



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Regional Development**



Wheatbelt:

a region in profile 2014



Foreword

Wheatbelt: a region in profile was prepared by the Department of Regional Development in conjunction with the Wheatbelt Development Commission to provide a snapshot of the region's economy.

The Wheatbelt region's economy is based on grain crops such as wheat, barley and oats and mining in the east. The region also boasts world renowned rock formations and, in season, an incredible abundance of wildflowers.

The Royalties for Regions program is an important State Government initiative that will allocate more than \$1 billion for regional projects in 2014-15, including more than \$163 million in the Wheatbelt region. Since it began in 2008, Royalties for Regions has allocated \$4.2 billion to more than 3,500 projects across regional Western Australia.

Through programs like Royalties for Regions, the State Government is increasingly investing in infrastructure and services to grow the state, including implementing major economic, social and community development projects that arise from the Regional Investment Blueprints.

This publication contains the latest information available on the economic development conditions of the Wheatbelt region and is one of a series of nine regional economic summary documents.

I invite you to read *Wheatbelt: a region in profile* and trust you will find it interesting and informative.



Hon Terry Redman MLA
Minister for Regional Development



Regional Development Commissions

The State's nine Regional Development Commissions were established by the Western Australian Parliament following the ratification of the *Regional Development Commissions Act 1993*.

The role of each commission is to:

- maximise job creation and improve career opportunities in the region
- develop and broaden the regional economy
- identify infrastructure services to promote economic and social development of the region
- provide information and advice to promote business development within the region
- seek to ensure that the standard of, and access to, government services in the regions is comparable to the Perth metropolitan area.

For the purposes of achieving that role a commission is expected to:

- promote the region
- facilitate coordination between relevant statutory bodies and State government agencies
- cooperate with representatives of industry and commerce, employer and employee organisations, education and training institutions and other sections of the community within the region
- identify the opportunities for investment in the region and encourage that investment
- identify the infrastructure needs of the region and encourage the provision of that infrastructure in the region
- cooperate with departments of the public service of the State and the Commonwealth and other agencies, instrumentalities and statutory bodies of the State and the Commonwealth in order to promote equitable delivery of services within the region
- cooperate with local governments in order to promote equitable delivery of services within the region.





- Major Road
- Formed Road
- Railway
- Local Government Boundary
- Gas Pipeline
- Urban Centres and Localities
- Population more than 5000
- 500 - 5000
- less than 500
- Aboriginal communities
- ✈ Perth Airport
- ~ River
- ☪ Lake
- National Park
- State Forest
- ✈ Airfields
- Fishing
- Horticulture
- Important Resource Projects**
- Operating or Under Development shown in blue
- Proposed shown in red
- Under Care and Maintenance or Closed shown in purple
- ⬆ Gasfield
- ⬆ Gold
- ⬆ Heavy mineral sands
- ⬆ Iron ore
- ⬆ Kaolin clay
- ⬆ Major power station
- ⬆ Solar Power
- Nickel
- ⬆ Titanium pigments
- ⬆ Silica

WHEATBELT REGION

KEY FEATURES



Government of Western Australia
Department of Regional Development



Government of Western Australia
Department of Water

This map is a product of the Department of Water. Spatial Services and was printed on 06/08/2013.

This map was produced with the intent that it be used for display purposes at the scale of 1:700,000 when printing at A0.

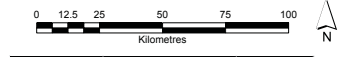
While the Department of Water has made all reasonable efforts to ensure the accuracy of the data, the department accepts no responsibility for any inaccuracies and persons relying on the data do so at their own risk.

Data and Projection Information

Vertical Datum: Australian Height Datum (AHD)
Horizontal Datum: Geocentric Datum of Australia 94
Projection: Geocentric
Spheroid: Australian National Spheroid

Project Information

Client: Regional Development and Lands
Map Author: Patricia Farrel
Filepath: J:\projects\Project01_Serials\DT1010038_Pilbara_Director007\CD\03\Revised_Alex_Bell/CD_Maps\mxd\2013_A0.mxd
Filename: Perspective_Wheatbelt
Compilation date: 06/08/2013
Edition: 1



DATA DICTIONARY		
THEME	SOURCE	DATE
Towns	LANDGATE/ABS	May 2013
Road Centrelines	LANDGATE	September 2012
Hydrography	LANDGATE	August 2009
Tenure	Department of Conservation	July 2013
Important Resource Projects	DMP - Modified from MINEDEX Database	July 2013

Overview

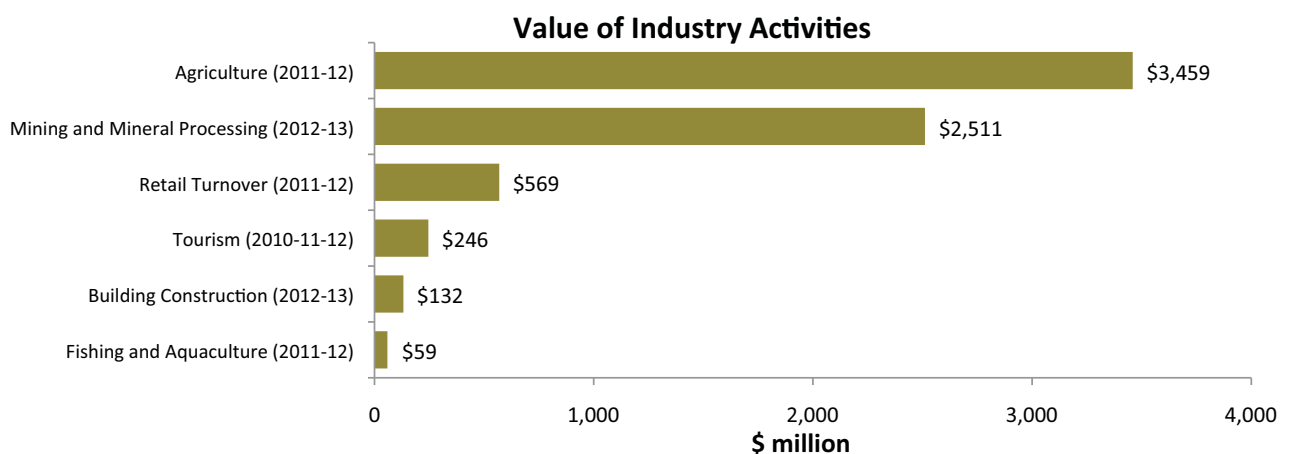
The Wheatbelt comprises an area of 154,862 square kilometres across 43 local government authorities. The Shire of Northam is the largest regional centre with population distributed throughout the region. The Wheatbelt is renowned for wildflower displays and offers a variety of attractions and activities including self-drive trails, granite outcrops, fauna and walking trails. Situated close to Perth, the Wheatbelt is recognised as a popular tourist destination. Two of the state's most significant transport routes - the Great Eastern and Great Northern highways pass through the region, essentially linking Perth to the north of Western Australia and east coast of Australia.

