

# INQUIRY INTO THE FUTURE ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION OF REGIONAL CAPITALS TO AUSTRALIA

City of Karratha Submission

April 2015



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Karratha is located in the Pilbara region of Northern Western Australia, about 1,500 kilometres north of Perth. Covering 15,278 km<sup>2</sup>, the City of Karratha is bounded by the Indian Ocean in the north and west, the Town of Port Hedland in the east, and the Shire of Ashburton in the south. It consists of the towns of Karratha, Dampier, Wickham, Roebourne, Point Samson and the historic village of Cossack.

The vast majority of the population in the City of Karratha are directly or indirectly dependent on a relatively narrow but very robust economic base (Syme Marmion & Co, 2014). It includes:

- a processing port and service base for off-shore LNG;
- a port and service base for in-land iron ore (high-quality hematite) operations;
- a port and processing base for iron ore (magnetite) mining operations;
- a producer of selected other minerals (e.g. salt); and
- an administration and regional government centre.

The City of Karratha has long been recognised as the primary commercial, community and tourist focus for the Pilbara Region. Arguably Karratha is amongst the most unique of all regional cities. It lays claim to some of the largest projects in the world, housing trillions of dollars worth of privately owned infrastructure and employing workers from around the world.

Known as the “Powerhouse of the Pilbara”, the City of Karratha has been described as the engine room of Australia’s economic growth, producing the sixth largest economic output of all Australian municipalities. In addition, worker productivity in the City of Karratha is more than 6 times the National figure (economy.id, 2015).

Growth potential in the Pilbara is unparalleled however formal recognition as a regional capital would assist the City of Karratha to fully capitalise on its many strengths.

To date, the State Government has shown its commitment to the Pilbara region by investing more than \$1 billion of Royalties for Regions funding. Much of this has gone into the development of Karratha. Funding has been spent on fast tracking housing construction, revitalising the Karratha Central Business district, improving utilities and roads, as well as creating additional commercial/industrial space in an effort to improve the overall quality of life. Collaboration with private industry and the State Government has resulted in the delivery of new quality infrastructure not previously seen this far north in Western Australia (WA).

The City of Karratha welcomes the Senate’s inquiry into the future role and contribution of regional capitals to Australia. We look forward to developing a partnership with the Commonwealth Government to achieve our vision for the City of Karratha to be formally recognised as the regional capital of the Pilbara. The City of Karratha considers that the following key actions will encourage growth and investment in our region (Table 1):

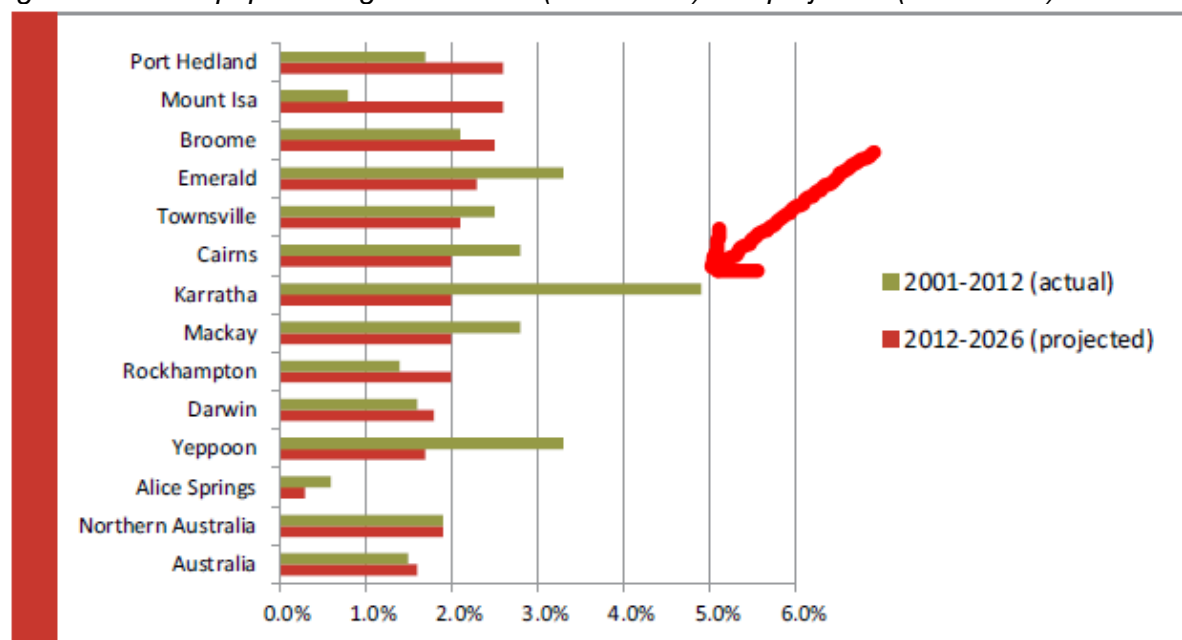
*Table 1: Key Actions for Growth in the City of Karratha*

