

LIVING IN THE REGIONS

THE VIEWS OF WESTERN AUSTRALIANS

The Wheatbelt Report

A Study Undertaken for

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE AND TRADE

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REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

•

MINISTRY FOR PLANNING

•

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSIONS

[Gascoyne Development Commission](#)

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[Great Southern Development Commission](#)

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[Mid West Development Commission](#)

[Peel Development Commission](#)

[Pilbara Development Commission](#)

[South West Development Commission](#)

[Wheatbelt Development Commission](#)

By

Patterson Market Research

in conjunction with Focused Management and Hames Sharley

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LIVING IN THE REGIONS: THE VIEWS OF WESTERN AUSTRALIANS
THE WHEATBELT REPORT

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FOREWORD

The Living in the Regions project was commissioned by the Regional Development Council to provide much needed information about why people decide to live in or move away from the regional areas of the State.

The Regional Development Council is the peak advisory body to Regional Development Minister, Hendy Cowan. The Council is made up of the Chairs of the nine Regional Development Commissions, a representative of the Department of Commerce and Trade and representation from Local Government.

The Living in the Regions reports provide statistical data which will be useful for all spheres of government, the private sector and community groups. There will no longer be the need to rely on anecdotal data in areas such as policy, planning or preparing submissions in matters relating to the retention or attraction of people to live in regional Western Australia.

The suite of ten reports contain the results of a statewide study which involved over 20 focus groups and 1500 telephone interviews. The State Report provides the survey findings for all of the nine regions in the one document. There is also one report for each of the nine Regional Development Commission regions of Western Australia, which highlight significant regional results.

I would like to thank all the people who took part in the surveys. Through the contribution of their time we now have a much greater understanding of why Western Australians choose to live where they do, what makes them stay and what makes them decide to move on.

This project will point the way to further research into issues such as higher education and professional development. The Regional Development Council would welcome any feedback you may have on the Living in the Regions project or suggestions for further research, both within the regions and the Perth metropolitan area.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stuart Morgan', written in a cursive style.

STUART MORGAN, AM
CHAIRPERSON
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

The *Living in the Regions* project was conceived by the Regional Development Council in conjunction with the State's nine Regional Development Commissions, the Department of Commerce and Trade and the Ministry for Planning. The project management committee commissioned Patterson Market Research in an open tender process to undertake the comprehensive survey which forms the basis of this regional report.

The State Report which gives an overview of the survey results in all Western Australian regions is also available from the Department of Commerce and Trade or Regional Development Commissions in the Kimberley, Pilbara, Gascoyne, Mid West, Wheatbelt, Goldfields-Esperance, Peel, South West and Great Southern regions. Highlights of the State Report are included at the end of this report.

BACKGROUND

In June, 1996 the Ministry for Planning released its population report *Migration Trends in Western Australia 1986-1991* which used census data to show the numbers of people migrating to, from and within Western Australia. This provided valuable data on population movement but did not set out to give reasons why migration occurs.

With 72 per cent of the State's population living in Perth (and this figure is showing a gradual increase) there is a need to determine if more should be done to encourage people to move to the regions and persuade those already there to remain.

The purpose of the Living in the Regions project is to determine the key factors which influence individuals and families on where they will or will not live in Western Australia. It also looks at likely movement in the future.

The information will assist Western Australia's nine Regional Development Commissions to form policies and strategies which address misconceptions and also promote the benefits of regional living.

SURVEY METHOD

The survey was conducted in two stages. First, an extensive series of focus discussion groups were established to gather profile information on attitudes to living in the regions and the propensity for movement. This information was used to help develop the survey questionnaires.

The focus groups, comprising people who had moved or were considering moving to or from the regions, included two groups in each of the nine regions and two in Perth, augmented, at the request of individual Development Commissions, by an extra group in the Pilbara and two extra groups in the Wheatbelt.

The second stage of the survey involved extensive telephone interviews with 1500 people aged 18 and over across the whole of Western Australia in October and November 1997.

This included 150 telephone interviews in Perth using a Perth-specific questionnaire and 1350 throughout regional Western Australia (150 in each of the nine regions) using a regions-specific questionnaire.

Because of the disparity in population sizes, it was inevitable that some regions were over-sampled relative to their more populated neighbours. This was adjusted using correction weights to align the regional survey numbers with populations from the 1996 census.

The effect of the weighting procedure is that each region has survey estimates based on 150 interviews, producing a sample error of plus or minus 5.5 per cent, but the all-regions averages reflect the average of all people in Western Australia.

