bigger towns. Some Aboriginal children live away from home for education purposes but without the cultural and family support networks, many are homesick and return to their families before their schooling is finished. There is a general lack of understanding of the need for support of young Aboriginal people separated from their community and who suffer homesickness and their need for appropriate housing with room for Aboriginal adults and mentors who have knowledge and familiarity with their home and people. These oversights are often blamed for poor secondary education tenure in remote communities.

As well, the supply of public housing has diminished throughout Australia for more than a decade. Relations who are visiting put considerable pressure on housing, particularly small housing which is rarely appropriately designed for Aboriginal cultural practices. There is a particularly high frequency of Aboriginal visits to regional centres like Mt Isa to access services. As noted by Memmot, Long and Thomson (2006), this suggests an ongoing need to ensure adequate availability of temporary forms of accommodation such as hostels, or community-owned houses. For Indigenous Community Housing Organisations (ICHOs) in remote and very remote areas there are high costs associated with maintenance of dwellings and currently, according to Hall and Berry (2006), the current operating revenues for state-owned and -managed Aboriginal housing organisations are insufficient to meet their normal operating expenses. This has a number of flow-on impacts for a potential workforce, most particularly on health and wellbeing adequate for employment. As reported by the Department of Families, Community Services and Aboriginal Affairs (SGS Economics and Planning & Tallegalla Consultants Pty Ltd 2006) there are very significant problems with substandard Aboriginal housing throughout Australia. Although there are many factors which contribute to the sustainability of housing, the adequacy of design, construction and maintenance of Aboriginal housing plays a crucial role. When houses are not culturally appropriate in their design, are poorly built, or where there is no systematic approach to their repair or maintenance, minor problems can escalate over time and shorten the life expectancy of houses. Given the serious backlog of housing need in rural and remote communities, it is important that resources are well targeted and provide the maximum benefit to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (ABS 2004).

Opportunities exist in using Aboriginal sense of place and connectedness in remote locations to attract and retain potential employees in remote regions. However, rapid expansion in settlements due to the opening of a mine, for example, will place strains on the availability, affordability and type of houses available for Aboriginal people – especially those renting privately. Providing affordable housing (affordable construction and operation) within these economic conditions is a significant challenge. As noted by Sinatra and Murphy (1997), a vital component of appropriate design and construction of dwellings for Aboriginal people is the role of building standards and codes. In remote locations, communities often fall out of the jurisdiction of local government authorities and other regulatory processes. A range of factors needs to be considered when designing appropriate housing for Aboriginal people including geographic location, kinship structures, specific lifestyle needs of some communities and population fluctuations which may vary according to seasonal, cultural and social reasons (Sinatra and Murphy 1997).

The impact of escalating demand and fluctuating temporary accommodation supply issues in resource towns has important ramifications for a long-term tourism development strategy particularly those associated with Aboriginal community cultural tourism (see Case study 11) and natural resource-based environmental tourism. The community cost of this is high as limited or poor quality housing is a proven deterrent for business people and professional people moving to a community (Institute for Service Professions 2006; Department of Transport and Regional services 2003) and the necessary tourism support functions (such as retail and other services) are similarly affected. Remote regions, often rich in diverse cultural, heritage and natural resources that are increasingly gaining national and international tourism interest have potential for increased employment opportunities but without businesses and suitable accommodation there is often high Aboriginal unemployment.

Mining companies, such as BHP in the Western Australian Pilbara region, do provide housing for their Aboriginal employees; however, the design and location of these houses is not always appropriate for Aboriginal employee needs. For example, Roebourne in the Western Australian Pilbara has a large Aboriginal population, many of whom are willing to work in the nearby mines. But access to employment is compromised by distance and the lack of housing close to work locations.

Potential interventions and recommendations from site visits

- It is important that community-owned houses are established near education facilities for Aboriginal children living away from home with accommodation for visiting parents/guardians.
- A survey of all houses currently occupied by Aboriginal residents should be undertaken within remote region and their suitability for Aboriginal occupation be properly assessed against publicly accepted standards.
- Aboriginal housing should be systematically assessed for safety, maintenance and liveability.
- Appropriate solutions to housing shortages and Aboriginal overcrowding become a priority for government.
- The provision of key infrastructure in remote communities (especially power and clean water), food preparation areas (barbeques, washing basins and preparation tables, for example) and sundry infrastructure (open air shelters and clotheslines, for example) should all be government budgetary priorities.

- A regular schedule of maintenance should be drawn for these services with the requisite funding available for regular maintenance.
- A cash prize and/or prestigious award could be granted to the architect who can design a durable house suitable for approximately 10–15 people that can be easily constructed by local community members and organisations. The design should incorporate: passive solar design, utility provision suitable for a large household, cheap building materials, architecture consistent with the community and environment, universal disabled access, ability to ‘modularise’ to separate the house into individual rooms and be suitable for frequent visitation by friends and family for a short period of time. This would decrease the cost of maintaining a large quantity of unsuitable housing.
- Housing placement by government agencies for Aboriginal people needs to be undertaken in consultation with family groups and in light of previous studies of family movement patterns. This would stabilise movement patterns and assist in the coordination of services to these houses.
- Improving access to the town centre and outstations will require whole of government commitment to transport and road maintenance.

4.2 Housing for the resource sector

A series of newscasts and reports from across the nation identify a need for more affordable housing for both locals and usual populations in towns experiencing mining ‘booms’ (ABC 2006a; Memmot, Long & Thompson 2006; ABC 2006b). It is also clear that developing housing policies in isolation of other services, policies and plans is ineffective. A primary theme in these articles is that existing communities are required to accommodate non-permanent dormitory functions with little investment being directed into permanent infrastructure fixtures and the community which will sustain the locations and diversify the economy. As other writers note, mining needs to occur *with* communities rather than *in* communities (Veiga, Scoble & McAllister 2001).

Remote areas such as the Pilbara region in Western Australia have experienced persistent housing shortages for more than a decade. With a booming resource sector, there is high demand for housing, to the point that now, it is no longer viewed by government and resource companies as an economic supply commodity, but rather an economic driver as new development is stymied by lack of locally housed workforce. Inappropriate housing, more reminiscent of suburban, city-style housing is often built which does not adequately accommodate difficult climatic conditions, nor adequately accommodate 12-hour shift work schedules. Environmentally insensitive housing design usually incurs high maintenance costs. This has a number of community flow-on effects. Costs associated with housing prices and rents are driven to an unprecedented level. Resource companies and government provide generous rent assistance but those residents who are not employed in either of those sectors are significantly disadvantaged. As a result, there is high turnover in population as people struggle to pay high rents, with a consequent negative impact on the community overall. The resource-based relationship with development underpins a number of remote communities which have a reputation as ‘company’ or ‘frontier’ towns. Company towns often exhibit pragmatic, utilitarian and universal urban planning features that do little to promote ‘sense of place’ and community commitment. High population turnover and the ‘get rich quick’ mentality of many employees in resource-based towns further undermines a critical sense of belonging and social capital.