The Wheatbelt has a rich agricultural history and the economy is built on this primary industry. The Wheatbelt's agricultural industry is the state's main producer of cereal crops and

contributes other products such as canola, olives, vegetables, wine grapes, honey, citrus fruits and livestock. In 2011-12, value reached nearly \$3.5 billion. More recently, the economy has diversified to strong mining and mineral processing. There are gold, nickel and iron ore deposits in the shires of Westonia, Yilgarn, Kondinin and Dandaragan.

Retail trade, construction and fisheries output also support the economy.

Royalties for Regions has contributed to numerous projects enhancing the region's economic, business and social development. The 2014-15 State Budget allocated \$163 million for development of the region, including upgrade and construction of education and training facilities, community and health infrastructure.

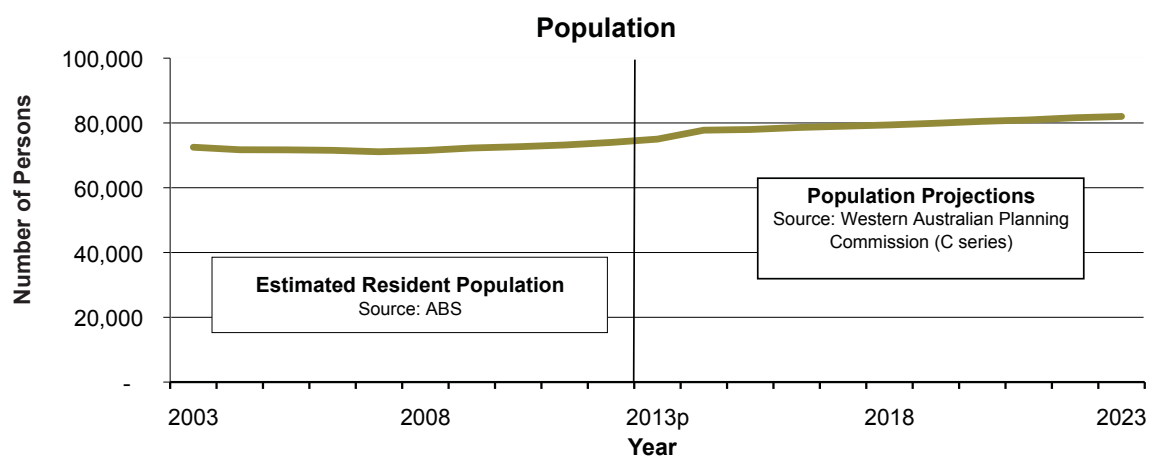


Source: Department of Regional Development.
Note: Industry activity is an estimation of the gross value of production of key regional industries.

Population

The estimated resident population of the Wheatbelt was 75,000 in 2013, representing three per cent of Western Australia's population. The largest resident base of the 43 local government areas (LGAs) is the Shire of Northam with more than 11,700 people. In many of the LGAs, the community sizes are between 500-1,000 residents.

The region's population remained steady over the decade to 2013. More recently, strong population growth is evident in the shires of Chittering, Northam and Gingin. Population growth in these locations was assisted by good road access to Perth and attractive lifestyle options. Growth in other parts of the region is attributable to the Wheatbelt's broader industry development.



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics and WA Planning Commission.

Region/Sub-region	2003	2013	% Share 2013	AAGR 2003-2013 %	Aboriginal ERP 2011
WHEATBELT	72,504	75,009	100%	0.3	5%
Avon	25,120	26,958	36%	0.7	5%
Central Coast	7,410	8,573	11%	1.5	2%
Central East	10,964	9,835	13%	-1.1	5%
Central Midlands	10,052	11,333	15%	1.2	5%
Wheatbelt South	18,958	18,310	24%	-0.3	5%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics. Note: AAGR = Average Annual Growth Rate.

According to the 2011 ABS census more than 4,100 Aboriginal Australians live in the region, reflecting approximately five per cent of the region's total. The Wheatbelt's five subregions: Avon, Central Coast, Central East, Central Midlands and Wheatbelt South are positioned to capitalise on a number of unique attributes, enabling growth into the future.



Labour force

Western Australia experienced a rise in employment levels over the last decade driven by population and industry growth, and international demand for raw material exports. The Wheatbelt recorded its highest level of employment at nearly 45,800 persons in 2012-13, increasing over the previous four

years. The unemployment rate reached a low of 2.5 per cent in 2011-12, remaining consistently lower than the state trend. Labour market conditions moderated over the 12 months to 2012-13 with some softening of employment growth and an increase in regional and state unemployment rates.



Source: Department of Employment with additional estimates by the Department of Regional Development.
Note: Labour Force is an average of the financial year's quarterly data.

Industry of Employment	2011	2006
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	24.6%	30.2%
Education and Training	8.2%	7.6%
Retail Trade	8.1%	8.6%
Health Care and Social Assistance	7.9%	7.2%
Construction	7.2%	5.9%
Public Administration and Safety	6.6%	6.1%
Manufacturing	5.5%	5.3%
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	5.3%	4.7%
Accommodation and Food Services	4.5%	4.1%
Mining	4.4%	2.8%
Other Services	3.5%	3.0%
Wholesale Trade	3.5%	3.8%
Real Estate, Administrative and Support Services	2.5%	2.5%
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	2.3%	2.1%
Inadequately described/not stated	2.0%	2.5%
Financial and Insurance Services	1.4%	1.5%
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	1.4%	1.1%
Arts and Recreation Services	0.6%	0.5%
Information Media and Telecommunications	0.4%	0.5%

Source: ABS 2011 and 2006 Census of Population and Housing; usual residence.