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WHEATBELT REGION

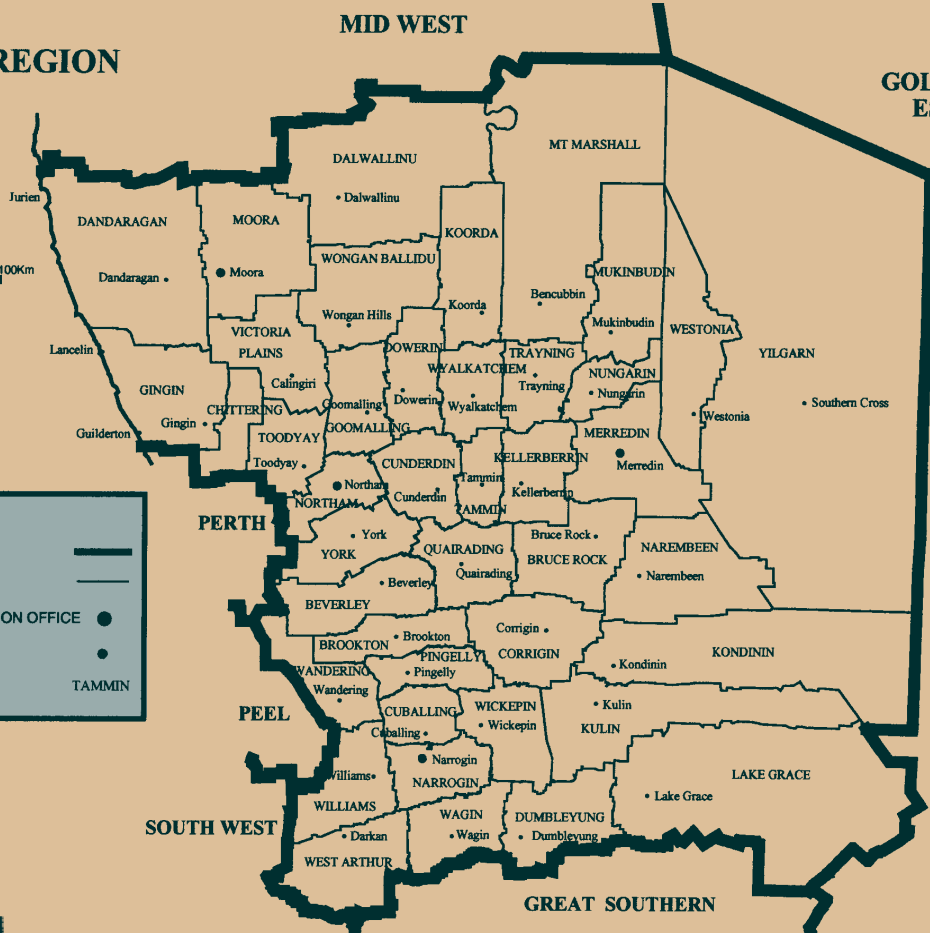
MID WEST

GOLDFIELDS - ESPERANCE



LEGEND

REGIONAL BOUNDARY	
LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY	
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION OFFICE	
TOWN OR CITY	
LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA e.g.	TAMMIN



PROFILE

The Wheatbelt Region adjoins Perth and extends from the Indian Ocean in the north west, to the western edge of the Goldfields and to the northern border of the Great Southern Region. It covers an area of 154,000 square kilometres, comprising four main sub-regions based around Moora in the north (Midlands), Northam (Avon), Merredin (Central East), and Narrogin (Central South).

There are 44 local government areas consisting of 42 shires and the two town councils of Northam and Narrogin.

In 1997, the Wheatbelt had a total population of 71,435 people.

The region has the most widely dispersed population in Western Australia. The largest urban centre is Northam, with about nine per cent of the population. In sharp contrast to other regions, half the Wheatbelt population is spread across more than 30 urban centres, with the other half living in small clusters of less than 200 people each.

The Wheatbelt has one of the highest median ages in the State. In 1997, the median age of the population was 34.6 years compared to 33.3 years for the State as a whole.

The economy has traditionally been based on agriculture and this remains the most dominant industry in the region today. Agricultural activities are dominated by wheat and wool production but also include other cereals, oilseeds, legumes, fruit and vegetable crops and the raising of livestock for slaughter.

A strong mining industry is dominated by gold production but also includes the extraction of heavy mineral sands, nickel and salt. The region also has a valuable fishing industry with rock lobster accounting for about 97 per cent of the catch.

THE WHEATBELT REPORT

The survey results were compiled using responses to 1500 random telephone interviews conducted throughout Western Australia, but also include feedback from discussion groups held in various localities. This included Jurien, Northam, Kondinin and Merredin. Information from these discussion groups is referred to in this report.

While the telephone survey involved 150 people in each of the nine regions and 150 in Perth, the results need to be viewed with care. A feature of this type of survey is that households without a phone and those in communities serviced by a 'communal phone' are not represented.

Where People Live

Most people in regional Western Australia live in towns or cities and the Wheatbelt is no exception. The survey suggests that 74 per cent of Wheatbelt residents live in a town, 17 per cent live on a commercial rural property and nine per cent in some other out of town situation.

Not surprisingly, a much higher proportion of people live 'on the land' than in any other region, indicative of the strong farming background.

While more people said they grew up on a rural property than those now living on one (34 per cent compared with 26 per cent), this phenomenon was evident to varying degrees in all regions, reflecting a general decline in people living on the land.

There was considerable movement by people in all regions but the Wheatbelt was one of the most stable regions in the State. Twenty-one per cent of respondents still lived in the area they grew up in, compared to 16 per cent across the regions. This stability was second only to the Mid West where 23 per cent of residents still live where they grew up.

Overall, more than half the respondents had been in the Wheatbelt for more than 10 years, 40 per cent for more than 20 years.

When the survey sought to determine where people who moved to the Wheatbelt came from, an interesting pattern emerged. More than four out of 10 were from Perth, the highest incidence of Perth migration for any region.