<b><u>Key Actions</u></b>
<p><b>Action 1 – Recognise the City of Karratha as a regional capital</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on National economic importance, support and encourage the City of Karratha as the Regional Capital of the North West.</li> <li>• Classify the City of Karratha as a regional capital across all Commonwealth Government Departments.</li> <li>• Support the growth and development of the Pilbara Cities Vision for the City of Karratha by assisting in the investment into critical infrastructure in Regional Capitals, increasing the attractiveness of the city to workers and their families to ‘Live, Work and Play’.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Action 2 – Clearly define the term ‘regional capital’</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop criteria that recognises a regional capital’s contribution consists of more than merely population size.</li> <li>• Standardise the definition for ‘regional capital’ across all Commonwealth Government departments.</li> <li>• Recognise the impact of this definition in regards to Commonwealth Government funding and allocation of new initiatives.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Action 3 – Establish a conducive regulatory and legislative environment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include a clear definition of ‘regional capital’ in all relevant legislation.</li> <li>• Ensure regional capitals are appropriately represented in key governance structures.</li> <li>• Prioritise taxation reform to encourage regional population growth and incentivise taxpayers working in remote regions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Action 4 – Invest in critical social infrastructure in regional capitals</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish appropriate facilities for mental health issues and support.</li> <li>• Improve and expand facilities for aged care and family support.</li> <li>• Invest in training institutions for higher education, research and vocational education in the City of Karratha.</li> <li>• Further development of trade training centres (TTCs) to support current and future industry.</li> <li>• Adequately fund emergency services in the Pilbara (including the Royal Flying Doctor Service).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Action 5 – Invest in critical economic infrastructure in regional capitals</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elevate priority of regions for implementation of the National Broadband Network.</li> <li>• Improve telecommunications in the Pilbara, particularly in regards to the availability of mobile coverage as well as access and speed to internet connections.</li> <li>• Support business development and workforce development.</li> <li>• Support and encourage sustainable job outcomes for Pilbara residents.</li> <li>• Encourage industry diversification in regional locations such as Karratha through expansion into international markets.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Action 6 – Enhance the presence of Australian Government agencies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to relocate and house Commonwealth Government services within the City of Karratha.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Action 7 – Coordinated approach and two way communication between all tiers of government</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve communication through two-way engagement with local government, particularly in the early stages of major projects and policy initiatives that affect the region.</li> <li>• Create clear delineation of roles and responsibilities between all tiers of government, so as to alleviate cost pressures on local government.</li> </ul>

## 1. CURRENT DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

With the highest actual population growth rate of any regional centre in northern Australia over the last decade, the total population of the City of Karratha is approximately 25,000 permanent residents (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). This substantial and sustained growth pattern is projected to continue at a higher percentage than Darwin over the next 15 years, albeit off a lower base (Figure 1). The City of Karratha is well on its way to achieving the Pilbara Cities vision of 50,000 residents by 2035.

Figure 1: Annual population growth actual (2001-2012) and projected (2012-2026)



Source: Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, unpublished, 2014.

