

Section 16(e) – Exmouth Gulf Exmouth Community Meetings 22 March 2021 Feedback from Community Members

This summary represents the feedback received from community members across two community meeting sessions on 22 March 2021 in Exmouth and from feedback forms provided to the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA). These community views will help inform the EPA's strategic advice on Exmouth Gulf to the Minister for Environment.

There were diverse views on many topics from members of the community and they are summarised here under key areas of interest.

The EPA has chosen to amalgamate the feedback for each of the three themes (environment, people and places) for clarity as there were overlapping ideas and views across the themes.

The questions asked at the community meeting sessions and the feedback form are provided below.

Theme 1 – Environment (marine and land-based) What do you see as opportunities about the future of the environment in and around Exmouth Gulf?

Theme 2 – People (tourism, community, recreation) What do you see as opportunities about the future for people in and around Exmouth Gulf?

Theme 3 – Places (infrastructure, industrial, settlement) What do you see as opportunities about the future of places in and around Exmouth Gulf?

Multi-use

- Opportunity to plan and manage Exmouth Gulf (the Gulf) as a multi-use area for both commercial and recreational users. Being able to equitably balance the environment, local economy and a functioning community with multiple interest groups working alongside each other. Considerations include:
 - creation of a framework management strategy for Gulf
 - some areas within the Gulf could be turned into sanctuary areas or a Marine Park; designations may limit some activities.
- Opportunity to look at a coordinated approach for land adjacent to the Gulf, with both land holders and land managers involved.
- Opportunity to retain pastoralism activities adjacent to the Gulf.
 - consider opportunities to diversify on pastoral leases.
- Opportunity for good economic diversification on East Exmouth Gulf, and provide jobs:

- consider salt farm opportunities with less environmental impacts than the previously proposed Yannarie Solar Salt proposal – particularly in relation to impacts on mangroves/nursery.

Waste and energy

- Opportunity for carbon capture both on and off pastoral leases.
- Opportunities for renewable energy and water. Considerations include:
 - a strong desire for solar power and other renewable opportunities (e.g. batteries, hydrogen, wind and wave)
 - opportunities for government-private funding partnerships for renewables/water/green infrastructure and recycling
 - the Department of Defence to reduce its carbon footprint through renewable energy rather than importing fuels.
- Opportunity to improve sewerage services, including public toilets and disposal facilities as current services are limited and under capacity. An important issue is the use of environmentally sensitive areas (e.g. dunes) for the disposal of human waste.
- Opportunity to manage waste services more appropriately, including kerbside recycling services, and bins on beaches for better protection of wildlife. A recycling industry could be established with education for residents and visitors.
- Opportunity for the public to be involved in keeping the local beaches clean and free of plastic and other debris (e.g. beach clean-up days).
- Opportunities to reduce the town's carbon footprint by investigating clean energy options (e.g. hydrogen). Considerations include:
 - stopping the use of fossil fuels for energy generation
 - incentives to increase the use of solar panels for use by businesses, residents and industry
 - the viability of generators for days when there is no available source
 - storage containers for power station.
- Opportunity to pipe gas to the town with infrastructure in the Gulf as an option.

Tourism

- Opportunity to understand the carrying capacity of Exmouth town and surrounding area, so tourism can be managed appropriately for protection of biodiversity. Considerations include:
 - the environmental, social and economic capacity of the area; may need to cap visitor numbers and permanent residents
 - the impacts of tourism from cruise ships
 - the compatibility and types of infrastructure needed to facilitate visitor numbers and to minimise environmental impacts.
 - limiting operators and licences
 - lotteries and/or fees to allow access to certain places and balance locals and tourists.
- Opportunity to create well-planned, structured tourism. Considerations include:
 - education, rules and compliance mechanisms for tourists; there are concerns that tourists are impacting coral, sand dune systems, fish populations etc