The next most likely origin was 'somewhere else in the Wheatbelt'. In other words, people moved to their current location from another town or district in the Wheatbelt. The 32 per cent with this background was the highest incidence of movement within a region and indicates a strong loyalty and affinity with the Wheatbelt among residents. Another 16 per cent came from overseas or interstate and 10 per cent were from another region in Western Australia.

Period in region	Wheatbelt residents
Under 6 years	30%
6 – 10 years	17%
11 – 20 years	13%
21 + years	40%
Total	100%

(Further information and comparative regional data pages 9 to 11 Living in the Regions - State Report)

Why People Move

Employment is the main reason for moving to any region, and in the Wheatbelt it was nominated by just over half the 'movers' as their major motivation, slightly above the all-regions average.

Family/marriage was the next most common main reason for moving, followed by lifestyle. The lifestyle result (seven per cent) was one of the lowest in the State, although it was only slightly under the all-regions average of nine per cent.

Single main reason for moving to the Wheatbelt	
Employment	51%
Family/marriage	21%
Lifestyle	7%
Other	21%

Because there is often more than one reason behind a person's decision to move, the survey then asked respondents to nominate all of their major reasons for moving to the Wheatbelt. While employment continued to be most important, mentioned by 71 per cent as at least one of their key motivations, it was noticeable that lifestyle gained much greater prominence on this measure, now mentioned by 61 per cent. This suggests that while lifestyle is seldom the single main reason for moving to the Wheatbelt, it is often at least an important consideration in reaching a final decision to move there.

(Further information and comparative regional data pages 12 to 13 Living in the Regions - State Report)

Feeling Safe

Perceived safety was the most universally held attitude throughout the regions where many people have a particular perception that their children are less at risk from the 'stranger danger' they associate with Perth. This was also the case in the Wheatbelt.

More than half the respondents 'strongly' agreed they felt safer in the Wheatbelt than they would in Perth and another 34 per cent generally agreed. This equates to 86 per cent in at least general agreement. The results are similar to the all-regions average but compare with extremes ranging from 96 per cent agreement in the Great Southern down to 71 per cent in the Peel.

"Feel safer here than in a place like Perth"	Agree %
Great Southern	96
Kimberley	92
South West	92
Pilbara	90
Wheatbelt	86
Gascoyne	84
Goldfields-Esperance	80
Mid West	78
Peel	71

(Further information and comparative regional data page 15 Living in the Regions - State Report)

Affinity with the Region

The great majority of regional people have a strong affinity with their region and this applies with equal vigour in the Wheatbelt. Three out of four respondents agreed that they would be sad to leave to live in Perth.

It appears generally that the bulk of people living in the regions prefer the regional lifestyle to any other option. Certainly, it will be shown later in this report that few Wheatbelt respondents, if given the choice of living anywhere they wanted, would choose a destination outside regional Western Australia and more than a quarter would use their lucky break to either stay exactly where they are or simply move to another part of the Wheatbelt.

Agreement that "I would be sad to leave this place to live in Perth"	Agree %
Peel	82
Great Southern	80
Kimberley	79
Wheatbelt	76
South West	76
Pilbara	70
Gascoyne	70
Mid West	70
Goldfields-Esperance	49

(Further information and comparative regional data page 15 Living in the Regions - State Report)

Community Facilities

People in the Wheatbelt had one of the highest levels of satisfaction with community facilities. This includes 84 per cent who believe sporting facilities are good, 79 per cent who feel general recreation facilities are good, and just 24 per cent who were prepared to agree that modern communications are a problem in the area.

The tendency to be more satisfied with sports rather than recreation facilities was evident in almost all regions, but both measures are an overwhelming endorsement of the facilities presently available in the Wheatbelt.

There was more contrast in people's view of modern communications. While less than one in four thought modern communications in the Wheatbelt were a real problem, this was still materially above the all-regions average of 19 per cent. It was noticeable, however, that just five per cent strongly agreed there was a problem. This may be a function of the comparatively low proportion who report growing up in a major city or could reflect a relatively narrow understanding of the commercial and recreational possibilities that modern communications facilities can bring.

(Further information and comparative regional data pages 16 to 17 Living in the Regions - State Report)

Perceived Community Spirit

Issues including friendliness, community division, stress on families, privacy and environment for children were considered when trying to determine people's broad perception of community spirit.

When views on all these issues were factored together, all regions achieved mean scores comfortably above the mid-point of 3. But the Wheatbelt was one of the top scorers.

There was overwhelming agreement that the area was "a really friendly place to live" (90 per cent) and "a great place for kids to grow up" (91 per cent) - painting a very positive picture of the Wheatbelt.

At the same time, Wheatbelt respondents were among the least inclined to agree that there was a lot of community division, stress on family life or a lack of privacy from living in a small community - the survey negatives. Of those who did perceive these problems, there was very little strong agreement.

Certainly, the 32 per cent who felt there were "great stresses on family life in the area" was well below the all-regions average. While it is disturbing that such a large proportion of any community perceive this family stress factor, it needs to be acknowledged that the issue has currency worldwide, not just in the regions of Western Australia, and very few Wheatbelt respondents 'strongly' agreed.