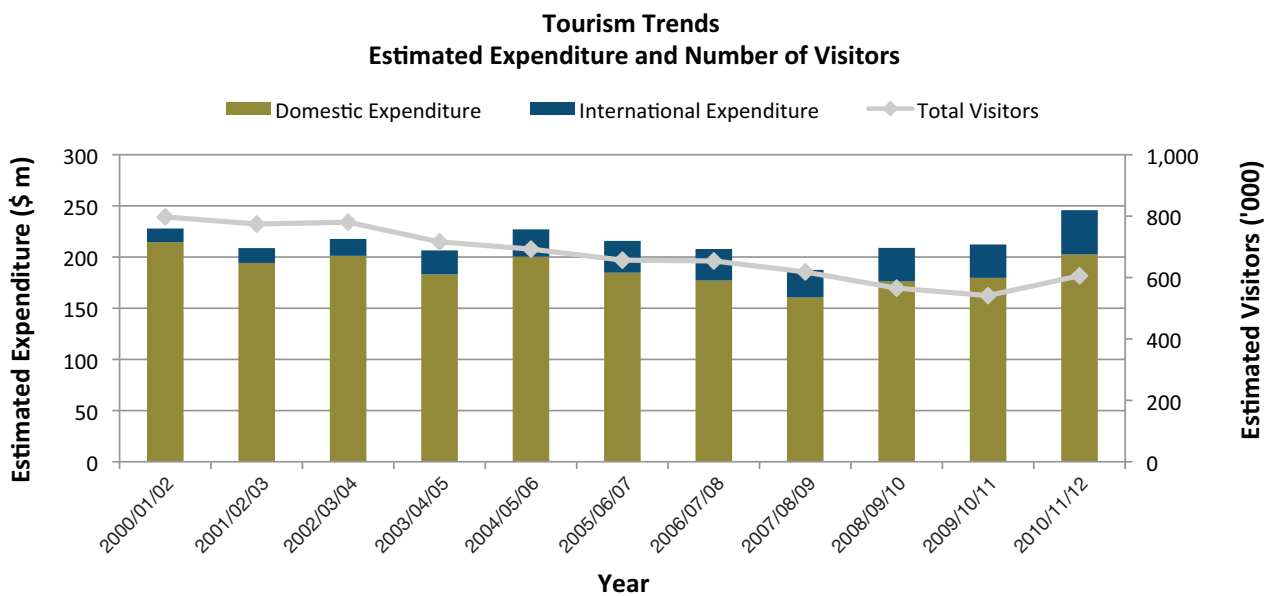
Agriculture, forestry and fishing has historically been the greatest employing industry in the Wheatbelt with the 2011 ABS census reporting employment at 24.6 per cent, lower than 2006. Poor seasonal conditions and diversified activities, however, have spread employment opportunities across emerging industries, such as construction and mining. The recommissioning of iron ore and mineral salt production in the Shire of Yilgarn increased employment in the construction phase and mining phase of operations.

Tourism

Tourism in the Wheatbelt capitalises on proximity to Perth, offering a variety of activities and attractions including New Norcia, the Avon Valley, Wave Rock and the popular wildflower season. Home to the Pinnacles Desert, located 20 kilometres from the coastal town of Cervantes, the drive through Nambung National Park allows visitors the fantastic opportunity to see unique limestone

formations and Australian wildlife in its natural environment.

The region hosts the second most visitors outside Perth after the South West, positively impacting on the economy and supported by the growth of international investment in recent years. According to Tourism Western Australia, the industry attracted an average of



Source: Tourism Western Australia and Department of Regional Development.

605,700 overnight visitors annually between 2010 to 2012. In the same period, turnover was estimated at \$246 million per annum.

The region offers a number of self-drive trails through natural attractions such as wildflowers, granite outcrops and CY O'Connor's pipeline through Wheatbelt scenery. The region also accommodates sporting events including motor sports, horseracing and adventure activities such as white water rafting, sky diving and hot air ballooning.



Mean taxable income

The mean taxable income for the Wheatbelt region was estimated at \$63,000 in 2010-11 representing an annual average growth rate of 6.5 per cent over 10 years. The region's average was still below the state average however, of nearly \$74,000 for the year.

The increase was driven by growth in the labour force arising from greater employment levels, increased hourly wages and longer work hours.

Resources activity influenced wages in the mining industry, as well as construction and wholesale trade industries servicing the increased production. This is evidenced by the higher incomes offered to iron ore mining in the Shire of Yilgarn, where the average income was \$79,000.



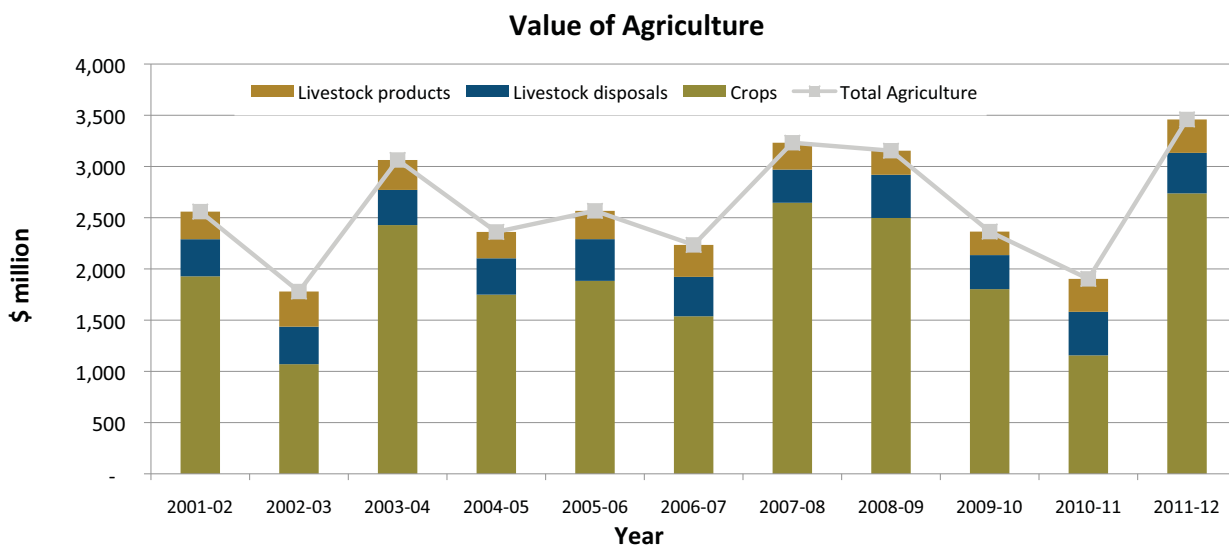
	Median Weekly Personal Income 2011	Mean Taxable Income 2010-11
Avon	\$495	\$62,968
Central Coast	\$515	\$65,256
Central East	\$627	\$66,430
Central Midlands	\$561	\$66,038
Central South	\$526	\$59,047
Western Australia	\$662	\$73,591

Source: ABS 2011 Census of Population and Housing, Australian Taxation Office and Department of Regional Development (2010-11).

Agriculture

The Wheatbelt is Western Australia's most significant farming region and agriculture is fundamental to its economy. In 2011-12, agriculture production in the region was valued at approximately \$3.5 billion, accounting for 46 per cent of the state's total value. Over the past decade however, the industry was greatly

affected by drought and other climate factors, increased production costs and commodity price sensitivity, causing fluctuations to harvest and production value. Positively, innovation and a bumper 2013 harvest positions the industry to continue long term growth.