The Karratha economy is known for its low unemployment, high wages and low levels of welfare dependence. With a very young and diverse population, key demographics for the City of Karratha as defined in the 2011 census include:

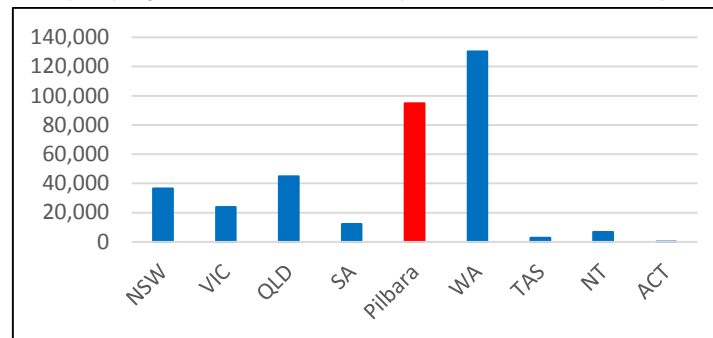
- A median age of 32 years (compared to a WA median of 36 years).
- Very few residents aged over 65 years.
- Non Australian residents are predominately from England, Scotland or Ireland.
- Low tertiary education levels – only 17% of residents have a tertiary qualification (diploma or degree), while 26% have a vocational qualification and over 31% of residents do not have a formal qualification at all.
- Unemployment at 2.2%.
- Indigenous and Torres Strait Islanders make up nearly 8% of the population.

A recent report from the Office of the Chief Economist (Dec, 2014) spoke of the significance of the Pilbara Region in relation to its impact on the National economy:

*"In 2015 the global economy is forecast to grow by 3.6 per cent, driven by strong growth in the US; and lower but still robust growth in emerging economies.... Western Australia dominates Australia's exports to major trading partners, accounting for 71 per cent of exports to China, 50 per cent of exports to Korea and 49 per cent of exports to Japan." About 36.6 per cent (\$94.8 billion worth) of the nation's exports have come out of the Pilbara.... This the **first time** a single State, Western Australia, is producing more than 50 per cent of the nation's exports."*

This view was reinforced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (Figure 2). Both reports recommended increased focus and resources to be allocated to the Pilbara region. A strong support for the WA Government's Pilbara Cities Vision to create attractive, sustainable local communities and places where people choose to settle on a permanent basis, to bring up families with access to high standards of education, health as well as diverse employment and career opportunities.

*Figure 2: Total Exports (\$m) by State 2013-2014 (with total Pilbara exports identified)*



*Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015*

Perhaps the most significant trend to impact directly on the City of Karratha is the transformation of Asia into the economic powerhouse of the world. As this ascent gathers pace, the impact on the Australian economy, society and strategic environment is already visible.

Operating in the same time zone, City of Karratha businesses, exporters and the community already engage regularly with the Asian region – the minerals and energy sector being the most visible. With such a long history of engagement, these links have enabled the City of Karratha to develop strong economic and social ties, including the establishment of a Sister City Relationship with Rizhao in China.

## **2. RECOGNITION OF REGIONAL CAPITALS**

One of the most significant issues for the City of Karratha is the lack of clear definition as to what constitutes a regional capital. Although the Commonwealth Government frequently use the term 'regional capital' or 'regional centre' interchangeably, there is not one definition that spans across government departments. Each department utilises different criteria.

Regional Capitals Australia (RCA) defines a regional capital as a "city that is located outside the state metropolitan urban growth boundary. A regional capital provides a central point to access essential infrastructure, services, business, employment and education for local residents as well as those in surrounding towns and rural areas. These cities perform a 'capital city' role within their regions" (Regional Capitals Australia, 2015). The City of Karratha meets the RCA definition however it has not been formally recognised as a regional capital.

The City of Karratha supports the RCA's definition for a regional capital and recommends the adoption of a legally recognised definition that incorporates an agreed set of criteria able to capture the role of a regional capital (not based solely on population figures).