Given that there is a high demand for housing in the Pilbara, there is an excellent opportunity to partner with the local TAFE/VET programs to provide job and training opportunities for young people in the local community. However, the Housing Industry Association (HIA) does not support training initiatives in North West building industry companies. This means that innovative secondary school and TAFE trainee and apprenticeship programs are locally under-utilised, and the lack of local building industry training and support programs fail to manage a key supply issue pivotal to provide the soft and hard infrastructure needs of the Pilbara mining industry hub.

The establishment of proactive cross-sectoral community engagement, collaboration, planning and capacity strengthening strategies is essential to manage more effectively the social, economic and environmental issues of affordable housing during the resource boom currently being experienced.

Many locals see the opening of mines as a necessary part of attracting and retaining the population, but also hold resentment toward the mining companies for their lack of long term support and the impact of housing demand from resource mining activities on the price and availability of local housing. It is of national consequence to make communities as self-sufficient as possible by using the opening of a mine as driver for sustained economic prosperity, social advancement and environmental protection (Department for Planning and Infrastructure 2004).

The ‘fly-in/fly-out’ (FIFO) approach works contrary to community stability and resilience, and is argued by many (Watts 2005; Stone & Hughes 2001; Storey 1999) to undermine sustainable community development. However, with housing affordability an issue across Western Australia and with the Pilbara experiencing median house prices similar to metropolitan Perth, increased demand further elevates the critical issue of affordability. As well, in a tight housing market, there is tremendous pressure on options such as caravan parks, which are traditionally for tourists, and on low socio-economic housing options. The use of existing caravan parks and their high occupancy rates prohibits their wider community use and no doubt affects the affordability of this accommodation. FIFO does not provide long term sustainable solutions from social or economic perspectives, but while housing is under-resourced or not provided at all, it relieves some of the accommodation pressures. The activism against mining operations in iconic settings, such as the Woodside site at the Dampier Archipelago and Broome in Western Australia, has put mining companies under further scrutiny with regard to their social and environment responsibilities. The temporary solutions of mediation between mining corporations and communities should indicate that mining **with** communities is a more sustainable outcome than mining **in** communities.

The Pilbara region, a resource mining hub, has experienced a number of tensions associated with the lack of affordable housing. These include:

- supply-demand and affordability issues for a wide cross-section of the working and non-working community
- the expanding number of company employees
- businesses providing goods and services to the locality
- employees of state and local government instrumentalities
- limited opportunities to develop other industries due to high cost of housing and infrastructure
- a decrease in local and international tourists attracted to invest and settle in the region
- the Aboriginal people are squeezed out of their communities to more affordable, and usually more remote locations, as housing and land reach premium prices.

In some remote communities there have been lengthy native title negotiations and government delays in the issuing of titles, but now housing is now becoming available. There are also indications that more climatically appropriate housing designs are becoming available (see www.landcorp.gov.au).

Potential interventions and recommendations from site visits

- New and innovative forms of high density accommodation for miners and local residents should be developed (with government taxation incentives if necessary). To enhance future sustainability, these could serve as permanent tourist attraction fixtures to remote areas after the resource boom has subsided. For example, modular housing has been recommended for remote locations. While the initial costs and risks of such projects is higher than providing temporary housing, mining corporations would have a greater incentive to invest if they are offered a percentage return of all profits. Such actions would decrease the reliance on mines for sustained growth and provide local employment opportunities.
- Community support for cooperative, ongoing decision making with mining companies may be encouraged by, for example, providing opportunities for home ownership with subsidised company repayments.
- A government/corporate partnership program that issues subsidised housing to mining staff based on permanency should be investigated. Capital from rents could be used to maintain the facilities and improve local infrastructure and services. The least permanent staff could be located within shared housing, intermediate permanent staff could be located in home compounds and the most permanent staff would be permitted into single houses dispersed within the community. However, employees should be given the option to accommodate themselves in the private rental market.
- Mining groups, government bodies, non-government agencies and community organisations could pool their resources to:
 - subsidise living costs for professional staff looking to relocate permanently; and
 - hiring expert community development and planning professionals to uncover growth opportunities and develop growth strategies.

5 Infrastructure

The provision of adequate infrastructure facilities is often a deciding factor whether a non-Aboriginal family will stay in a remote community or move away, even if they are enjoying the community and the lifestyle offered to them. This trend is particularly evident when children are reaching the end of their primary school education. Generally, an employee that has been educated will have lived for some time in a regional centre, or more likely, a city. Consequently, rural, regional and remote locations throughout Australia are constantly competing with city-centric infrastructure expectations. The provision of government infrastructure such as postal, health and education services, as well as corporate services such as banking are usually crucial for the survival of a viable community. Accessibility of essential services within an hour's travel is the accepted government standard, however, unreliability of the services and the lack of choice of service providers draws attention to the equity/efficiency trade-off.

5.1 Water

There is a limited supply of potable water in remote communities. Photovoltaic-powered desalination systems for all remote Australian communities have the potential to provide potable water, albeit at considerable cost. Aboriginal communities, in particular, must rely on bore water with a high salt, micro-organism and pathogen content. Coupled with mechanical failures, bore water contributes significantly to diabetes, kidney and gastric disorders (Richards and Shafer 2003). The provision of potable water improves general health and decreases the financial and social burdens of providing and receiving specialised health care. Removing these burdens from remote areas through the provision of adequate services is a basic necessity for all communities, and helps to facilitate the attraction and retention of singular and multiple populations in a region.

Potential interventions and recommendations from site visits

- Adequate incentives provided by government and the private sector to engineers and scientists who can optimise the desalination system whilst simplifying its maintenance requirements. Testing areas for the final product should emerge out of a study that reveals remote communities most in need.

5.2 Telecommunications

The Australian Government's Coordinated Communications Infrastructure Fund is providing remote locations with broadband internet connections along telecommunication 'backbones' to improve business, health, justice and educational conditions (ABC 2006c; DCITA 2004). Opportunities for government bodies, non-government organisations and business enterprises to share ideas, coordinate activities and conduct business are outcomes made possible through this fund. However, teaching programs that develop knowledge and use of broadband technologies appear to be ad hoc. It is of interest to note that these challenges of providing telecommunications services to remote areas are not new (Hovenga et al 1998). The nursing and allied health professions require the support of telecommunications to exchange vital patient information between medical centres and to contact emergency numbers and services. However, remote locations are prone to poor connections and power failures. These directly impinge on the level of service provision and human wellbeing which can decrease population movements to a particular area.

Case study 14: Bendigo Bank

While Bendigo Bank does not have a presence in many remote centres or communities, its principles of community self-determination and autonomy are an interesting benchmark. Bendigo Bank has been able to build a number of successful business models based on simple methods, encouraging local people to commit to buying their services through a company committed to retaining at least some of its earnings in their community. For example, all people buy telephony, but probably from a number of different suppliers. But if enough people choose to buy from a locally owned telephone company, then the dynamics change. That company employs locals and retains local earnings. Competitors have to improve services or reduce prices to compete. Both ways, the community wins. And Bendigo Bank wins, too, because there is more money – and therefore more available banking – in the local community. Telephony is but one example which is now being pursued by Bendigo Bank on behalf of its member communities and their residents. For more information, go to http://www.bendigobank.com.au/public/community/building_better_communities.asp

Potential interventions and recommendations from site visits

- Locating telecentres within remote communities would greatly assist electronic networking across remote communities.
- The provision of adequately trained and resourced telecentre co-ordinators through a public/private partnerships could greatly assist basic computer skills training, ‘troubleshooting’ and the delivery of online ‘life skills’ such as online banking, tax returns and e-learning.
- New/relocating settlements should be positioned along or near the telecommunications ‘backbones’.
- Expand the number of external tertiary courses/units relevant to remote area living (urban and regional planning, business skills, agribusiness, etc) with the necessary incentives to encourage take up.
- Tertiary institutions must be properly compensated by the Commonwealth for the delivery of remote and regional education.
- Invest more heavily in live-feed teleconferencing in medical facilities. Ambulances/mobile medical service vehicles could be equipped with such devices and remove the need to transport the patient to the medical facility.