It was interesting that while there was some suggestion from the focus groups conducted in Northam, Merredin and Kondinin that a 'social divide' existed between long term and short term residents, this factor - to whatever degree it may exist - does not appear to have dented enthusiasm about the overall friendliness of the region.

The Wheatbelt	Generally agree %	Strongly agree %	Total %	All regions average %
Really friendly place to live	55	35	90	85
Lots of community division	25	6	31	36
Great stresses on family life	26	6	32	39
Lack of privacy	21	9	30	27
Great place for kids	54	37	91	89

(Further information and comparative regional data pages 17 to 19 Living in the Regions - State Report)

Environmental Values

While recognising the problems inherent in trying to assess people's attitudes to the environment from just a few questions, the survey sought to get a broad indication using three specific measures. These included the importance of clean air, the benefits of the climate and likely acceptance of environmental cost in exchange for jobs.

When factored together, the views of Wheatbelt respondents on each issue suggest a high regard for the local environment with a mean score of 3.6 out of a possible 5. Other regions ranged between 3.3 and 4.0.

Ninety-two per cent of Wheatbelt respondents agreed that clean air was "one of the best things" about the area but it was noticeable that just 63 per cent felt the climate was a major benefit. This was one of the lowest results and probably a reflection of the hot, dry summers in the region. When the Wheatbelt focus discussion groups were interviewed over August, they were already complaining about the forthcoming summer. This discomfort is a significant contributor to the desire of many people to retire 'to the coast'.

The third statement asked respondents to agree or disagree that they would "accept some environmental cost in exchange for more job opportunities". Across all regions there were strong indications that residents want to maintain and protect the local environment.

While responses would be influenced by the availability of jobs in a region, they nonetheless give a strong indication of the extent to which people are prepared to trade off environmental factors for economic benefits.

In the Wheatbelt, 48 per cent of respondents at least 'generally' agreed they would accept some environmental cost in exchange for more jobs, compared to extremes ranging from 59 per cent in the Mid West down to 41 per cent in the Kimberley.

"I would accept some environmental cost in exchange for more job opportunities in this region"	Generally Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Total %
Mid West	46	13	59
Great Southern	45	10	55
South West	47	5	52
Gascoyne	42	8	50
Pilbara	43	6	49
Wheatbelt	36	12	48
Goldfields-Esperance	38	7	45
Peel	35	7	42
Kimberley	32	9	41

The result shows that while almost half the Wheatbelt sample was at least cautiously open to environmental trade-off, half was not.

This is an important finding because people in the Wheatbelt strongly support the concept of attracting new development to provide more jobs. This aspect is discussed later in this report.

Certainly, developments which have a significant impact on the environment will need a very convincing argument to win support. It is clear that one of the major benefits people enjoy about the Wheatbelt (and indeed other regions) is the fresh, clean environment they live in.

(Further information and comparative regional data pages 19 to 20 Living in the Regions - State Report)

Perceived Economic Benefits

The survey examined cost of living, earning potential, retirement barriers and economic future to give an indication of how residents perceive the economic well-being of their region.

In total, 65 per cent of Wheatbelt respondents agreed the cost of living in their area was not too bad, 49 per cent felt you could earn a lot of money if you work hard, 63 per cent thought the region had a strong economic future and 28 per cent felt cost of living would make it hard to retire in the Wheatbelt.

Results varied greatly between regions, with the Wheatbelt around mid-range for cost of living, less inclined to see cost barriers to retirement, cautious about the region's economic future and clearly unconvinced about the ability to earn good money in the area.

While the survey found that a majority feel the Wheatbelt has a strong economic future, it was a noticeably smaller majority than in most regions. One influence is likely to be the

withdrawal of some Government, banking and other services from many Wheatbelt towns. Certainly, in Merredin, (which has experienced a five per cent population decline since 1991) there is a perception that the closure of Government railway workshops and other services is depressing the local economy and calling into question the viability of other business prospects for the region. This no doubt goes some way to explaining the strong support for new development activities.

Agreement that "the cost of living is not too bad here compared to other places"	Agree %
Peel	84
Mid West	79
South West	77
Great Southern	75
Wheatbelt	65
Gascoyne	64
Goldfields-Esperance	45
Kimberley	30
Pilbara	23

While the table shows there was no major outcry about cost of living in the Wheatbelt, when compared to some regions, there was nevertheless some disquiet evident. While two thirds of respondents felt cost of living was "not too bad", one in three did not. There was also very little 'strong' agreement among those who indicated it was acceptable. This may reflect issues such as transport costs and low trade volumes in local retail outlets.

It was interesting that despite those concerns, only a small proportion of respondents felt cost of living would make it hard for people to retire in the Wheatbelt. The 28 per cent who saw such barriers compares with the all-regions average of 34 per cent. This is an important issue because it affects the ability of multiple generations to remain in an area, which in turn affects the social fabric of the whole community.

Agree that cost of living makes it hard for people to retire here	Agree %
Pilbara	80
Kimberley	72
Goldfields-Esperance	54
Gascoyne	43
Wheatbelt	28
Mid West	25
Great Southern	18
Peel	17
South West	14

The sharpest contrast related to earning potential. Just 49 per cent of respondents agreed you could earn a lot of money in the Wheatbelt if you work hard, well below the all-regions average.