- visitor fees to enter certain areas to assist with management of the environment
- clearly defined areas where camping should and should not occur along the Gulf coast and on inshore islands
- zoning of land adjacent to the Gulf to minimise tourist impacts.
- Opportunity to consider how Exmouth is marketed to tourists. Some stakeholders suggest that the town does not want over exposure through social media. Also, boats, phones, cameras and other technology quickly communicate and cause mass interest. Considerations include:
 - the type of tourist Exmouth should be attracting, high volume vs high yield
 - marketing Exmouth as wilderness escape and look to attract tourists who are compatible with the environment, for example eco-friendly tourists
 - Lord Howe Island is a good example that could be applied to Exmouth by limiting who can consume the area and targeting responsible visitors, but also making sure everyone can still come.
- Opportunity for good planning, management and enforcement of tourism and tourist facilities. Considerations include:
 - seasonal population influx in tourism planning
 - where holiday homes should be located – challenge to house residents and lack of long-term stay accommodation options
 - greater management of caravans that come to the area
 - greater management of visitor camping areas and appropriate compliance measures enforced
 - coordinating activities for 2023 solar eclipse event
 - evaluate short-term accommodation – need more of it but also needs to be away from long term residences, and consideration that Airbnb and other short-term accommodation stays takes away long-term accommodation options.
- Opportunity to cater for diversity of tourists, including attracting international tourists. Considerations include:
 - creating more curated experiences, diversified activities (e.g. bird watching, dark sky tourism), and better facilities (including free ones, lighthouse etc)
 - attracting digital nomads, expand local human capital and job opportunities in the creative sector
 - cultural and educational tourism
 - how the area interacts and attracts international tourists in a post-COVID-19 world
 - the proposal to develop the lighthouse caravan park.
- Opportunity to create sustainable tourism with low impact activities; educating people about the environment, and the profits can go back to the community and environment. Considerations include:
 - an opportunity to instil a sense of custodianship in tourists
 - pathways for tourism to finance improvements in the town, so less reliance on other forms of development.
- Opportunity to use existing infrastructure for tourism purposes. Considerations include:
 - use of the Navy Pier/Jetty or expansion of the existing marina for cruise ships
 - use of the concrete pads at Kailis for operation as tourism site (improved re-zoning mechanisms)
 - improving Bundegi and Tantabiddi boat ramps.

Education and research

- Future environmental research needs to focus on information gaps to inform good decision making. Considerations include:
 - research opportunities to learn more about the Gulf, reef systems, biodiversity of the area and connectivity to Ningaloo Reef
 - understanding how one-off climatic events (e.g. cyclones) impact the environment
 - researching the terrestrial wildlife that use the Gulf and how future changes of human interaction alter species habitat and use, for example bird populations.
 - opportunity to look at how plastic waste is impacting on marine and terrestrial wildlife
 - look at the flow on effects of fishing on whale sharks and other marine species
 - greater research, education and regulation is needed to protect the karst system
 - research to look at ways to reduce run off, silt and dust into the Gulf.
 - research into coral growing and culturing opportunities.
- There is a need for good environmental baseline data, including archaeological, flora and fauna surveys – opportunity to understand what is currently there, and to understand what happened before settlement and prawn trawling activities to inform restoration actions.
 - consider baseline information already gathered by industry to help inform decision-making.
- Opportunity for citizen science.
- Recognising that Exmouth is unique especially because it is facing global pressures. Large, estuarine, connections with Ningaloo Reef, home to rare and endangered species, there is a great deal of research that could be used to ensure the values are recognised, understood and conserved.
- Good communication and education are needed of all users of the Gulf including tourists, recreational users and children to ensure intergenerational equity.
- Opportunity to invest in education opportunities rather than just focusing on future industrial development.
- Opportunity to educate visitors on healthy reef ecosystems (e.g. to not walk on or touch coral).
- Opportunity to research how shipping impacts whales and potential to introduce pests.
- Opportunity for Exmouth to be positioned as global marine research centre, which can provide labs, skills, people, education and job opportunities for skilled individuals and economic diversity. Considerations include:
 - that the Gulf is a relatively pristine laboratory for understanding ‘natural infrastructure’
 - potential partnerships with universities for research opportunities (similar to Townsville, Queensland)
 - the need for realistic ambitions for a small town – can’t expect to have everything (resources) in a small town.

Water [supply]

- Opportunity to manage water supply and groundwater more appropriately, including education opportunities.
- Consider how Exmouth uses wastewater and how it can be managed. Can it be recycled and used for a splash park?
- Opportunity to consider how bores could be regulated and reduced in the area. Are bores turning saline? And if so, where will the water supply come from?
- Opportunity to increase water quality and supply - consider desalinisation as a viable option.
 - Opportunities to deregulate and incentivise water tanks on properties, including consideration for grey water options.
- Opportunity to educate Exmouth residents and visitors to be water wise.

Fisheries

- Opportunity to consider the number of tourists fishing and bag limits; this needs to be better regulated and managed (e.g. possession limit suggestions are 10kg - 20kg of fin fish).
- Opportunity to ensure healthy fish populations in the Gulf through use of existing data, fish cams and education for locals and tourists about fish stocks. Concerns include:
 - continued prawn trawling, recreational fishing wastage, and spearfishing
 - nursery areas should be protected from recreational fishing and prawn trawling.
- Opportunity to research and manage sharks in the Gulf. It appears there are more sharks in the Gulf and depredation is an issue for recreational fishers. Research indicates high species richness in the Gulf for elasmobranchs.
- Opportunity for aquaculture in the Gulf.
- Opportunity for further management of the trawling industry – increased levels of observers on regular prawn trips, increasing the level of data required to be collected on endangered, threatened and protected species, CCTV footage, funding for research into population within the trawl grounds.