## **3. FUNDING PROVIDED TO REGIONAL CAPITALS**

Apart from own source revenue (including rates and charges) the City of Karratha's main sources of funding are partnerships with the resource sector and government funding including Royalties for Regions, the Financial Assistance Grant, the Local Road Grant and the Roads to Recovery program.

Although there is no specific Commonwealth funding available to support regional capitals, the WA Government has provided and continues to provide Royalties for Regions funding to the Pilbara region to support the Pilbara Cities of the North initiative designed to transform the Pilbara's mining towns into diverse regional cities. Most of the Royalties for Regions funding provided to the Pilbara region has gone into the development of Karratha to provide more affordable housing, revitalising the Karratha CBD, construction of a new hospital, new schools, improving utilities and roads, as well as creating additional commercial/industrial space in an effort to improve the overall quality of life for residents of the City. In addition, collaboration between local government, private industry and the State Government has resulted in the delivery of new community infrastructure, including the Karratha Leisureplex, Pam Buchanan Family Centre, Frank Butler Community Centre, the Youth Shed and the Dampier Community Hub.

The Financial Assistance Grants incorporate a specific disability factor for regional centres, that offsets the cost of the provision of services to non-residents from surrounding local government districts, however the lack of formal recognition as a Regional Capital, means that the City of Karratha does not receive any additional funding under this disability factor. This is a significant disadvantage given that residents of surrounding municipalities do not make a direct financial contribution to the City.

#### **4. BENEFITS OF ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR REGIONAL CAPITALS**

Given the reliance on regional capitals, the provision of additional funding to create stronger regional capitals will have benefits for the whole region. Additional funding for the City of Karratha is essential if the Pilbara region is to continue expanding its current contribution to the National economy. As we work towards building a Regional Capital of choice, all additional funding would be focused on developing critical economic and social infrastructure.

##### **4.1 Additional Funding for Critical Economic Infrastructure**

Transport Links – The development of public rail and ports in the Pilbara are essential (currently all are owned and operated for private use). Significant road improvements are also required in the Pilbara. This includes the upgrade of the North West Coastal Highway to a national highway status which would create a new major supply chain link. Access roads improvements are also required, particularly to ports and linkages to inland towns such as Newman, Tom Price and Paraburdoo (Regional Development Australia – Pilbara, 2014).

As the second busiest regional airport in Western Australia, the Karratha Airport caters to approximately 870,000 passengers per annum making it Australia's 15<sup>th</sup> busiest airport. Expanding into international markets will significantly drive both industry in Karratha and trade with Asia.

Water – The water schemes servicing Karratha and Port Hedland have only recently been able to meet the demand. They are sitting at capacity and new supply is urgently required.

Power - With ample generation capability, much of the power network is privately owned in the Pilbara. Major changes are required to bring these private systems into the North West Integrated System or an additional power source will be required to cope with any further population growth.



## 4.2 Additional Funding for Critical Social Infrastructure

The majority of socio economic indicators for the Pilbara indicate more focus is required to ensure the region keeps up with the Eastern States especially as it relates to tertiary education, health and housing.

Education – School enrolments continue to increase in the City of Karratha with the 2015 enrolments up by 5.5% on the previous year (Table 2). Ensuring adequate school facilities is therefore essential to maintaining the growth of the region.

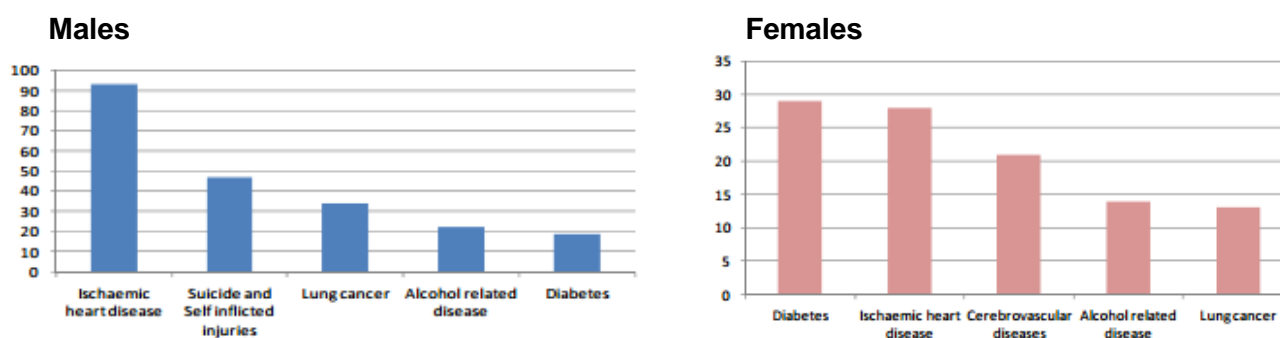
Table 2: State Government School Enrolment for 2015