5.3 Banking and financial services

The banking sector was targeted in the early years of de-regulation (1983–84) and is now responsive to international finance trends. Consequently, branch closures have occurred to cut operating costs and increase efficiency. New technologies (EFTPOS and ATMs) have enabled banks to change their method of service delivery. Nonetheless, appropriate financial services are as important to remote communities as water, health, education and telecommunications services, particularly for businesses and individuals located around vibrant industry hubs. For those people in remote locations without banking facilities, online banking skills have potential, provided the appropriate electronic infrastructure and skills are available. However, the spread of such infrastructure and skills is generally limited to urban and bigger community centres. Branch closures have led to changes in local spending levels, savings and borrowing patterns, impacting on both local businesses and the community.

The deregulation (reduction) of banking and financial services and branches in remote Australia has had particularly negative repercussions on the welfare-dependent segments of communities (McDonnell & Westbury 2001). The political costs and ‘poverty traps’ – that undermine the wellbeing of the less technically literate, such as elderly and Aboriginal people – to emerge out of this rationalisation has led to an immediate need to ‘re-regulate’ the sector. For example, the cost of over-the-counter financial transactions has increased and placed a greater burden on remote customers to find new ways of investing their money within the same or another financial institution/s using electronic fund transfers.

Bank closures and less competition between financial institutions has increased the travel times that local residents need to access services, and has decreased employment levels. Research (Haslam McKenzie 1999; Beal & Ralston 1998; Harrison 1997) has shown that electronic banking is not an acceptable substitute for over-the-counter transactions which, apart from being more legible to the customer, generate a sense of trust within the community. This sense of community serves to attract and retain people to and in remote areas. Rural Transaction Centres are a recent innovation in remote banking. They provide face-to-face contact with the community and a range of services including banking, posting, phone, fax, internet services and Medicare claims. Simply, sustaining a population relies heavily on the ease and personalisation of financial transactions of and for all community members and businesses.

Potential interventions and recommendations from site visits

- Conduct more research into cooperative financial services such as the Australia Post
- Commonwealth Bank Business Banking program and their usefulness in remote communities for attracting and retaining a population.

5.4 Power

Remote Australian coastal towns and inland areas have potential access to untapped solar and wind energies (Blakers 2002); however, the paucity and expense of the necessary infrastructure to facilitate sustainable resources limits their use. Consequently, many of these places still rely on diesel generators as their main source of electricity. Some remote Aboriginal communities exist without power. At present, investment in renewable energy technologies has not been normalised within Australian cities or towns, yet there are a growing number of research institutions and companies such as the CSIRO (see <http://www.csiro.au/org/ps1b.html>), Curtin University, the Australian Greenhouse Office, the Australian Business Council of Renewable Energies and private sector companies are showing willingness and commitment to investigate and establish sustainable electricity production enterprises.

The localised production and sale of power in remote areas will help to attract services and professional staff. However, the retention of staff is heavily dependent on the number and type of services surrounding these operations. Importantly, the installation of facilities can be highly contentious for community members – especially when considering alternative power sources (nuclear and natural gas solutions) for example. Blakers (2002) states that while recommendations of good practice exist there is a significant gap in the research and development of renewable energy technologies in Australia.

6 Lifestyle and community

6.1 Introduction

Since the early 1980s, Australian society generally has reflected an international trend favouring liberalism, which in part has stimulated government policy based on goals of economic efficiency, self-regulation and less state intervention with market mechanisms. ‘Community’ connotes consciousness and a sense of ‘place’. ‘Place’ according to Moore (1997) ‘is the intersection of people’s physical, biological, social and economic worlds’. Sustainability relies on all four of these worlds and most importantly, upon integration across them (Putnam 1993; Geno 1998). A sense of place adds to the current popularity of the notion of social capital. Woolcock (1998) argues that intra-community ties and extra-community networks linkages are two forms of social capital which facilitate economic development processes and community development. Heterogeneity – or economic and social diversity – in a community provides a number of advantages. Salaman (2003, p. 47) adds that it is important ‘that business-friendly attitudes and continual dedication to active boosterism are used to sustain a mixed-economy town’ thereby maintaining dynamism and long-term continuity (where ‘boosterism’ is promotion of innovation).

Welcoming new people to town is often quite challenging for some towns and locations. However, not being welcomed marginalises the newcomers, particularly the family of a new employee and they are then eager to leave at the earliest opportunity. For many in small remote communities, survival requires knowledge of local networks and the motivation to make a commitment to community development.

A focus on lifestyle and community is therefore very important for attraction and retention of people to a remote location. Community activities are an avenue for entering the community and for establishing friendships and social support which sustain individuals when services are not available. The Western Australian government has acknowledged the importance of lifestyle issues in a strategic planning framework document for the Western Australian public sector, *Better Planning: Better Services* (Department of Local Government and Regional Development, 2003). The extension of the working day in mining communities, for example, pulls the issue of work/life balance into focus. The twelve-hour shifts have had an impact on the number of people available for sporting teams and other leisure activities, therefore compromising regional competitions and the viability of local clubs. As well, the number of people available as supporters, volunteers and coaches and managers of children’s sporting activities is reduced, contributing to a sense of ‘missing out’ that is often a concern of parents for their children’s lifestyle. According to an Institute for the Service Professions report (2006), high pressured jobs and long working hours are regularly cited as reasons for Western Australian public sector workers leaving their regional posts. A survey conducted by the Institute showed that 60–80% of police, teachers and nurses expressed concern about the level of their workload in rural, regional and remote postings and their inability to attain an appropriate work/life balance due to staff shortages and high demand for their services.

The demographic profile of the remote and very remote areas of Australia for the 2001 census is shown below in Tables 1, 2 and 3. The higher mortality rate in remote and very remote locations has an impact on the age distribution and this is also affected by the lack of adequate housing and health care for older Australians in remote locations.

Table 1: Age profile of remote areas 2001

	Remote	Very Remote	Australia
Age Group (years)	%	%	
0-14	23.2	23.6	20.8
15-24	11.2	13.7	13.7
25-34	15.5	17.1	14.5
35-44	16.2	15.1	15.3
45-54	13.8	12.9	13.7
55-64	10.2	9.9	9.4
65 and over	9.7	7.7	12.6
Median Age	35 years	32.3 years	35.7 years

Source: ABS 2001a Census of Population and Housing

Table 2: Key Demographic statistics for desert-based geographic regions

	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal	Total Population
Population	33,186	130,219	
Population aged 15+	20,509	95,817	163,405
Population aged 15-24	6,261	13,425	116,326
Change in Population since 1991	24.0%	-2.2%	2.1%
Percent of population that speaks an Aboriginal language	54.6%	0.2%	11.6%
Average household size	3.9	2.6	3.1

Source: ABS 2001 Census of Population and Housing

In remote and very remote areas there are more males than females at all ages.