Social surroundings (community, culture, light, noise)

- Opportunity to retain and recognise the value of the clear skies, atmospheric environment, and lack of noise and light.
- Opportunity to retain and celebrate the rich cultural heritage of Exmouth and the surrounding area. Considerations include:
 - recognising that cultural systems are as important as natural systems
 - recognising that traditional way of life and stories speak of the natural system and how they operate to sustain life; Aboriginal seasons and food are intertwined.
 - regaining Aboriginal cultural values that may have been lost.

- Opportunity for intergenerational equity. We need to make sure our grandchildren can enjoy the Gulf. Considerations include:
 - looking at what infrastructure already is there and using that for best outcomes
 - careful growth of Exmouth town population; minimise impacts on the Gulf
 - economic diversification in Exmouth town for year-round job opportunities.
- Opportunity to educate the community on state environmental assessment process:
 - consider how to involve the community more in decision making, and for an appropriate level of information to be shared between government and locals.
- Opportunity to protect/preserve the sense of isolation and wilderness in the Gulf and its islands; consider protecting being able to enjoy low level recreation as an important feature. Considerations include:
 - the natural environment of the Gulf is unique and sustains local business and a thriving community
 - that the beauty and dynamism of the Gulf is precious and a key to future social, economic and environmental future.
- Opportunity to recognise Defence and associated services to the region and retain these. Considerations include:
 - the employment opportunities associated with Defence and the military support services (e.g. career pathways)
 - any risks associated with the airport owned by Defence.
- Opportunity for infrastructure to better represent natural values and supports lifestyle in Exmouth – housing design, liveability (walking), ‘prettier’, more sustainable housing:
 - consider Exmouth to be an example for sustainable living (tourists also expect it).
- Opportunity to improve high speed internet connectivity - could enhance future job opportunities and add value to community.
- Opportunity to retain Lighthouse as a special location aesthetically and culturally.
- Opportunity to retain the connectivity (i.e. retain natural vistas and aesthetics) to the environment for town residents, as the population has an environmental focus and values freedom and solitude. Considerations include:
 - that resident’s value the natural opportunities available to them (e.g. marine recreational activities, solitude of beaches and serenity space, lower stress and strain levels, and low noise/pollution/people /dust/odour)
 - an opportunity to instil a sense in visitors and residents that the Gulf belongs to everyone; locals could be wardens or custodians of the Gulf and include school children.
 - nature-based job opportunities and social events (e.g. triathlons) aligned with community values of the environment.
- Opportunity to tap into all facets of the marine industry, including servicing oil and gas industry, recreation and industry boats. Skills are not an issue and it is good for young people to have a career locally and live in this place they call home. They want to stay. Environmental work does give people jobs.

Protection and restoration of marine and terrestrial environment

- Opportunity to consider land tenure of inshore islands. The different tenures (i.e. nature reserves, unallocated crown land) presents difficulty in management and access.

- Opportunity to consider whether all or parts of the Gulf and adjacent terrestrial areas should have designated protection. Considerations include:
 - whether Exmouth Gulf should be included in World Heritage area or designated nature reserve or marine park
 - whether only certain areas should be formally protected, e.g. East Exmouth Gulf, Qualing Pool, mangroves, islands, karst system, adjacent land systems
 - whether restricting activities in certain areas of the Gulf would place extra pressure on other areas
 - if certain areas of the Gulf should only be protected at certain times of the year, for example during bird migrations, whale migrations. These species habitats should be preserved
 - maintaining restrictions on public access to East Exmouth Gulf, given the environmental values (e.g. pristine area, mangroves and intertidal areas)
 - protecting and managing critical habitat areas (marine – dugongs, turtles, manta rays); limiting off road vehicle access to dune areas, particularly in nesting habitat areas (birds and turtles)
 - the differences between preservation and restoration and what outcomes are desired for the Gulf.
- Opportunity to recognise, protect and celebrate globally significant inter-related natural systems, bird life, whales, migratory species that depend on the Gulf. Considerations include:
 - excluding heavy industrialisation, particular concerns regarding dredging activities
 - environmental thresholds for sustaining users and health of the environment
 - health and protection of inter-related natural systems, particularly intertidal systems of east Exmouth Gulf (i.e. mangroves) and the complex role in preserving diversity of the system.
- Opportunities for coral and reef rehabilitation (e.g. Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions Resilient Reefs program); regeneration of sea grasses and mangroves for blue carbon capture.
- Consider dedicated mooring zones within the Gulf to restrict impacts on the seabed and marine environment.
- Opportunity to replace non-natives plants with local natives/endemics in gardens – create responsibility for seed spreading; work with local plant suppliers.
- Opportunity for remediation of any locally contaminated areas (e.g. if Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) is present).
- Opportunity to protect the Gulf from free campers, as they may spoil the isolation of the area.