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics and Department of Regional Development.

In 2011-12, crops were valued at \$2.7 billion with wheat making up half of Western Australia's total wheat production, totalling \$1.7 billion alone. Wheat is a staple food for domestic consumption and exported largely to Asian markets such as Indonesia, South Korea



and China. The Wheatbelt also produces 39 per cent of the state's barley and 70 per cent of grain oats, valued at \$383 million and \$106 million respectively.

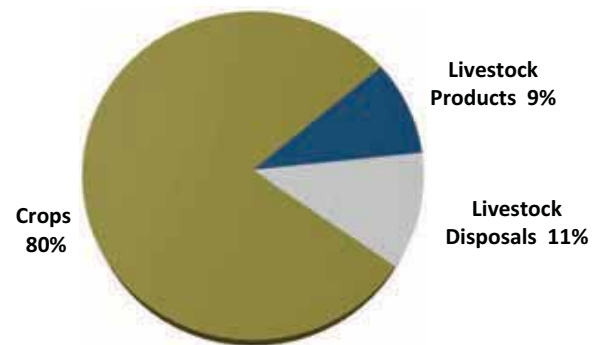
Livestock disposals were valued at \$395 million, representing 11 per cent of the region's value in 2011-12. This included sheep and lamb slaughtering as the greatest product at \$265 million.

The total value of livestock products was \$326 million. Wool production originated during the nation's colonisation in the 1800s and the industry continues to produce a high quality and desired commodity, exported largely to China, India and Italy. In 2011-12 the value soared to include over half of Western Australia's output at \$298 million.

Although broadacre agriculture will remain as the dominant agricultural activity, opportunities will arise for growth in the horticulture industry within the shires of Gingin, Chittering and Dandaragan. This is due to the locations benefiting from high rainfall, suitable ground water and proximity to market. Viticulture is also an expanding industry with the southern and western areas of the region proving to be ideal for grape production.



Agriculture Commodities 2011-12



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

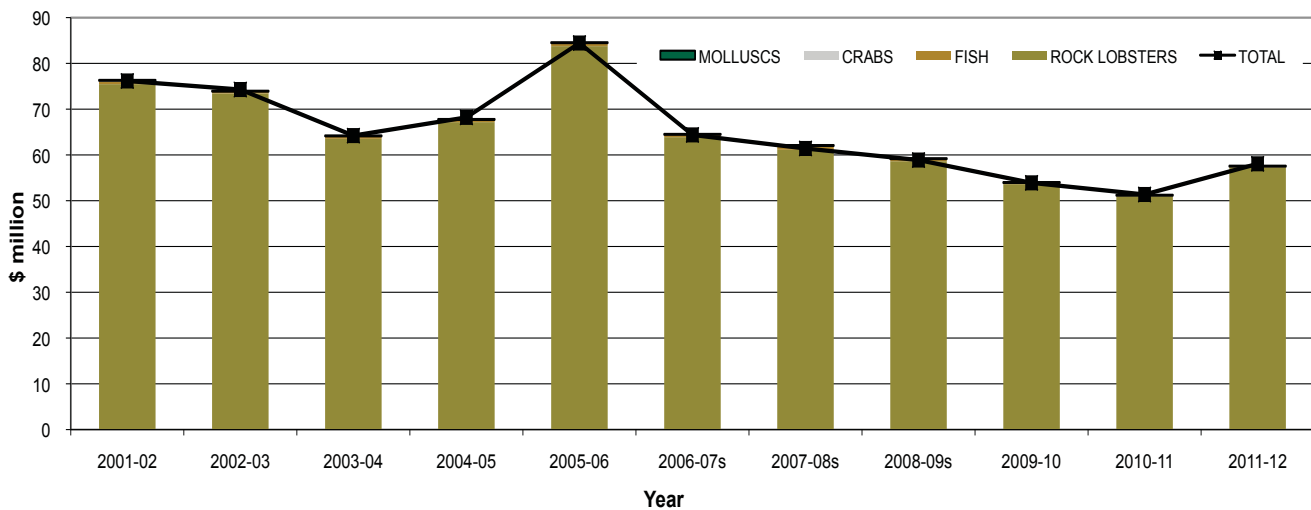
Fishing and aquaculture

Commercial fishing in the Wheatbelt supports the Western Australian rock lobster fishery, which is Australia's most valuable single species wild capture fishery. This value was \$57 million for 2011-12 and accounted for 32 per cent of the state's rock lobster value. There are smaller quantities of fish, crabs and molluscs contributing to the Wheatbelt fishing catch. The fisheries operate sustainably in the region and are internationally recognised for

research practices and best management, ensuring industry longevity. Production value has remained steady in recent years.

Aquaculture production is relatively small with an industry value of less than \$1 million. Typical aquaculture activity includes fish and yabbie farming with potential for cultivation of abalone and farming beta-carotene.

Fishing Catch Estimated Value



Source: Department of Fisheries with further estimates by the Department of Regional Development.

Aquaculture

	Estimated Value (\$'000)			
	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Finfish	272	267	444	592
Yabbies	487	531	234	226
Total	759	797	678	818

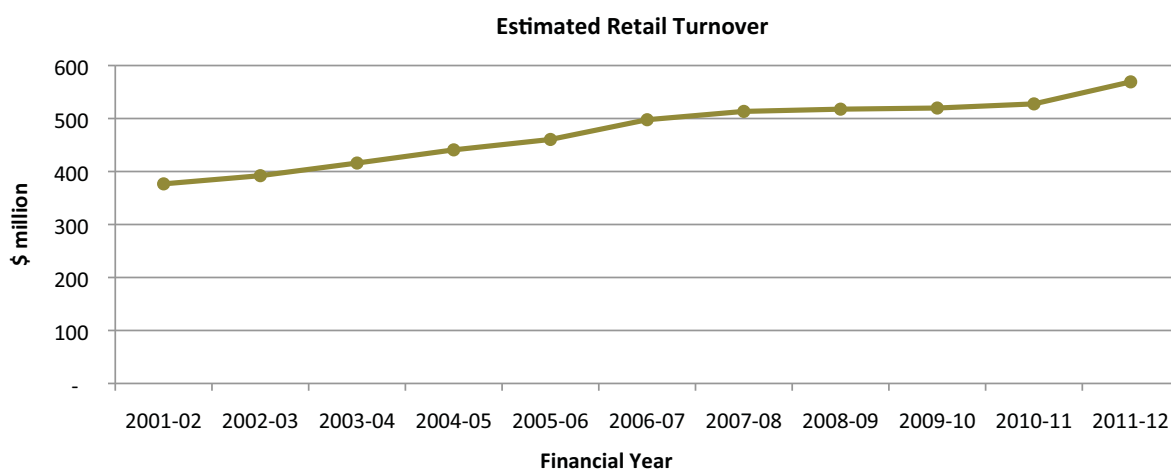
Source: Department of Fisheries with further estimates by the Department of Regional Development.