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>Total City of Karratha</b>	2459	2677	2752	2781	3107	3440	3628
<b>Growth % from Previous Year</b>		9.0	3.0	1.0	11.7	10.8	5.5

In order to support and retain families living in the City of Karratha, funding is required to provide more options for post-secondary education including options for University education.

Health - Of the leading causes of death in the Pilbara, many are preventable (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Leading Cause of Avoidable Mortality in the Pilbara, 1997-2007



Source: WA Country Health Service, 2012

Socio-economic disadvantage can be seen in the Pilbara particularly within Indigenous communities resulting in increased health issues and/or risk factors. Poor health can have a significant impact on a population's ability to participate at school or in the workforce. It also puts pressure on limited health resources.

Potential Preventable Hospitalisations (PPH) accounted for 6,823 (9%) of hospitalisations, a significantly higher figure than the rest of the State. These hospitalisations could have been avoided with disease intervention plans focusing on areas such as diabetes, cancer and vaccinations.

Housing - City planning in partnership with State Government has been establishing a greater land supply for residential housing and to drive down the rental market to more affordable levels. During 2013, this resulted in construction growth statistics for the City of Karratha as follows:

- Total value of building licenses issued \$517 million.
- Number of building licenses issued 1,358
- Planning development application value \$479 million.

However, a substantial increase in the release of Crown land is required to meet the Pilbara Cities Vision.

## 5. INVESTMENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Despite its perceived isolation, the Pilbara is one of the fastest growing regions in Australia. However, to achieve sustainable growth, the City of Karratha needs to support its growth across social, environmental and economic values.

One of the significant challenges to investment in Karratha is its relative isolation and the costs of doing business in the Pilbara (especially the cost of infrastructure construction). Improved transportation and communication links, including high speed broadband are key opportunities for encouraging greater investment in the region.

Over the years, the City of Karratha has been scoped for the development of sustainable energy and alternative fuels. These include solar energy and the creation of an algae biofuel industry. Once again, the high cost of doing business and relative lack of infrastructure has affected the success of these opportunities.

Suggestions for attracting investment and innovation in the City of Karratha include:

- *An innovation centre* – funded by both public and private sectors, this centre would solicit, receive and shape new ideas into actions and projects to benefit the nation.
- *A public investment bank* – aimed at raising and managing funds from government, industry and community sectors, for investment in key infrastructure projects (this also provides opportunities for crowd sourcing and tax incentives).
- *A business incubator* – linking products, producers and services together to provide small business with the infrastructure and support required to get products.
- *Physical and online innovation hubs* - for development of both business and community initiatives.
- *Centres of excellence* - industry partnerships to enhance research and development.

## 6. INCENTIVES AND POLICY MEASURES TO SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

There are currently no incentives for the business sector to start-up or expand into regional locations. Taxation reform is required in order to support workers and business investment in regional capitals. In addition, the implementation of business focused incentives will aid industry growth and diversity. This is essential if a city such as Karratha is to create a sustainable regional capital.

There has been extensive development planning undertaken in the Pilbara. This has resulted in the Karratha City of the North Plan; City of Karratha Strategic Community Plan and Local Planning Strategy, Pilbara Plan (Regional Development Australia, Pilbara); Pilbara Blueprint (Pilbara Development Commission), Pilbara Planning and Infrastructure Framework (Department of Planning). Despite all of these plans and strategies, there is disconnect current governance methods have created significant and discord in the regions (Dale, 2013) as seen in Table 3.