Government policy, schemes and planning mechanisms

- Opportunity to create a coordinated, cross government management strategy or plan for the Gulf and adjacent areas that is adequately resourced. Currently there are government planning mechanisms and policies to keep development to specific nodes, but each department/level of government has its own policies:

- Regulation is needed in the Gulf, particularly regarding recreational activities and best practice to ensure global and local pressures are managed appropriately.
Considerations include:
 - there needs to be better resourced management of the environment (Shire rates not sufficient financial resources)
 - government has responsibility for educating and managing the public about sensitivity of the Gulf, including how to use/protect their own assets (beyond capacity of local government)
 - stricter regulations for oil, gas and heavy industry in the Gulf
 - financial bonds should be applicable for significant development in case of environmental damage, could provide a contingency for managing risk associated with development
 - where diving and surfing activities are appropriate within the Gulf
 - both spatial and temporal regulation for activities in the Gulf and should not be limited to peak season.
- Opportunity to consider zoning different parts of pastoral land for better management of access to the Gulf.
- Opportunity to develop better policy and guidance. Considerations include:
 - revision and enhancement of State planning policy 6.3 – Ningaloo Coast, which provides some guidance for tourism, residential, commercial and industrial development to address the Gulf
 - development of an Environmental Protection Policy (EPP) for the social and environmental values and the numerous linkages of the Ningaloo Coast and the Gulf
 - finalising a regional scheme aligned with the original intentions of the Ningaloo Sustainable Development office.
- Opportunity for road improvements needed in the area. Considerations include:
 - improve floodways near town (e.g. Minilya - Exmouth Road; access to airport)
 - tapping into the Northern Infrastructure Fund.
- Opportunity to recognise the importance of military presence; better educate locals and tourists of Defence role.
- Opportunity to more accurately record how many people are here during the census - because the census only counts place of usual residence; there is no way the government can possibly know just how much pressure the tourist towns are under because people are recorded at the 'home of usual residence'.
- Opportunity for a comprehensive strategic plan for the town of Exmouth to plan for growth and careful planning of service delivery. A strategic plan would preserve the environment as well. Cohesion across government departments is really important but so often Exmouth is a town with two strings to its bow - the environment and tourism, but they are interrelated, so they need to be assessed and invested in together.
Considerations include:
 - more flexible zoning to enable mixed used in special zones, so that people can 'live over the shop'
 - releasing more land adjacent to the town for housing development
 - a 20-year plan for development as a priority for government

- the current Plan to 2030 by the Shire is the vision for the town; however, it is not adhering to the vision. Need to protect industry/business already here i.e. radio frequency
- is Exmouth an extension of Gascoyne or Pilbara? This needs to be decided for better coordination to benefit area
- the Shire development targets - want more infrastructure and high yield tourism.
- Opportunity to expand Ranger program – local trainees at ex-Giralia Station, Indigenous Rangers.

Management and biosecurity

- Opportunity to create long-term environmental management programs - supporting sea, coast and land managers. Considerations include:
 - an increase in ecological sustainable management plans – need land management to reduce erosion runoff impacts
 - a coordinated and targeted management to limit introduced species and improve management of pests and feral species; need to research and understand where incursions areas and how certain species might invade environment
 - that good Pastoralists are responsible land managers and can be environmentalists
 - the impact of climate change as part of future/long-term management of the Gulf.
- Opportunity for Exmouth and the Gulf as a case study for managing a complex and fragile environment for others to learn from. Considerations include:
 - looking to other locations in the world where precious places have managed capacity
 - low impact use in the Gulf, using marine park model at Ningaloo
 - that the Gulf is a common pool resource that needs to be managed.
- Opportunity to manage marine traffic in the Gulf, particularly shipping and recreational boat use impacts on dugongs and whales.
- Opportunity to better manage recreational activities. Considerations include:
 - retaining recreational driving on beaches; however, visitors should not use vehicles on the dunes
 - options to enforce speed limits on beaches during peak tourism season, use the go-kart club, develop cycling tracks, or banning four-wheel drive vehicles during certain months
 - introducing speed limits for jet skis in the Gulf.
- Opportunity to manage wild dogs and dingoes more effectively. Consideration for options other than 1080 baits as pets and domesticated animals sometimes eat them (4-5 pet dog deaths last year).
- Opportunity to consider pests/biosecurity management especially on pastoral land. Culling programs are a controversial issue.
- Opportunity to improve service provisions for popular beaches (e.g. shade structures, toilets and bins to control waste).
- Opportunity to manage light spill.