Retail turnover

The retail sector is a large employer and an important contributor to the Wheatbelt's economy. The industry experienced steady growth over the last 10 years, increasing 50 per cent from an estimated \$377 million in 2001-02 to \$569 million in 2011-12.

Sales growth slowed in recent years, partly attributed to changes in buyer behaviour as consumers' propensity to save a greater proportion of income is coupled with increased living costs. The retail sector is strong in all five regional centres; Jurien Bay, Merredin, Moora, Narrogin and Northam. There are opportunities for retail outlets to service an increasingly diverse economic base.



Source: Based on ABS State Retail Turnover. Regional estimates by the Department of Regional Development.

Mining and mineral processing

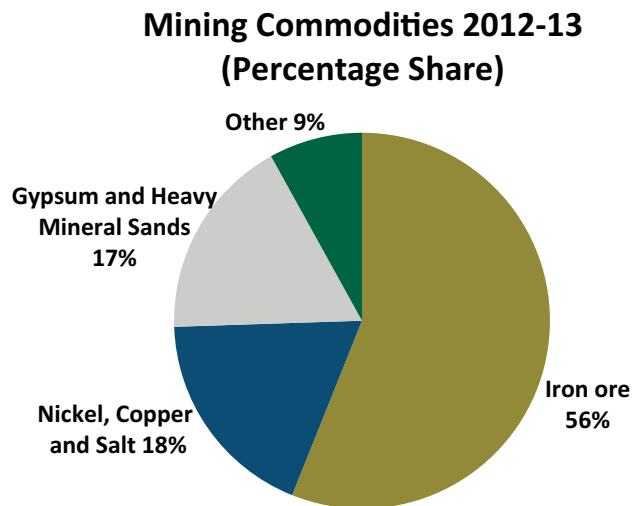
Western Australia's resources industry grew significantly over the past decade due to unprecedented overseas demand, which resulted in a mineral production and revenue increase from \$27.9 billion in 2002-03 to \$101.8 billion in 2012-13. Wheatbelt mineral production expanded over the past decade, increasing from an estimated value of \$452 million in 2002-03 to \$2.5 billion in 2012-13.

Iron ore comprised 56 per cent of the region's total mining production, valued at \$1.4 billion in 2012-13. Koolyanobbing mining operations, located 50 kilometres northeast of Southern Cross, expanded in 2004 to include two new mines at Windarling and Mount Jackson. The ore mined in the Wheatbelt region is exported through Esperance and Kwinana.

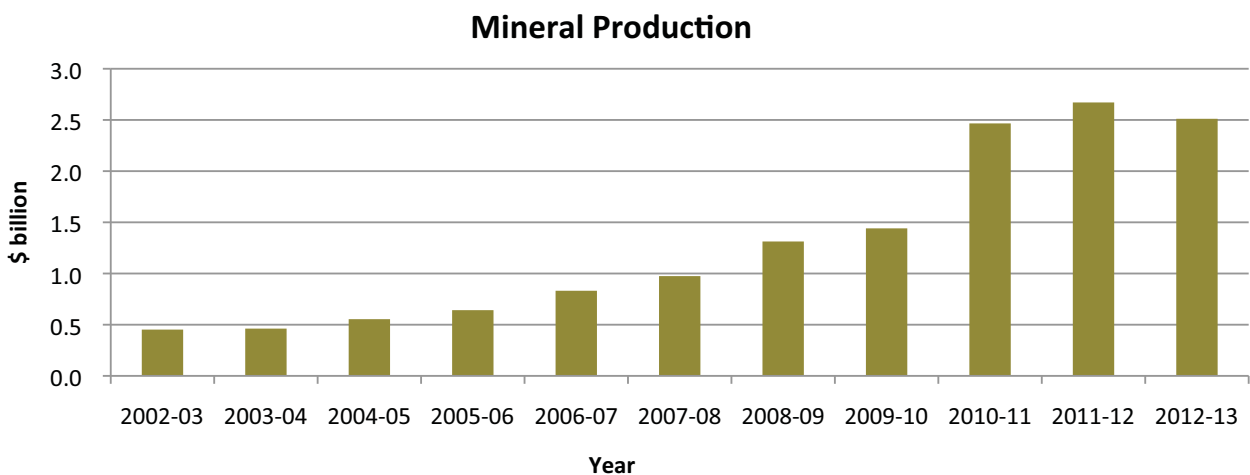
Nickel, copper and salt accounted for 18 per cent of total mining production, valued at \$462 million. Western Australia's largest export market for nickel is China, followed by Canada and Japan.

Gypsum and heavy mineral sands were valued at \$439 million in 2012-13 (17 per cent of the region's production). Mineral sands are extracted and processed at Cooljarloo. The mine produces zircon and rutile. Rutile is processed to produce synthetic rutile and titanium dioxide pigment.

Basic raw materials for the building and construction industry complement other mining commodities.



Source: Department of Mines and Petroleum with further estimates by the Department of Regional Development.



Source: Department of Mines and Petroleum with further estimates by the Department of Regional Development.