A contributing factor may be the strong farming culture of the region, where good years and bad can take little account of how hard a person works, and a tough year on the farm spins off into many other businesses reliant on farm output. It may also relate to a lack of opportunity in the Wheatbelt to pursue sophisticated career paths which have big salaries.

"You can earn a lot of money here if you work hard"	Agree %
Pilbara	82
Goldfields-Esperance	77
Mid West	68
Kimberley	66
South West	65
Gascoyne	58
Great Southern	52
Wheatbelt	49
Peel	47

(Further information and comparative regional data pages 21 to 22 Living in the Regions -State Report)

Employment Perceptions and Attitudes

The survey asked people to agree or disagree with four statements relating to job security, the range of jobs available and the need for new development to provide more jobs.

Almost six out of 10 Wheatbelt respondents agreed they were "often concerned" about job security, although the level of concern appears to vary from one part of the Wheatbelt to another. For example, in Merredin the level of concern would be above the 'Wheatbelt average' whereas in areas such as Jurien and perhaps Kondinin it would be lower.

There was much greater interest in the range of jobs available in the Wheatbelt, with almost eight out of 10 respondents agreeing that the region needs a wider range of job opportunities. This was well above the all-regions average and suggests that people in the Wheatbelt are keen to see developments which encourage a diversity of skills.

The Wheatbelt also had the highest proportion who felt there were not enough career opportunities for people with higher education. The region has an apparently long tradition of sending its children away to boarding schools in Perth and it was noticeable that the lack of local career opportunities for their well educated (often tertiary educated) children causes

an element of dissatisfaction among parents. Increasingly, a move away to high school in the early to mid teens can effectively mean a move away permanently because the opportunities for young people to put higher learning to effect are very limited in the local communities.

The 85 per cent agreeing that the Wheatbelt needs new development to provide more jobs was the highest of any region and well above the all-regions average.

Wheatbelt residents	Generally agree %	Strongly agree %	Total %	All regions average %
Often concerned about job security here	44	14	58	54
Wider range of job opportunities needed	49	28	77	71
Few career opportunities for people with higher education	48	31	79	65
Wheatbelt needs new development to provide more jobs	56	29	85	73

The survey suggests that the key to the development of the regions almost across the board lies in the development of a wider range of employment options. It needs the encouragement of industries that provide career opportunities for the future generations of people who, in the main, very much like living in the regions, but leave reluctantly to find better education, more meaningful employment, and to a lesser extent, better health care (discussed shortly). It should be recalled, however, that earlier findings on environmental cost indicate that unfettered development would be unacceptable.

It was interesting that the Wheatbelt focus groups conducted in Kondinin, Merredin, and Northam all focused on the need for greater economic development of the regions. People living in these communities appear to feel a quite urgent need for a more diverse economic structure to take advantage of the natural advantages found in the region. In Merredin this was expressed in terms of the access the town has to a high quality rail transport system, which they believe ought to be used for downstream processing of the bulk wheat which is now simply freighted out of the area.

It appears that people living in the Wheatbelt towns are concluding that the economic future of the region lies in the development of a wider economic base, with a more sophisticated economy to provide meaningful employment opportunities for the better educated generations of today and tomorrow. There is a sense that the Wheatbelt was developed 'in a rush', but that the impetus for that development (largely clearing of land and development of wheat properties) has dissipated and there is a need for a further stage in development to provide greater depth of employment opportunities, preferably less affected by the agricultural economic cycle than the current economy.

(Further information and comparative regional data pages 23 to 24 Living in the Regions - State Report)

Diversity in Recreation/Entertainment

Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with five statements to determine attitudes to recreation/entertainment in the regions. These related to sport, entertainment and the availability of restaurants and nightlife.

The results show quite a degree of concern on each measure. The Wheatbelt had the equal lowest mean score (2.8 out of a possible 5.0) when responses to each statement were factored together.

There was a two-thirds majority view that the area “relies on sport to keep it together socially” - dramatically higher than any other region. Half the respondents also felt that if you were not into sport there was “not much else to do”.

Presumably many of those people are into sport because a noticeably smaller proportion agreed that they missed the entertainment that comes with a big city. This could also reflect the relatively small proportion of people in the Wheatbelt reporting that they grew up in a major city (25 per cent). Certainly, in the Pilbara and Gascoyne, where many more people originate from Perth, there was a much higher proportion who missed ‘big city’ entertainment. The Wheatbelt result was nevertheless quite high compared with other regions.

Less than four out of 10 respondents felt there was a “good range of eating establishments” in the Wheatbelt, and only just over half thought there was enough nightlife - equal lowest of all regions.

While there is clearly a significant opportunity for further nightlife entertainment facilities to be provided in the Wheatbelt, the task of delivery to such a wide spread population base in a cost-effective (and profitable) manner may prove challenging.

Views of Wheatbelt respondents	Agree %	All regions average %
This area relies on sport to keep it together socially	67	51
If you're not into sport, there's not much to do	50	36
I miss the entertainment of a large city	44	37
There is a good range of eating establishments here	39	66
Area has enough night life	54	64

(Further information and comparative regional data pages 25 to 27 Living in the Regions - State Report)

Standard of Health Services

Almost three-quarters of respondents in the Wheatbelt agreed the standard of general medical practice was good, but many were less convinced about the availability of specialist medical services.