Table 3: Sex ratio of the Australian population by remote classification 2001 (males/100 females)

	Major Cities	Inner Regional	Outer Regional	Remote	Very Remote
0-14	105.2	105.4	105.9	107.2	107.6
15-29	100.3	102.3	106.0	114.6	126.0
30-49	95.5	94.3	100.7	116.5	139.0
50-64	98.4	100.4	108.1	121.9	127.6
65 and over	74.6	81.5	91.1	109.6	126.1
TOTAL	96.0	97.1	102.7	114.1	125.3

Source: ABS 2001a and Larson 2006

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2003) reported that the lowest proportions of people aged 65 years and over were in Remote and Very Remote areas (10% and 8% respectively). This may partly be the result of older people moving away from these areas to less remote locations, such as Inner Regional areas, to access health services and other forms of assistance. The lower percentage of older people is also likely to be related to the higher proportion of Aboriginal peoples in these areas and their significantly lower life expectancy compared with the total Australian population.

6.2 Aboriginal people

Using a handful of the resources available, this section of the report will identify what impedes a healthy lifestyle and community for Aboriginal people. Since European settlement in Australia, the traditional community and lifestyle functionality of Aboriginal peoples has been largely disrupted (Brown 2001). Part of this disruption has resulted in a lack of understanding about what attracts and retains Aboriginal people to a particular area. This is particularly important as recent Aboriginal population movements are increasingly from rural to urban environments (ABC 2006d) as Aboriginal people are drawn to regional centres to access critical services such as health, education and social security. Alice Springs, Broken Hill, Mt Isa and Kalgoorlie are all large regional centres with relatively high Aboriginal populations. Petrol sniffing, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse and numerous other crimes increase when Aboriginal people are gathered together in substandard conditions with limited financial resources and inadequate housing. Employment and improved health conditions are critical for enhancing Aboriginal lifestyles in remote communities.

Compared with other, Australians Aboriginal people have a:

- Lower life expectancy
- Higher incidence of alcoholism and violence
- Lower level of education and employment
- Higher per centage of one parent families
- Higher incidence of death in custody.

As noted by Guenther et al (2005, p. 9) ‘there is some limited research on Indigenous mobility patterns that elucidate the complexity and persistence of movement across the desert’. Peterson (2004) argues that this mobility is fundamental to an Aboriginal person’s social identity which is quite different to that of a non-Aboriginal person. Aboriginal people often feel divided between two cultures. This is especially the case for those who pursue secondary and tertiary education in non-remote places. Time spent away from the family loosens connections to traditional ways of life, and those caught ‘in the netherworld between two societies’ can turn to substance abuse and violence (Barker 2004). Improving Aboriginal lifestyles and communities, which will help to attract and retain Aboriginal people in their particular place requires that these situations are reversed. It is suggested (Hunter 2005; Swan & Raphael 1995) that mental health difficulties are both a product and cause of negative health trends. The national inquiry into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health (Swan & Raphael, 1995) conducted in the early 1990s recommended that holistic conceptions of emotional and social wellbeing were prioritised and practiced by health services and health workers. The Commonwealth (Department of Health and Ageing 2007) is now strongly advocating that social and mental health programs for Aboriginal people are provided in a culturally appropriate way because the success rate is consistently higher.

Case study 15: Maari Ma Health Service, Broken Hill

Maari Ma (a Paakantyi word meaning ‘people working together’) Health Service based in Broken Hill, far-west New South Wales, is an Aboriginal health organisation. It has started taking health care to Aboriginal communities, rather than the other way around. Its success is based around its ‘tent’ initiative where a giant marquee is pitched by the river or other Aboriginal meeting place. It delivers an effective service that involves a strong mix of medical and nursing professionals with a stable Aboriginal health workforce. Maari Ma Health Service has developed a workforce of around 50 Aboriginal health workers who are from local communities – and therefore have an understanding of the dynamics therein – and are trained to a university standard.

The director of Maari Ma Health Service, Richard Weston, an Aboriginal man but not from a local community, believes that in the past a mistake has been that governments have thrown money at the Aboriginal health problem and not really looked at how best to be culturally appropriate with Aboriginal people in health care. Weston believes there still is a need to increase funding and making dollars available to address Aboriginal health, but more importantly, it is essential to have Aboriginal ownership and input into programs, and it needs to be recognised that there are certain responsibilities attached to this approach.

Weston said, ‘We know there’s a lot of negative statistics, there’s a lot of negative thoughts about Aboriginal affairs generally, and about in particular Aboriginal health, but I think in our region, there’s a positive resolve to find solutions and work towards addressing the issue as opposed to letting it overwhelm us’.

Much ambiguity surrounds the equity and effectiveness of overtly moving Aboriginal people into mainstream remote and non-remote communities. There are concerns that moving people away from their country, familial and friendship networks and the places with which they are most familiar is disruptive and unsettling. On the other hand, government over the last thirty years has centralised services into regional centres and bigger communities. Aboriginal people who are isolated in outstations are therefore more likely to suffer from poor service provision and health problems (Guenther et al. 2005; Memmot & Moran 2001). The dilemma is to provide service delivery without disrupting cultural practices and choices that serve to attract and retain people in the first place.

It was a concern for all of the communities visited during this project that young Aboriginal people are encouraged to stay or return to their communities but work opportunities are crucial. Sport is an important part of young Aboriginal peoples' lives and programs such as the Clontarf College in Western Australia has been significant in providing leadership opportunities and mentoring programs.

Potential interventions and recommendations from site visits

- Providing tourists with the opportunity to travel to Aboriginal communities and learn about traditional Aboriginal culture. International, national, state and local trading of art and traditional Aboriginal tools and bush foods have supported successful autonomous initiatives (See Section 3.3.2).
- The promotion of 'dry' communities in remote areas by Aboriginal Elders is critical. They need institutional support to maintain healthy communities.

6.3 Men

The wellbeing of men in remote communities is inextricably dependent on several factors. It is generally accepted that men are often reluctant to regularly visit the doctor and where medical services are less accessible, men's health is likely to be negatively affected. In response to this trend, the Western Australian Health Department commenced the *Medical Pit Stop* program, specifically targeting men in non-metropolitan areas. The program commenced in 2001 and was run in collaboration with other community events such as police-supervised drag racing days in the Gascoyne region of Western Australia. The purpose of the program was to make health check-ups fun (medical staff dressed in mechanics' uniforms) and to educate the male community especially that health check-ups make good business and personal sense.