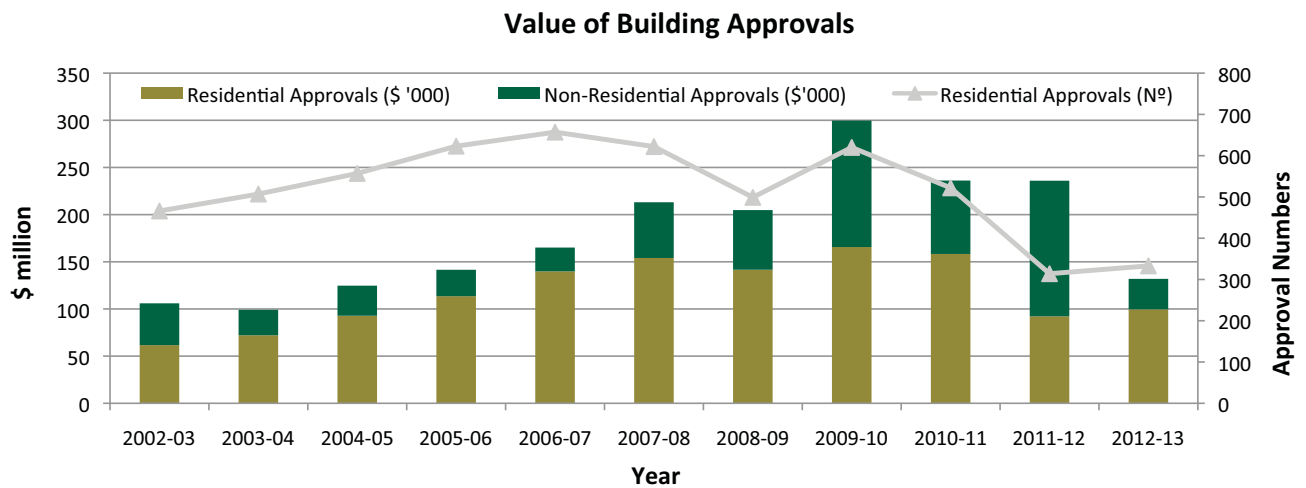
Building approvals

Building approval activity provides a strong insight into planned work and the housing construction likely to follow. This activity acts as a strong indicator in the construction industry. Compared to the rest of the nation, Western Australia remained robust over the decade to 2012-13 in construction value and approval numbers.

The total value of building approvals for the Wheatbelt was approximately \$132 million

in 2012-13. Approximately 330 residential buildings were approved for construction, at a value of \$100 million. New building laws and a certified application process introduced in 2012 means the approval process is now more efficient and consistent across the state.

The value of non-residential construction peaked in 2009-10 at \$147 million.



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics.



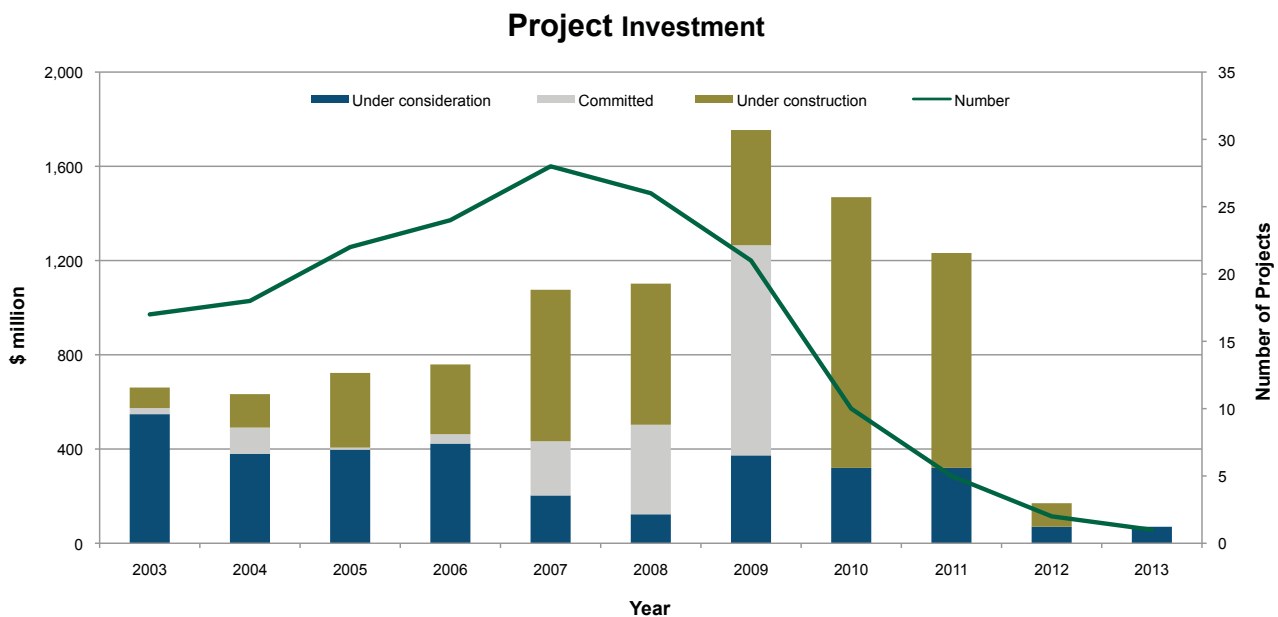
Project investment

Project investment data is divided across three categories: under consideration, committed and under construction. Projects under consideration are being scoped for further development. Once the projects are approved they are committed, and under construction once building commences.

For the last decade, Western Australia was the fastest growing economy in Australia fuelled by investment contribution to the mining sector's construction phase. The Wheatbelt's investment value peaked in 2009 with steady

development of mining projects in the shires of Gingin and Yilgarn. The construction of transport and infrastructure facilities required to service the industry also benefitted. Recent years depict a slower project and investment cycle, but further iron ore proposals are under consideration.

The Western Australian economy is positioned to embrace a broader investment profile beyond mining for transitional growth into the future.



Source: Deloitte Access Economics Investment Monitor and Department of Regional Development.
 Note: The graph represents investment value for calendar year.

Aboriginal Australians

At the 2011 ABS census, Aboriginal people represented approximately six per cent of the Wheatbelt's population. Industries with the largest Aboriginal employment participation include tourism, arts and crafts, and government and community service organisations.

A number of initiatives are being explored to increase the employment rate of Aboriginal residents in the Wheatbelt region. This includes the Gnaala Karla Booja initiative, which provides opportunities in land-based activities (farm, forestry and land management), tourism, arts, and cultural education. In addition, the Mogumber Mission could be converted to an employment and training site for cultural healing and community development.

Royalties for Regions has made a significant impact in supporting Aboriginal arts. The Community Arts Network WA (CANWA) project at Narrogin uses art as an individual and social/community healing and development tool. The CANWA program is also operating successfully in Kellerberrin with both projects providing employment and skill development opportunities for local Noongar people.

Avon Youth in Northam established a reference group of local elders, which was incorporated as the Maali Northam Aboriginal Circle of Elders. Their aims include improving business and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people and working towards social cohesion. Directions Workforce Solutions also received Royalties for Regions support to enhance Aboriginal employment opportunities. The Wheatbelt Development Commission has supported these initiatives.

The State Government is also in the process of recognising the native title rights of the Noongar people through the Single Native Title claim. Three parts of the native title claim lie within the Wheatbelt and include the Yued, Gnaala Karla Booja and Ballardong groups. Once settlement is reached it will transfer funds and crown land to designated Aboriginal groups as an investment in the future of the Noongar people and Noongar cultural heritage.