*Table 3: Governance Issues in the Pilbara, 2014*



Competitiveness Index Element	Pilbara Situation
Regional government influence at state and national level	The Pilbara is a high profile regional location and has very good exposure at the state government level and, to a lesser extent, nationally.
Clear roles and responsibilities in regional governance	At the development level there is quite a lot of crossover between individual local governments and state agencies and at development policy level there is some duplication across all three tiers of government.
Financial burden of local government	The local governments have very high financial commitments for the provision of infrastructure and services for a rapidly expanding population, with a limited rate base and are under constant financial pressure.
The local and regional assistance available for businesses	The local and regional bodies have limited funds available for direct business assistance, but it ranks amongst the highest among Australian regions.
Regional government independence (Councils with more autonomy are more able to respond to local needs/demands)	Compared with some other Australian jurisdictions, there is a high reliance on government decisions made outside of the region, particularly at State government level.

Source: *Regional Development Australia, 2014*

A coordinated approach between all tiers of Government is essential in achieving sustainable growth. Full agreement must be made on the goals and strategic direction that will be pursued.

A series of policies, programs, initiatives and incentives are required to assist the City of Karratha to grow sustainably, such as:

- Establish an open, adaptable and resilient economy through the reform and investment across the five pillars of productivity – skills and education, innovation, infrastructure, tax reform and regulatory reform.
- Invest in developing creativity and design-based thinking within industry sectors.
- Improve the visibility and accessibility to programs designed to assist local industry to be highly innovative and competitive.
- Encourage trade, investment and partnerships with the City of Karratha through openness and integration.
- Ensure stability and sustainable security of the Asian region through the building of trust, co-operation and participation in regional developments.
- Create opportunities for Asian market connections and the development of Asian literacy to build closer partnerships through the understanding of cultures and languages.
- Establishment of innovation zones and business packaging opportunities.
- Locate government departments in the regions to support

## 7. CONCLUSION

The pressure on urban areas is increasing; Australia's capital cities make up 64% of the country's the population. There is no major urban centre outside of the Perth metropolitan area in the state's north-west, despite being the biggest contributor to the economic activity. Establishing Pilbara cities will enable the growing population to be distributed across the state, and help to alleviate the growth pressure on Perth as the capital city. Within the Pilbara, the City of Karratha is central to the current resources surge, with companies operating and developing multi-billion dollar oil, gas and mineral projects within the municipality and often locating a significant workforce in Karratha.

The State Government has recognised the opportunities for capitalising on this natural abundance, with a view to turning Karratha into a city of the north - a destination of choice for individuals and businesses wanting to take advantage of the area's strategic importance.

But in recent years there has been emerging evidence that Australia's infrastructure is not keeping pace with the demands placed on it by a growing population and economy, and that the current approach to infrastructure funding and provision needs improvement. The work of Infrastructure Australia and the revival of Commonwealth interest in Australia's Regional Centres and Cities and infrastructure provide a significant opportunity to advance the sustainable growth of regional centres such as Karratha. It is recognised that there is a key opportunity to establish strong partnerships between all levels of government to progress infrastructure, transport and other major proposals.

Government has a key role to play in the development and upgrading of Karratha as a key strategic regional centres, to ensure efficient and effective use of infrastructure, ensure high quality urban places and spaces where people have a choice of housing and employment supported by a public transport system that allows equitable access and reduces the cost of living, and travelling time.

Karratha is currently part of a major urban regeneration project. Urban regeneration projects are often cost prohibitive due to generally limited development scale in existing and high upfront infrastructure costs. However, the benefits of undertaking urban regeneration projects have a wider impact than just the immediate development area, including building capacity for economic development, sustainability and employment generation.

It is well understood that the Pilbara is a region of vital national significance and its contribution to the overall Australian economy cannot be underestimated. The City of Karratha supports an industry sector that contributes over \$80 billion to the National economy and has over a trillion dollars' worth of private investment in industry infrastructure. Despite possible market volatilities and new competing sources of commodities, the minerals and energy sector will continue to expand at an unprecedented pace. Coinciding with this, is increased pressure for adequate social and economic infrastructure, highly skilled staff and diversification of industry.