The 71 per cent who felt GP services were good was in sharp contrast to the 65 per cent who had real concerns about the availability of specialist medical services. While this represents a

substantial level of concern it was still only slightly above the all-regions average. There is clearly significant disquiet in many parts of regional Western Australia about the availability of specialist services.

Agree that "the availability of specialist medical services is a real concern to me"	Total %
Pilbara	80
Kimberley	73
Gascoyne	73
Wheatbelt	65
Great Southern	65
Mid West	62
Goldfields-Esperance	60
South West	56
Peel	51

It appears from the focus discussion groups that major concerns in the Wheatbelt include childbirth (women from Merredin reported having to go to Northam to have their babies) and aged care facilities. Comments were made throughout the Wheatbelt groups that many towns did not have a resident doctor. The reliance on volunteer ambulance services was also referred to in Jurien and Kondinin, and while to an extent this was a source of pride to the local community, they believed they "deserved better".

The Wheatbelt respondents showed a particular interest in aged health and care facilities with nine out of 10 agreeing it was important that good facilities were available in the area. People of all ages in most regional communities shared this sentiment, but the 90 per cent agreement in the Wheatbelt was the equal highest recorded. This would in part reflect the older age profile of the region. While not asking people to judge the standard of existing facilities, the survey sought to determine the importance people placed on them. Certainly, in some regions, it appears that a lack of adequate facilities for the aged will contribute to families leaving an area. The strong views expressed by people of all ages in all regions, combined with the rapid ageing of society generally, reinforces the need to ensure these facilities are given an appropriate priority in future planning strategies.

(Further information and comparative regional data pages 27 to 28 Living in the Regions - State Report)

Perceived Isolation

People in the Wheatbelt were not particularly inclined to feel a sense of isolation, a finding which is probably influenced by the comparative stability of the region and propensity for different generations to remain there.

While 45 per cent of respondents agreed the area could be "lonely for homemakers", there was little strong agreement and the overall result was only a little above the all-regions average.

Less than a third said they would like to live closer to their extended family, suggesting residents do not feel a significant sense of dislocation. There are comparatively many

instances of several generations of families living within a district compared, for example, to the clear dislocation of families in a region like the Pilbara.

(Further information and comparative regional data pages 29 to 30 Living in the Regions - State Report)

Schooling

Only respondents with school age children took part in this section of the survey. Across the regions, this amounted to 470 respondents. The results should be viewed with care as the sample for each region was inevitably quite small

People in the Wheatbelt were most satisfied of all regions with the schooling solution they had chosen for their high school children. This is despite the fact that the Wheatbelt had one of the lowest incidence of high school children able to live at home and commute to school.

The finding goes against the trend in other regions where parents were happiest the less distance their children had to travel. There appears to be a high level of acceptance in the Wheatbelt of the tradition of sending high school children to live in Perth for their education, with the ensuing family disruption this causes. Certainly, it was commented in the focus discussion groups that it was good for the younger generation to experience life in large cities as this gave them a wider perspective than those who grew up and were schooled locally.

The 24 per cent who said they were, or would be, sending their children to live away from home to attend high school in Perth was one of the highest proportions of any region, second only to the Kimberley. When you add those who send their children away to a regional school, it shows that a third of respondents in the Wheatbelt have a schooling solution which requires their children to live away. This was the highest of any region.

The survey also reveals that one in 10 from the Wheatbelt sample opt to move the whole family to an area served by a school, and a very small number actually 'split' the family. Typically, this involves a mother and student moving to an area served by adequate schooling while the husband remains on the property/near work.

The 82 per cent of Wheatbelt respondents happy with their schooling solution compares with the all-regions average of 70 per cent.

High school solutions adopted	Wheatbelt %	All regions average %
Commute to high school from home	60	78
Move family to area served by school	10	7
Split Family	2	1
Send away to Perth	24	12
Send away to regional school	9	5
Distance education	5	1

Table includes some multiple responses due to parents opting for different education solutions for their children, and therefore adds beyond 100%. For example, they could use a local school for one child and send another to Perth.

(Further information and comparative regional data pages 30 to 33 Living in the Regions - State Report)

Future Movement

Sixty per cent of Wheatbelt respondents said they either planned to stay in the region or at least had no plans to move. This compares with as few as 30 per cent in the Pilbara to a high of 77 per cent in the Peel.

In all, 50 per cent said they would stay and 10 per cent had no particular plans to move.

Those tending to leave include 16 per cent with definite plans to move and 16 per cent who said they would probably move. The remainder were not sure.

While this means that almost a third of Wheatbelt respondents will at least probably move from the region at some stage, this is similar to the all-regions average and merely indicative of the extent to which regional Western Australia moves from place to place.

Of those planning to go, more than four out of 10 (equivalent to about 14 per cent of the population) said they would do so within five years. But most plan a considerably longer time frame. This goes against the average and may reflect a relative 'stay put' working life pattern with greater impact from long term retirement plans. Certainly, the proportion planning to leave the Wheatbelt within five years was a full 16 points below the all-regions average.