Social and economic infrastructure

The Wheatbelt's strategic location

The Wheatbelt is uniquely and strategically located between major mining regions and the metropolitan area. It is in close proximity to national and state transport infrastructure. This affords the Wheatbelt a strong competitive advantage in transport, logistics and light manufacturing, at a time when global demand for such services are accelerating. The region is on major east-west rail and road corridors and north-south road freight routes providing strategic access to both a critical mass of urban populations in Perth and the South West and the major mining regions of the Pilbara, Mid West, and Goldfields. Passenger rail services include the Prospector (Perth-Kalgoorlie), the MerredinLink (Perth-Merredin) and the AvonLink (Perth-Northam) and while passenger bus services operate throughout the Wheatbelt there is great opportunity for investment in inter- and intra-community public transport.

Modernising infrastructure to enhance community well-being is essential to meet changing demographics including the region's ageing population and rapid population growth along the Central Coast and peri-urban areas of the Avon and Central Midlands.

Water infrastructure

Potable water requirements for the inland Wheatbelt are serviced by a number of schemes, which are connected to the state's Integrated Water Supply Scheme. There are large ground water reserves in the region's

Central Coast and Central Midlands sub regions. These ground water reserves are utilised for potable and industrial (including agricultural) purposes. Ground water is fully allocated in some areas, resulting in water access issues for future population growth. The Water Corporation is responsible for the treatment and disposal of wastewater in most of the Wheatbelt shires.

Energy infrastructure

The Wheatbelt's electricity demand is serviced largely by the South West Interconnected System (SWIS), which is operated by Western Power. The Wheatbelt generates 60 per cent of the state's renewable energy, with wind farms operating in the shires of Merredin and Dandaragan which are connected to the SWIS. The state's three major transmission lines traverse the Wheatbelt: Muja via the Narrogin South Terminal to Kalgoorlie, Perth to Kalgoorlie, and Perth to Geraldton. This presents opportunities for the Wheatbelt to provide renewable energy solutions for the entire south west of the state. The Wheatbelt's Red Gully Gas and Condensate Processing Facility in the Shire of Gingin commenced operations in May 2013.

Telecommunications

Telecommunications services are critical to business growth, liveability and safety and emergency services. While current infrastructure in the Wheatbelt is inconsistent, there have been recent investments in improvements including the Regional Mobile

Communications Project and the forthcoming National Broadband Network optical fibre/ wireless roll out. Digital television is available throughout the Wheatbelt via either re-transmission towers or installation of a satellite dish and receiver. There are 41 Community Resource Centres located across the Wheatbelt forming a telecommunications and government services network.

Education

There are more than 80 educational facilities located in the Wheatbelt with enrolments of more than 10,000 students in public and private schools. There are also three residential colleges and a School of Isolated and Distance Education. Complemented by three agricultural colleges, CY O'Connor Institute is the primary provider of post compulsory education in the Wheatbelt. Campuses are located in Merredin, Moora, Narrogin and Northam. The University of Western Australia's Future Farm is located in Pingelly, focussing on mixed-enterprise operation incorporating studies in renewable energies, agricultural science, business management, the natural environment and architecture.

Child care

There are 43 licensed private and volunteer run childcare centres throughout the Wheatbelt that offer a range of care options from occasional to long day care. Demand is growing for childcare to expand in the Wheatbelt, particularly in the larger centres.

Health

There are 20 hospitals, 18 community and public health services, four nursing posts, four aged care service facilities, three health centres and two mental health centres in the Wheatbelt. Royalties for Regions and government services funding has supported projects such as the Southern Inland Health Initiative (\$565m, 5 year, 2011-2014), Regional Men's Health Initiative (\$2.79m, 4 year, 2010-2014), Royal Flying Doctor Service new medical jet service (\$30m, 3 year, 2009-2012) and Housing for Workers (400 Government Regional Officers Houses).

Aged care

Aged care is a recognised priority in the community. The Central East Wheatbelt Aged Care Regional Solution and whole of Wheatbelt Aged Care Regional Solution reports were commissioned to set clear direction to develop and implement infrastructure and service level solutions to address the need for accommodation, services and facilities for older people living in the region.

Sport and recreation

Sport and recreation is important in contributing to community well-being in the Wheatbelt. Sporting facilities including hockey fields, netball, basketball and tennis courts, football ovals, swimming pools are available in each local government area. Other recreational venues include the Cummins Theatre in Merredin and the Moora Performing Arts Centre which both attract state and national performing arts acts.

Living in the Wheatbelt

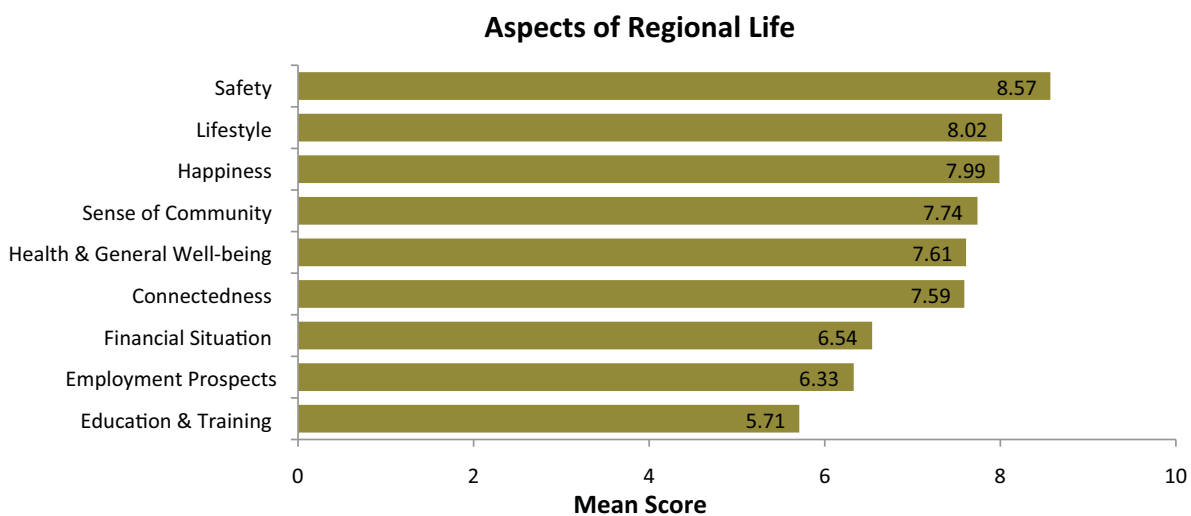
Living in the Regions 2013 was a large-scale social research project conducted by the Department of Regional Development. The purpose of the survey was to identify what attracts people to the regions, understand the barriers of living in the regions, measure the quality of life in regional Western Australia, and most importantly use that information to inform and direct regional development initiatives into the future. The survey received more than 10,000 responses.