Webb (2006) suggests that a heightened sense of lifestyle and community hinges on how transient working males are received by the local residents, especially if workers operate on a 'fly-in/fly-out' (FIFO) basis. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001) found that since the 1980s FIFO arrangements have been used to service the mining sector. FIFO was introduced, particularly to the mining industry, when there was an insufficient labour force to meet the demands of the developing industries. A FIFO workforce also minimised the capital outlay required for 'start-up' communities and provided a flexible workforce. FIFO arrangements have been successful in attracting highly skilled personnel to remote areas. The study by Watts (2005) also found that the concept has a range of negative impacts on community and regional development. Of particular importance for this report, there is conflicting evidence regarding the sustainability of communities where FIFO arrangements dominate, but there is considerable research (Chamber of Minerals and Energy WA 2005; Watts 2005) suggesting that FIFO does compromise the retention of staff in remote areas. The pressures of living away from home and family induce domestic pressures, often ending in marital splits. As well, data related to domestic violence, drug abuse, loneliness, stress and depression are

well documented (Watts 2005; Storey 2001; Stone & Hughes 2001). Simply, the effects of non-sustainable (permanent) mining settlements have negative consequences on families in non-remote areas. On the other hand, as noted by Watts (2005), some workers enjoy FIFO and their family and friends are also able to positively adapt to the often peripatetic arrangements.

Mine operators such as Pilbara Iron have made FIFO arrangements more attractive to employees by providing high quality services and facilities – including recreation facilities, individual accommodation and regular leave (Pilbara Iron 2005). Investment in the community is also encouraged through sponsorship programs and funding. Nevertheless, Colley (2005) and others (Cheney, Lovel & Solomon 2002) suggest that there is a significant level of discontent within the mining workforce as indicated by high turnover rates and the increasing undesirability of mining as a life-long occupation. The author explains that this may, in part, be explained by long working hours and ageing workforce. Some mining operations permit ‘compressed rosters’ which grant more non-working days at the cost of longer working periods (up to 72 hours per week in some cases). However, this has been leading to extreme worker fatigue. Fatigue is a significant health issue for mining operations as it can increase the risk of accidents. While some research has been conducted into ascertaining the maximum tolerance of fatigue and sleep deprivation, no models have been successfully created that could assist more appropriate rostering.

Ongoing and unreported health problems in men are partly responsible for their higher mortality rate as compared to women. Not surprisingly, given the limited health services in remote and desert locations, men in remote areas are less likely to seek treatment than those in non-remote areas. Older men tended to take longer to respond to ill health symptoms. Jirojwong et al (2004) have linked the high incidence of death from coronary heart disease in remotely located individuals to male ambivalence. Understanding how and why men seek medical assistance in remote areas helps to understand what supports are required to attract and retain men in and to remote areas.

One solution to the difficulty of attracting and retaining skills in remote areas has been gaining skilled labour from overseas through the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (See Section 3.1.1). However, this can be politically and socially divisive and, according to Colley (2005), is not currently a viable option to solve skills shortages as the problem is not confined to Australia but is now a global problem. ‘Importing’ skilled labour also avoids the opportunity to train unskilled or under-skilled labour that is already available in remote locations. In particular, a potential Aboriginal labour force is available and provided the training and work practices are consistent with their needs, Argyle Mining has demonstrated considerable gains. Rosters that provide adequate leisure and family time, (for example, four days on, four days off), job sharing, part-time employment, parental leave, childcare and fatigue management policies have all been noted as recommendations to improve the attractiveness of remote work conditions.

Twelve-hour shifts on mine sites have significantly impacted on the leisure opportunities for men in remote communities. Exercise and social interaction are important components of community life as well as contributing to productivity and personal fitness. Some resource companies provide 24-hour gymnasiums and library facilities, but these are not universally available to the community and therefore limit the opportunity to expand social networks and involvement with the local residents.

The overriding problem is to both attract and retain workers in sustainable settlements that are accessible to mining operations. Mine sites are rarely now developed near towns, and mine sites will usually close when it is no longer viable to mine at that site. Inevitably, it is not economic

to provide a permanent town site, and so mine camps with FIFO or drive in/drive out facilities are developed. This is a classic problem of social needs conflicting with economic demands, and achieving a compromise is problematic for both the companies and the employees.

Potential interventions and recommendations from site visits

- Increase funding and support to travelling health professionals who provide ‘tune ups’ specifically for men’s mental, physical and spiritual health and wellbeing. Making this a standard procedure for working staff ensures that peer pressure increases attendance.
- Ensure that mining companies that ‘invest in the community’ are investing in location-specific community problems.
- Counselling and education services that assist women detect depression in their partners are properly resourced and are known about.

6.4 Women

Women from regional, rural and remote areas are generally a minority of the population and yet their contribution to the social, economic and environmental spheres of the nation is indispensable. Women have always been present and recognised in their roles as mothers, ‘helpers’, community workers, teachers, nurses and carers. Throughout the 1990s, there was a concerted push by government, researchers and some parts of the public and private sectors to recognise the often less well known contribution of women to the non-metropolitan economy (Haslam McKenzie, et al, 2005; Pini et al, 2003; Liepins, 2000). At a broader, regional level, there continues to be a paucity of research regarding women’s roles in leadership and in developing a strategic and sustainable future for their region and industries, even though the data collected on a yearly basis by a number of government agencies show that women increasingly hold decision-making positions in their work.

Women’s health is often compromised by remoteness and a lack of medical service continuity. Women in remote areas often experience a sense of loneliness and isolation (Greenwood & Cheers 2002), especially if they are at home with children. Research (Flood 2005; Haslam McKenzie 1999) shows that friendships and networks help ease the impact of pregnancy and child rearing. An inter-generational attitude of ‘soldiering on’ compounds stress and other emotional difficulties. For those women who feel marginalised, the temptation to return to the city or stay with family members for months at a time (or permanently) often arises and is commonly the catalyst for the family leaving the remote community at the earliest opportunity. Involvement at community and cultural events is very important, especially for those who are not employed. As well, the availability of services for children, particularly health and education facilities, are critical deciders for mothers regarding whether they will stay in a place or look to leave.

The demand for staff in many remote locations means that if women want work, there is work available. However, a common complaint is under-employment, especially amongst skilled and professional women who follow a partner to a particular location. It was reported in the field trips for this project that not all the agencies prepare female staff adequately for remote service and hence there is a higher turnover than is the case in rural and metropolitan postings.

Increasingly however, women are present in the mining sector with more than 3,500 starting work on mine sites in the last three years, and women now constituting 18 per cent of the workforce (Stutsel 2006). Women are valued for their attention to detail and are considered to be less aggressive and better truck drivers than their male counterparts. Until recently, women in the mining industry tended to be in environmental, administrative or catering positions, but the Minerals Council reports

that there are several women who are mine managers and there is an Aboriginal woman who is a mining engineer. They are attracted by the salary and the overt efforts by mining companies to actively promote anti-discrimination and anti-harassment behaviours. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that there is considerable room for improvement and that broad cultural change is needed to remove some of the obstacles facing women in the minerals and resources industries (Central Western Queensland Remote Area Planning and Development Board 2005).

According to Warner-Smith & Brown (2003; 2002) and Stutsel (2006), attracting and retaining women in remote Australia involves preserving a sense of civility (meaning that attention is paid to workplace language and culture) whilst providing meaningful employment, adequate transport and communication infrastructure, good health services for themselves and their children.