(Further information and comparative regional data pages 34 to 36 Living in the Regions - State Report)

Where People Would Go

While there will always be barriers which stop people living exactly where they choose, respondents were asked to ignore those obstacles and nominate where they would most prefer to live if they had the choice.

The most common preference for Wheatbelt residents was Perth, nominated by 22 per cent. Other popular destinations were the South West (14 per cent) and Kimberley (seven per cent). (The South West was the most popular choice, after Perth, for people in almost all regions.)

Over a quarter of respondents said they would choose to stay in the Wheatbelt - a quite high proportion - including 20 per cent who would stay exactly where they are and six per cent who would move to some other place in the Wheatbelt.

Desired Location	Average %	CURRENT LOCATION								
		Kimberley %	Pilbara %	Gascoyne %	Mid West %	Wheatbelt %	Goldfields-Esperance %	Peel %	South West %	Great Southern %
Will not move	21	17	9	8	21	20	13	30	25	26
Perth	19	21	28	20	17	22	26	15	15	17
Kimberley	7	16	9	13	14	7	1	5	4	6
Pilbara	3	2	3	5	3	3	1	4	2	1
Gascoyne	1	2	1	4	2	1	-	4	1	-
Mid West	5	6	8	13	9	4	3	1	3	2
Wheatbelt	2	1	3	2	1	6	2	-	-	3
Goldfields-Esperance	3	1	5	2	-	2	10	1	1	3
Peel	3	1	3	2	5	5	4	2	3	4
South West	14	7	11	13	6	14	10	18	23	13
Great Southern	6	3	2	2	3	6	6	7	9	9
Interstate/overseas	6	14	12	7	4	1	11	5	5	6
Other	2	2	1	5	6	3	2	7	1	4
Don't Know	8	7	5	4	9	6	11	1	8	6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

The shaded cells indicate the proportion of people moving from one part of a region to another. For example, at the top left shaded cell, you find 16% of people in the Kimberley would move elsewhere within the Kimberley given their choice of living anywhere in Western Australia. Places which could not be identified through the Department of Land Administration database are categorised as 'other'.

Note that in calculating State averages, results from each region are weighted to take account of the impact of population size. Without this weighting, responses from a smaller population region would have a much greater impact on the whole of regional Western Australia than it should. The weighting reinstates the relativities of the nine regions in population terms.

The most common reason people gave for choosing to leave the Wheatbelt was a different lifestyle. However, the issues of family reunion, career move and education were prominent in a decision to move to Perth.

(Further information and comparative regional data pages 36 to 40 Living in the Regions - State Report)

Why People Move

Having determined which locations are most popular as 'ideal' destinations, the obvious question is why.

It has to be said that the Wheatbelt received the second lowest vote as a preferred destination, drawing most interest from Pilbara and Great Southern residents, although it was nominated by just three per cent from each of these regions.

However, respondents in all regions were asked to nominate things which would attract them to a region, and on this measure people nominated the ocean, the lifestyle and attractive environment as the major attractions of the Wheatbelt. Fourteen per cent also mentioned health services, perhaps reflecting the attraction of Northam and Narrogin as major regional centres within the Wheatbelt.

To determine which factors are particularly important in any decision to leave the regions or to stay, respondents were read a list of eight issues and asked to rate their importance. Across the regions, this showed clean environment, career opportunity and simpler lifestyle as the most important issues for regional people generally. However, it was noticeable that Wheatbelt respondents went against this trend by rating the provision of community services as one of their most important considerations, second only to clean environment.

(Further information and comparative regional data page 41 Living in the Regions - State Report)

The View from Perth

The survey included 150 interviews conducted with people in Perth to ascertain their views on a range of issues affecting the regions.

A significant finding was that while 57 per cent of Perth respondents said they would not want to leave Perth, a solid 43 per cent indicated they would prefer to live somewhere else in Western Australia. Most commonly, they would head south to either the South West or Great Southern, but four per cent nominated the Wheatbelt as their ideal location. While this may seem small, it was higher than for most regions. It was particularly intriguing, however, when you consider that people currently living in the Wheatbelt have the equal highest proportion who originally came from Perth. This suggests the Wheatbelt was once more of an attraction for Perth people than it now is.

Where Perth people want to live	%
Perth	57
Kimberley	4
Pilbara	2
Gascoyne	1
Mid West	3
Wheatbelt	4
Goldfields-Esperance	1
Peel	3
South West	16
Great Southern	9
Don't Know	3

Note: This was a multiple response question and therefore does not equal 100%.

When asked why they would choose to leave or remain in Perth, a number of common themes emerged. Those who chose Perth did so on the basis of family connections, facilities and lifestyle. Those wanting to live in the regions cited physical environment and a quieter, more relaxed lifestyle as their major motivations. It appears that people in Perth tend to think of the regions in terms of lifestyle advantages rather than economic opportunities.

A striking feature was the relative lack of knowledge people in Perth have about the regions. More than half could not name any towns in some regions, but the Wheatbelt fared comparatively well with 71 per cent able to name at least one town. Most commonly this was Merredin, followed by Northam, Narrogin and York but there was also some awareness of quite a wide range of Wheatbelt towns.