Respondents were asked to rate attitudes and participation, with a score of 10 representing the most positive and a score of one the least positive. Results confirmed the Wheatbelt has a lot to offer local residents. The most positively rated aspects of regional life were safety and lifestyle, general well-being and happiness.

Specifically:

- the Wheatbelt was characterised by lifestyle quality, the cleanliness of the environment and the sense of safety in the community
- residents are more active in their local community than any other region. Sporting and social involvement were strongly rated
- the Wheatbelt's increasing access to quality aged care services and affordable housing were attractive qualities for Wheatbelt residents, with their responses rating higher than those from other the regions.

Living in the Regions 2013 will assist government, the private sector and community partners to direct their efforts and investments on matters relevant to people living in regional Western Australia. A copy of *Living in the Regions 2013 State Report* is available for download at www.drd.wa.gov.au. In 2014, a *Living in the Regions: Wheatbelt Report* detailing all data from the survey will be available.



Source: Department of Regional Development - *Living in the Regions 2013 State Report*.

Invest In The Wheatbelt

Agriculture

The Wheatbelt presents significant opportunities for investment in the agriculture sector. The Wheatbelt is the highest contributor to the state's agriculture sector, with an industry value of \$3.5 billion in 2011-12 (46 per cent of the state's total value of agricultural production). The agriculture, forestry and fishing sector remains the region's largest employer, even though this sector has seen significant restructure (climatic, economic and political) and a decline in the number of people employed in this sector over the past 10 years.

As well as broadacre agriculture, the region has significant horticulture activity (including olives, citrus, lettuce, carrots). Water, climate and existing transport and energy infrastructure mean that intensive agriculture and industry value-chain investment offer significant diversification opportunities for the region.

The fishing industry, particularly western rock lobster, also plays an important role in the productivity of the region.

Recent agricultural investment includes:

- Muchea Sale Yards (2010)
- State Barrier Fence (2012)
- research facilities at Merredin (2012) – New Genes for New Environments, Managed Environment Facility

- considerable private investment in horticulture in the Central Midlands and Central Coast.

Mining and manufacturing

Mining has grown 170 per cent in the last five years in the Wheatbelt region. Resources extracted from mines within the region include but are not limited to mineral sands, bauxite, iron ore and gold. There has also been increased activity surrounding the potential for natural gas extraction (fracking). There has been an increase in exploration activity by smaller companies, however, the details and results of their activities are difficult to quantify.

The Wheatbelt services the mining sector outside of the region by offering and supplying mining companies with manufacturing and service industries. Rural communities close to Perth also offer an attractive lifestyle for fly-in fly-out (FIFO) workers, with a recognised increase of FIFO and drive-in drive-out workers in Wheatbelt towns.

Ausdrill has recently purchased land and infrastructure adjacent to the Muresk Institute near Northam and will offer mining training, education opportunities and cross-industry training. This has the potential to significantly impact the Avon economy and attract associated investment.

Health and aged care

The Western Australian Planning Commission suggests that, by 2026, one in four people living in the Wheatbelt will be over the age of 65 indicating that there will be a great need for increased aged care services in the future. Health and aged care is therefore an emerging industry in the Wheatbelt that will not only lead to a higher retention of the population as they age, but also provide employment and training opportunities in primary, general and acute health care and social service delivery.

The affordability of the region relative to Perth, coupled with the ageing population and regionally significant health care provision that already exists, will underpin the demand for aged housing, age-friendly communities and aged care service delivery. Population ageing also increases the intensity of local demand for pharmacy, radiology, oncology, cardiology, pathology and other primary ancillary support services that will have a flow-on benefit for the rest of the community. A strong emphasis has been put on aged care planning in the Wheatbelt region to ensure planning aligns to regional needs as well as State Government policies.

Tourism

The Wheatbelt's central location and its proximity to Perth create the ideal opportunity for investors to capitalise on domestic and international tourist markets. The region is home to a variety of landscapes, from the tourist-friendly coast in the north-west, fertile countryside in the southern and central Wheatbelt, to the vast wildflower meadows in the east.

The Wheatbelt is the second most visited region in the state for day visits. It is a region that boasts three of the state's major tourist destinations: Wave Rock located in Hyden; the Pinnacles located in Nambung National Park near Cervantes; and the monastic town of New Norcia.

Other emerging mid to long term investment opportunities exist in the development of:

- rural excursions and organised tours, including day trips to wildflower spots and lesser-known rural towns
- Aboriginal educational and cultural tourism experiences
- eco-style accommodation and nature based tourism
- adventure tourism alternatives, including aviation, hiking, four-wheel drive adventures and water sports.

Contact us

Wheatbelt Development Commission

AVON OFFICE

1st Floor, 298 Fitzgerald St
PO Box 250
NORTHAM WA 6401

Telephone: (08) 9622 7222
Facsimile: (08) 9622 7406

CENTRAL EAST OFFICE

110 Barrack St
PO Box 420
MERREDIN WA 6415

Telephone: (08) 9041 1445
Facsimile: (08) 9041 2297

WHEATBELT SOUTH OFFICE

Government Offices
Park Street
PO Box 258
NARROGIN WA 6312

Telephone: (08) 9881 5888
Facsimile: (08) 9881 3363

CENTRAL MIDLANDS OFFICE

Central Arcade
13 Dandaragan St
PO Box 240
MOORA WA 6510

Telephone: (08) 9651 1770
Facsimile: (08) 9651 1910

All correspondence should be directed to:

Chief Executive Officer
Wheatbelt Development Commission
PO Box 250
NORTHAM WA 6401

Email: info@wheatbelt.wa.gov.au
Website: www.wheatbelt.wa.gov.au

Department of Regional Development

Level 2, Gordon Stephenson House
140 William Street
PERTH WA 6000

PO Box 1143
WEST PERTH WA 6872

Telephone: (08) 6552 1800
Free call: 1800 049 155 (Country only)
Facsimile: (08) 6552 1850

Email: info@drd.wa.gov.au
Web: www.drd.wa.gov.au

All photos are courtesy of the Wheatbelt Development Commission.

Disclaimer: The information contained in this document is for general information only. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the information, information referred to in this publication may include or be based on data provided to the Department of Regional Development (DRD) from other sources or organisations. Any person who uses or seeks to rely on this information, including for comparative purposes, should obtain appropriate professional advice relevant to their particular circumstances.

Neither DRD nor the State of Western Australia (including their employees, officers and agents) make any representation or warranty as to the accuracy or completeness of the information or take responsibility for any errors or omissions in the information. DRD and the State of Western Australia (including their employees, officers and agents) do not accept any liability for any loss or damage incurred or suffered by any person as a result of the information contained in the document or it being used or relied upon by any person, or it being used or relied on for comparative purposes.