They reaffirm that the sense of isolation in remote places is detrimental to a sense of wellbeing and community. However, they and Watts (2005) all suggest that the physical environment is also one of the key attractors to remote locations, which should be better promoted to newcomers.

Educational and health standards in regional Australia generally and remote locations in particular, are considered by some families to be below the standard that might be reached in metropolitan areas. As well, the lack of family support also has significant influence on peoples' decision to leave a remote community (Fegan & Bowes 1999).

A Western Australian program, *Strong Women, Strong Babies, Strong Culture*, which built on a successful Northern Territory initiative, uses the participation of senior women in the community to provide support for pregnant women and their families (Exten, 2003). The program recognises the traditional cultural approaches and supports pregnant Aboriginal women and their babies through better diet, education and ante natal care, leading to higher birth weight babies and improved early childhood development. Senior women, the traditional custodians of health in Aboriginal communities, are employed to run the program in communities and be recognised for their essential role in the life of pregnant women and their newborn babies. (See http://www.sjog.org.au/portal/page?_pageid=419,62120&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL)

Potential interventions and recommendations from site visits

- A community-based buddy system, sponsored by local government and community groups, to be established to make newcomers more comfortable in a new location and lessens a sense of isolation.
- Embedded, non-negotiable equity and equal employment opportunity practices need to be in place in all remote workplaces.
- Women's leadership skills need to be valued and their potential leadership mentored. This needs to be driven and celebrated by local government, industry and community groups.
- There needs to be improved and appropriate preparation of women for remote location service particularly in public sector jobs such as policing and education.
- There needs to be ongoing support through mentoring, ongoing training and additional workplace awareness programs for women in remote location jobs, particularly for those women in non-traditional employment.

6.5 Youth

Research has shown that youth is the single largest group most likely to leave remote areas and statistics show that once they leave, they are unlikely to return. Research around Australia has identified a pattern showing that rural youth believe that being successful in their communities is considered 'second rate' to being successful in the city (Department of Transport and Regional Services 2001; Haslam McKenzie & James 2002). In 2001, remote areas had the lowest proportion (11%) of young adults (15–24 year olds). The youth drain is a real concern for some communities because it impacts on the continuing viability of some services and therefore, the general future of communities. In some communities, a shrinking young population impacts on employment with a perceived lack of opportunities, causing a loss in social capital and potential entrepreneurs and therefore vibrancy and optimism, continuing the cycle of pessimism and devaluation (Haslam McKenzie and James, 2002). In other communities, particularly those dominated by mining, young people are a potential resource but due to a variety of problems, including inadequate training, accommodation shortages, high cost of living and a dearth of youth-oriented entertainment, young people are not easily lured to stay in remote communities in the longer term.

The issues are exacerbated for Aboriginal youth. Access to jobs is often an additional problem with limited reliable transport. The lack of public or organised transport to the workplace makes it difficult for young people to reach jobs on a reliable basis. Job-ready skills, language and cultural diversity all present challenges for young Aboriginal people. The main employment opportunity for desert Aboriginal peoples is CDEP, and according to Guenther et al. (2005) CDEP has formed the backbone of essential public and community services on desert communities.

Youth suicide, depression and teenage pregnancy are more prevalent in remote areas than in non-remote areas (Quine et al 2003). Remotely located youth also find it more difficult to access affordable and confidential healthcare services. Limited meaningful job and recreational opportunities, a sense of isolation and poor education are all attributable to youth suicide, depression and teenage pregnancy. Like most men, young adolescent males find it difficult to talk about depression and mental illnesses which leads to further health complications – impinging on lifestyle and community wellbeing. The general consensus amongst youth is that if there was more to do, there would be fewer problems (Quine et al 2003). In turn, fewer problems means fewer reasons to leave a particular location. This lack of activity in remote locations was a consistent problem identified in the field trips conducted for this project. Girls in particular miss the 'retail therapy' of larger cities and the varied social activities that revolve around 'doing coffee and shops'.

While it is acknowledged that the youth cohort is highly mobile regardless of their location, this research project (and others: Haslam McKenzie and James 2002; Forth 2001, Eversole 2001; Cameron and Milstein 1998) shows that young people in rural, regional and remote Australia would like to have more control over where they are located in order to pursue higher education and work options. Participants from this project indicated that many would welcome the option to stay closer to home immediately after finishing secondary school rather than having to go to capital cities to develop skills and get work.

There are strategies that have been developed to encourage young people to view living in a non-metropolitan environment positively.

Case study 16: The Croc Festival

The Croc Festival is an innovative event held annually in a number of locations around remote areas of Australia which aims to build partnerships whilst celebrating youth and culture in rural and remote communities. It is a four-day event that provides exhibitions and showcases talent from schools in remote areas. Opportunities to interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds is encouraged and facilitated. Education displays on health, employment, art, sport, science, and environment provide students, teachers and visitors with information pertinent to sustaining remote communities (Croc Festival 2006).

It began in 1996 and grew out of the Rock Eisteddfod Challenge. In 2005 events were staged on Thursday Island (Qld), Alice Springs (NT), Geraldton (WA), Halls Creek (WA), Port Augusta (SA), Swan Hill (VIC), Moree (NSW) and Kempsey (NSW) and involved 18,843 students from 416 schools. In 2006 over 20,000 students from around 450 schools are expected to participate in one of the eight planned events.

The Croc Festivals encourage young people living in remote and rural Australia to lead healthy, positive lifestyles without misusing alcohol or consuming tobacco, illicit drugs or other volatile substances. It also encourages young people to view their home as a positive place and something to be celebrated. The Festival receives national media attention and increasing sponsorship from both the private and public sectors. The festivals are produced by Aboriginal Festivals of Australia Ltd (IFA), a non-profit company limited by the guarantee of its directors.

Of particular importance, is the Expo and *Solid Future* program that provides young Aboriginal people with ideas and gateways for future employment and qualification options. It also provides employers the opportunity to get to know Aboriginal youth and convey to them the type of work they offer. (For more information, go to <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/health-crocfest-index.htm>)

The feedback and tangible outcomes from this initiative is impressive. (See http://www.crocfestival.org.au/modules.php?op=modload&name=PagEd&file=index&topic_id=0&page_id=152)

The push by government for communities to be more self-determining and self-reliant has shifted the focus of community development to local leadership. Some communities recognise the advantages of being more inclusive of the youth cohort but do not know how to engage them. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) recognised that regional youth had issues that were particularly important to them as well as to the rest of the country. It acknowledged that their voices were not easily heard because regional youth are a minority in their own communities. Furthermore, they are significantly outnumbered by metropolitan youth so their issues are rarely considered or acknowledged, even though this group of people is the future of rural, regional and remote Australia. The ABC developed the Heywire Program to give non-metropolitan youth a voice and an opportunity for them to participate in a challenging youth leadership program that puts them in touch with other youth like them.

Case study 17: The Heywire – ABC gives rural youth a voice

The Heywire Program has a reputation for effectively developing youth leadership skills as well as providing participants with a ‘once in a lifetime experience’. The aim of the initiative, begun in 1997, is to give rural youth a voice in their communities, and to give all of Australia some insight to issues, concerns and ideas that are important to youth in rural, regional and remote Australia. This initiative encourages rural and regionally-based young people in the age range of 16–22 years, from throughout Australia, to submit a short piece to their local ABC radio station, expressing their views about regional youth issues and what it is like to live in rural Australia. One contestant from each region is chosen for the Heywire Rural Youth radio competition. Each winner presents their story on radio and several months later, as part of their prize, along with all the other winners, they attend a five-day youth leadership forum in Canberra developed by the ABC, staying at the elite Australian Institute of Sport (AIS).