Just 39 per cent of Perth respondents perceived the Wheatbelt as a region with a strong economic future, while 21 per cent perceived it as weak - the highest 'weak' register for any region. The high 'weak' perception probably has a lot to do with the tendency for people in Perth to only hear about the Wheatbelt economy in relation to farming, at times when things happen to be tough.

Perceived Economic Future:

Perth respondents	Kimberley %	Pilbara %	Gascoyne %	Mid West %	Wheatbelt %	Goldfields-Esperance %	Peel %	South West %	Great Southern %
Net Weak	3	3	9	13	21	9	9	8	17
Net Strong	61	62	35	31	39	61	47	63	34
Neither	10	6	11	17	17	14	16	12	11
Don't Know	28	29	45	39	23	16	28	17	38

There was also an above average tendency to rate the natural attractions of the Wheatbelt as poor, which may be influenced by publicity in recent years about salinity issues. A quite high 'don't know' response dragged down perceptions on issues such as quality of social life and essential services, but results overall were not particularly at odds with other regions.

The fact that only 52 per cent of Perth people report that they have been to areas which are in the Wheatbelt (assessed by their understanding of the Wheatbelt's perimeters, not necessarily the true perimeters) suggests the need for more active promotion of the Wheatbelt as a place to visit. Only one in three Perth respondents said they had been there specifically for a holiday. The promotion of country harvest festivals and regional show days may also be attractive 'day trips' for people to visit the more accessible parts of the Wheatbelt.

When asked directly if the Wheatbelt was a place they would like to live, only 13 per cent of Perth respondents said it was, again suggesting the need for greater promotion of the region to provide a better understanding of its natural and other attributes.

A Place I Would Like to Live:

Perth respondents	Kimberley %	Pilbara %	Gascoyne %	Mid West %	Wheatbelt %	Goldfields-Esperance %	Peel %	South West %	Great Southern %
Net Disagree	58	67	68	63	69	63	37	21	41
Net Agree	23	14	11	13	13	22	42	66	35
Neither	7	5	5	8	7	7	7	6	7
Don't Know	12	14	16	16	11	8	14	7	17

(Further information and comparative regional data pages 42 to 51 Living in the Regions - State Report)

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE STATE REPORT

Mobility:

The survey shows that regional Western Australia is highly mobile. Only 16 per cent of respondents had grown up in the area where they now live. More than half had been in their current region for 10 years or less and a third for five years or less.

The survey suggests that about a third of people who move to the regions come from Perth and a quarter from overseas or interstate. The remainder move from within their current region or from another Western Australian region.

One in five reported moving three or more times in the last 10 years.

The Mid West had the highest proportion of people who had not moved from their current town or district in the last 10 years, while the Peel and the Pilbara were the most mobile.

Motivation:

Employment is the key factor prompting movement, followed by family/marriage influences and then lifestyle.

People living in the regions indicated they felt safe, had a strong affinity with their location and were generally happy with community facilities (particularly sports). Perceived safety was the most universally held attitude throughout the regions.

While in some regions there is a strong trend towards moving when children reach high school age, the survey suggests that overall 78 per cent of regional people with high school children send them to local high schools.

Attitudes to health care varied across regions, with particular concern evident in the northern regions. Overall, the standard of medical general practice was considered good, but the availability of specialist medical services was a significant concern.

The Future:

Only half the people in regional Western Australia plan to stay where they are indefinitely, although another 11 per cent say they have no firm plans to move.

This leaves a solid 33 per cent of the population who say they will either definitely or probably move on. The residual 6 per cent are not sure.

The survey suggests that a fifth of the regional population will move from their current region within five years.

Asked where they would most prefer to live, two-thirds of the total sample chose a regional area in Western Australia. In other words, the majority of people living in regional Western Australia prefer that lifestyle to any other.

In total, 21 per cent said they would prefer to stay in their current location, 44 per cent said they would either transfer to another region or to another place in their current region, 19 per cent chose Perth, five per cent interstate and one per cent overseas. (A further eight per cent said they did not know and two per cent named places that could not be identified through the DOLA database.)

The Perth Perspective:

Forty-two per cent of Perth respondents said they had lived at some stage in regional Western Australia, although most did not grow up there.

More than half said they would not move away from Perth, but a massive 43 per cent indicated they were open to the possibility. The South West was the most preferred destination (nominated by 16 per cent) followed by the Great Southern (nine per cent).

Major motivations for remaining in Perth include family and the availability of good services/facilities/shopping.

Major motivations for moving to the regions are a quieter lifestyle and country atmosphere.

Perth residents who wanted to move to the regions, but had not, said career structure was the overwhelming reason (28 per cent), followed by financial constraints (18 per cent) and children's education (14 per cent). There was a strong perception that they would not find suitable employment in the regions.

The view from Perth showed relatively little understanding of the economic opportunities available in regional Western Australia. Lifestyle values rather than economic opportunities were overwhelmingly the key attractions.

There was also limited awareness of specific regions, particularly those in the north. A significant number of respondents could not name any towns in some regions. Questions about perceived quality of life and essential services also drew a significant 'don't know' response.

There were clearly people in Perth who would like to live in the regions for perceived lifestyle benefits that appear to be borne out by the experiences of those living there. But most do not pursue a move unless they happen upon employment related opportunities.