Population growth to date has far exceeded expectations. However, current social, economic and political deficiencies provide obvious disincentives to growth. Weaknesses of the region have been identified in terms of critical infrastructure for health, education and the basic provision of services - each failing to meet community demand or expectations. While high living costs and high costs to do business impact significantly on whether a new or potential resident will make the Pilbara their permanent home.

Despite these challenges, the City of Karratha possesses strengths in the well-established partnerships with global companies in the resources sector, a young population with a strong entrepreneurial spirit, high disposable incomes and family friendly living. The inspirational beauty of the rugged landscape is also a drawcard for many, offering both career and recreational opportunities. It is these strengths that form the foundation for the many opportunities available to the Pilbara region.

Indications show that unless major intervention occurs, the value delivered by the Pilbara will be compromised through the inaction of underinvesting in the region. Concern has been expressed in a large number of studies with input from the resource sector and all levels of Government that the current practises are failing to develop sustainable local communities.

The Pilbara Cities: Karratha, City of the North Plan provides a framework to establishing sustainable communities in the North West of Australia. However a strong partnership with

Commonwealth Government is required to strengthen and deliver a long term strategic and sustainable focus to the Pilbara region.

The City of Karratha is the Regional Capital of the Pilbara. And as such, the City will continue to support surrounding communities. We will continue to advocate for the key drivers of change that are essential to the development of social and economic infrastructure, the creation of industry diversification, and the continued growth of our contribution to the National economy.

As the regional capital, we look forward to developing a strong collaboration with the Commonwealth to ensure that our region obtains the appropriate investment and resources that are essential to sustaining both our region and the National economy. The time is now for creating strong resilient regional communities for the future. Karratha is no longer a 'mining boom town' but a regional capital and it should be recognised as such.

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Further information can be obtained from the following sources:

- City of Karratha Strategic Plans - <http://karratha.wa.gov.au/plans-strategic-business-community>
- City of Karratha Local Planning Strategy - <http://karratha.wa.gov.au/local-planning-strategy>
- City of Karratha Economic Prospectus - <http://karratha.wa.gov.au/economic-prospectus>
- Pilbara Cities Vision. [www.pdc.wa.gov.au/pilbara-cities/](http://www.pdc.wa.gov.au/pilbara-cities/)
- Karratha City of the North Plan - [www.pdc.wa.gov.au/index.php/download\\_file/view/456/](http://www.pdc.wa.gov.au/index.php/download_file/view/456/)
- The Pilbara Regional Plan 2012 – 2017. [http://www.rdapilbara.org.au/resources/site1/General/Publication%20Reports/RDAP\\_Regional\\_Plan\\_2012-2017-Final-Updated%2021\\_2\\_13.pdf](http://www.rdapilbara.org.au/resources/site1/General/Publication%20Reports/RDAP_Regional_Plan_2012-2017-Final-Updated%2021_2_13.pdf)
- The Pilbara Report 2012: Exploring Opportunities in the Nation's Powerhouse. [http://www.rdapilbara.org.au/resources/site1/General/Publication%20Reports/Pilbara%20Report\\_WEB\\_spreads.pdf](http://www.rdapilbara.org.au/resources/site1/General/Publication%20Reports/Pilbara%20Report_WEB_spreads.pdf)
- City of Karratha Submission to the Green Paper on Developing Northern Australia - [https://northernaustralia.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/online-submissions/city\\_of\\_karratha.pdf](https://northernaustralia.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/online-submissions/city_of_karratha.pdf)
- City of Karratha Submission to the 2015 Defence White Paper - [www.defence.gov.au/Whitepaper/docs/186-CityofKarratha.pdf](http://www.defence.gov.au/Whitepaper/docs/186-CityofKarratha.pdf)

**Videos you may wish to view:**

- The City of Karratha: <http://vimeo.com/101484646>
- Regional Capitals: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=StPOpludZB0>