The Heywire Program provides the opportunity for young people to think objectively about their environment, articulate issues and communicate to a large audience the challenges, their concerns, ideas and what it is like to be a young person in rural, regional and remote Australia. The Heywire Program enables young people to express their pride in being ‘rural or remote’ as well as to qualify what ‘rural or remote’ means to each of them. Through the leadership forum in Canberra, the program provides tools and skills to enhance this community identity. From this, it helps participants develop practical visions for the future that can motivate other people – both from within and outside the community, most particularly, decision-makers for the area – to appreciate the attributes of regional Australia.

ACROSSnet (Australians Creating Rural Online Support Systems) is a recent innovation which:

... aims to help members of rural and remote communities to access information, education and support regarding suicide and its prevention. In particular, the project aims to design and develop an online support system that will assist community professionals and professional mental health workers in rural and remote areas to access information, education and support on mental health, suicide risk and resilience factors (ACROSSnet 2006).

While these initiatives are valuable, it is also clear that certain types of infrastructure are required to support them. For example, adequate road and aircraft infrastructure is necessary to host the Croc Festival, and the ACROSSnet program requires reliable internet and intranet services. The need for more and better quality infrastructure is crucial to sustain the social, economic and environmental activities that will attract and retain populations in remote areas.

Role models are very important. The local perception of a place has a significant influence on how young people feel about ‘their place’. It is therefore important for teachers, community leaders and mentors to clearly understand their role in guiding young people about their self-perception and that of the place where they live. Role models of successful people and successful business ventures in remote locations have a powerful influence. Leadership opportunities for young people in remote communities need to be encouraged and embedded. For example, some regional development authorities and local government authorities have youth groups mirroring their boards and councils, providing experience and networks for the future. It is anticipated that these initiatives will provide young people with tangible leadership experience and insight to responsible management and administration of ‘their place’.

Potential interventions and recommendations from site visits

- Leadership opportunities for young people in remote communities need to be encouraged and embedded.
- Mentoring of younger people into remote location work opportunities needs to be a community and business priority. Community and government strategies that overtly value the contribution of young people must be properly funded and managed.
- City-based training programs to have block practicum of considerable time (2+ months) in a remote location. Successful examples of this have been pioneered by the New South Wales remote medical services and Royal Flying Doctor Service. See 3.2.
- Local communities need to make an effort to welcome newcomers, particularly young people, to remote locations.

6.6 Creative capital

It became evident during the community meetings and consultations that, not surprisingly, quality of life issues were very important to people living in remote communities. In the older established communities such as Broken Hill, Mt Isa, Alice Springs and Kalgoorlie, the sense of history and the richness of the town and regional stories provide a patina which other, newer towns cannot easily recreate. The affluence of mining towns is inextricably linked to the global resource markets but very often it has been the history of hard luck and the instant wealth stories that have inspired artistic talents and motivated the establishment of diversified business opportunities such as tourism.

Despite Broken Hill having a long and robust history of trade unionism and ‘blokey’ mining and pastoral activities, art has a very important and overt presence in the city and region. In the workshops, many participants commented that art and cultural diversity was an important feature of the region for them personally but it was also important as a ‘selling’ feature of the town. The acceptance and promotion of art was appreciated for its ability to be more inclusive of a range of different people: old, young, retired, actively working, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, male and female.

The Aboriginal art industry in and around Alice Springs is an important industry that brings tourists and money to the region. It was commented that art awakens an appreciation of the landscape and physical attributes of the place which are sometimes taken for granted.

These observations provoked animated conversations and reinforce the findings of Richard Florida in his seminal work *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2003) where he claims that cities and communities that accept and encourage diversity and creativity are the economic winners of the 21st Century because creative people move to places that allow them to be themselves and they attract others like them. The choices these people make has an economic impact, and in the future they will determine how the workplace is organised, what companies will prosper or go bankrupt, and even which cities or towns will thrive or wither. Places where people feel stifled, constrained by rules and traditions, are likely to be places that are not welcoming and have a limited future.

It was therefore interesting to note in this research that the communities which demonstrated creative ideas about how to best position themselves as places that could attract and retain skilled and professional staff were those that promoted a range of different cultural and community attributes and valued the natural features of the surrounding landscape. While they did not exclude or overlook the contribution of financial incentives and other tangible rewards, it was the more subtle ‘people investments’ that were particularly valued. For example, mentoring young people, buddy systems for newcomers, the promotion of a range of sporting, cultural and leisure opportunities were all viewed as ‘going the extra mile’ and it would appear that it was that effort that had succeeded in making their community a ‘winner’.

7 Concluding remarks

Attracting and retaining skilled and professional staff is a problem not limited to remote, or even rural and regional locations in Australia. There is strong evidence to suggest that it is increasingly a global problem and organisations throughout the world are seeking innovative strategies to attract and develop new talent and are also developing other strategies to retain that talent.

Locations in desert Australia, and remote areas generally, have varied needs but there is the continual problem of attraction and retention which is costing businesses time, money and lost opportunity. For the latter half of the last century, there has been a significant trend for population to shift to the large coastal urban centres, drawing young people to the cities, from where it is hard to lure them back. In addition, city-based workers usually have limited appreciation or understanding of work opportunities in remote locations and resist remote or regional service.

This resistance is not unreasonable. Government policy has followed a stringent neo-liberal economic policy for the last three decades which has meant that services and infrastructure have been rationalised based on efficiency rather than equity. The distribution of a relatively small population over large distances does not fit comfortably with government policy that expounds government fiscal restraint (Beer et al 2005). From a sustainability perspective however, the efficiency arguments do not hold water. There are strong cultural, economic, social and environmental reasons why people live in remote and very remote locations. However, under the current government policies the under-provision of infrastructure is a hallmark of non-metropolitan Australia and its lack both pushes people out of communities and turns people off going there for any length of time.

Housing, or the lack of affordable and climatically appropriate housing, is another issue that is a common reason for people not wanting to live in remote locations. Throughout the towns visited by the research team for this project housing was often in short supply, was expensive, and maintenance was difficult due to a paucity of tradespeople. Appropriate housing for Aboriginal employees is also an enduring problem that thwarts employment opportunities in remote places.

Training facilities and higher education for industry is not usually available in remote locations. The centralisation of education facilities in regional and city centres is particularly challenging for Aboriginal people for whom a new environment is a barrier anyway, with the additional stresses of living away from crucial family and friendship networks. For workers already employed in a remote community who are required to upgrade their skills, costs associated with travel and accommodation in a centre can be prohibitive, both for them as individuals, and for their employers.

Similarly, the limited range of health services can hinder attraction and retention strategies, particularly for families with young children or members with a chronic health complaint.

All of these identified issues are problems that are presented as barriers for companies and communities working to attract and retain a skilled and professional workforce, but there are isolated towns and communities that have few services, but to which people are drawn and volunteer to stay. What is it about those towns that sets them apart from the majority? What features would need to be present for a place to be a sustainable remote community?

They are communities that are usually surrounded by stunning scenery which is actively promoted, used and appreciated by the local residents. Although they are isolated, they have a vibrant population base often underpinned by the mining, tourism or pastoral industries. People take pride in the community landscape and the houses are well tended, albeit often old and 'tired'. Very often these towns don't have several generations of families in the region, so families look after each other. Community groups will often work together to attract cultural activities to town. This activity will usually be achieved with the assistance of a corporate sponsor and perhaps the local government authority with whom community members have had to come together, negotiate and work through the logistics to successfully bring the event to town. Social interactions are varied and the community is sufficiently robust that people come and go but new people are always made welcome. The children of the town might have to move away to be educated but their enduring childhood memory is of a place that had job opportunities, was a great place to grow up and would be nice to return to. This is perhaps a utopian scenario, but it is clear from this research that there are some innovative strategies that are being developed in remote locations in Australia that are having a positive impact on attraction and retention of skilled and professional staff.

It is clear that a welcoming community that embraces newcomers and is tolerant of change is likely to not only attract new people to town, but those people are likely to stay, or return after going away for whatever reason. The residents become the community's marketing instruments. Of the towns visited for this project, several stood out for their friendliness and 'can do' attitude. It was evident when we patronised shops, when we booked into the hotel and was thoroughly reinforced at the workshops held in the towns. It would appear that the friendliness and 'can do' attitude is a feature of these communities that has become embedded over a long period of time, probably due to the cyclical nature of mining and its subsequent flow-on effects on the communities. While mining was the *raison d'être* and remains an important part of the local economies, other industries have grown up around the towns, often when mining was at a low point. As well, industry has been encouraged to invest in these towns and there has been significant infrastructure developed that has been borne from government/private/community partnerships. While these towns are technically remote, they have many features that make them regional centres in their own right. Despite their perceived issues with attraction and retention of staff, these towns are growing. They are sufficiently distant from other places that they have had to make their own social resources. These towns had issues typical of all communities, including a drop-off in volunteering, depleted service and sporting clubs, mental health and youth issues, staff turnover problems and frustrations with government's seeming lack of interest. However, these are problems common in all communities.

It is the communities where there are small population bases; entrenched practices and traditions that effectively shut out newcomers; and mono-industries so that residents live and work together and cannot easily escape, that are the 'problem' towns. As well, towns that have overt crime or racial discrimination issues are usually towns that are not attractive to newcomers.

Successful strategies for the attraction and retention of professional and skilled staff revolved around giving potential residents 'a suck it and see experience'. For example, the University Department of Rural Health in New South Wales collaboration with the medical training program in Broken Hill requires that doctors have block experience of several months in the town. Many of the myths and less than congenial image of remote towns and remote service are 'busted' by the diverse medical experience, the warm welcome given the visitors and the varied social experiences offered by a remote community.

A number of organisations and government agencies are working to improve the preparation and specific training provided to staff **before** staff are sent to a remote posting or location. This includes better cultural training and improved support networks both in the location and with head office. Buddy systems and mentoring of new staff with ‘old’ staff is increasingly being developed.

‘Growing your own workforce’ also has potential, particularly for Aboriginal people. Opportunities that enable Aboriginal employees to develop skills without having to leave their communities and support networks have had some success. As Richard Weston said at the Maari Ma Health Service in Broken Hill:

Aboriginal people also must understand the importance of working with white fellas too. Got to work with white fellas if we’re going to fix up an inept system. We, Aboriginal people, need to make the system more appropriate to Aboriginal needs, but to do this, we need to increase Aboriginal input to health services. We have to mentor each other.

However, ‘growing your own workforce’ is not limited to Aboriginal people. Mentoring young people who live in the community, keeping in touch with them when they go away for university or secondary school education through newsletters and e-links, providing vacation work when they have university or school holidays and ‘talking up’ the opportunities of the region makes an impression that adults often overlook. Similarly, negative perceptions of the location, by parents, community leaders and teachers make an impression that has significant negative effects.

The example of the Royal Flying Doctor Service which encourages former employees to return to the Service after having time out for whatever reason also has merit (see Case study 3). Mining companies and some government services, including the health and planning professions are offering cadetships and scholarships to local youth to assist in their tertiary education in the hope that they will return to the remote location in a professional capacity at the end of their training.

All of the strategies canvassed so far have revolved around social and industry practices, but it would appear that financial allowances and increased salaries are also important for many employees and it is these financial incentives that attract people to take jobs in remote communities. Government agencies and many businesses have found that they have to offer a variety of incentives to keep the employees in the remote location. These include housing or rent relief, top-up vacation allowances, return airfares for the employee and their family, paid utilities and even education allowances for children. There is no doubt that the financial rewards are important but not every business is able to offer financial incentives and there are numerous reports of staff poaching.

There were a number of issues raised as potential areas for further investigation.

- A thorough examination of the zone allowances needs to be conducted and an assessment of its role in the attraction and retention of skilled and professional staff to remote locations. This would include a review of taxation and its impact on the zone allowances. The regional prices index is out of date and needs to be urgently revised to compensate people for lifestyle and other expenses incurred while living in regional areas.
- There needs to be a better understanding by the training authorities of the apprenticeship schemes. This includes better integration of training needs and awards across state boundaries, improved incentives for employers, more accommodation and transport support for apprentice block release and reduced employer risk or a safety net for when times are less buoyant in private sector businesses.

- It was suggested that the government could give young employees who take and stay in jobs in remote locations additional HECS repayment relief to encourage longer tenure.

Appropriate and affordable housing that is properly maintained is clearly an issue for workers and their families in remote locations. Until relatively recently, housing has been viewed as a ‘soft’ issue but both the private and public sectors are increasingly being forced to understand that housing can be an economic driver which has a direct influence on the viability of a project. There is an urgent need for housing that is affordable and climatically appropriate for remote residents. As noted by Garnaut (2001), housing, employment opportunities and amenity are all important and inter-related influences on peoples’ decisions to remain or leave regional and remote Australia.

It is important that employers do all they can to market themselves as ‘employers of choice’ and that their workplace location is promoted as a place of opportunities for the employee and their family. There are many attributes about remote Australia that are not broadly known and could be marketed more effectively to attract and retain the skilled and professional staff seeking diversity and unique work experience. As noted by the Institute for Service Professions (2006) recommended improved collaboration (across agencies and different levels of government) including the development of support and mentoring linkages is necessary. Pro-active strategies that ensure new workers are oriented to new locations and work-places, and have access to social support networks and career development opportunities is an important element of this.

Finally, remote and desert Australia is diverse. There is no best answer. Financial incentives alone will not achieve long term employee tenure in remote communities, and social incentives alone cannot be sustained in a tight economic and employment market. While the word ‘partnership’ is over-used, it was very evident that government recognition of its responsibility to the needs of remote communities which is equally matched by corporate sector investment and community commitment is likely to reap long-term benefits and a sustainable future. However, without that mutual and equal commitment, the attraction and retention of a professional and skilled workforce in remote locations will remain a significant challenge.

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