

3 South West Overview

Regional Economic Snapshot

In 2024, the South West Region's Gross Regional Product exceeded \$19.6bn to set a new benchmark, accounting for 4.3% of WA's Gross State Product (ABS National Accounts). An average annual estimated GRP growth rate of 5.3% was achieved in the years 2016-2024, with negative growth reported in 2020.

The South West has a broad economic base with manufacturing, construction, mining, agriculture, tourism and timber processing key elements. There is a strong business and retail sector with an estimated 17,118 businesses in the South West. The main contributors to economic output in the region are Manufacturing (22.4%), Construction (14.5%) and Mining (15%).

Small and medium enterprises are the most significant employers with only 3% of all businesses employing more than 20 staff. Most production in the region is small scale and relies on premium markets to generate return on investment. Marketing premium quality is the principle characteristic of South West competitiveness.

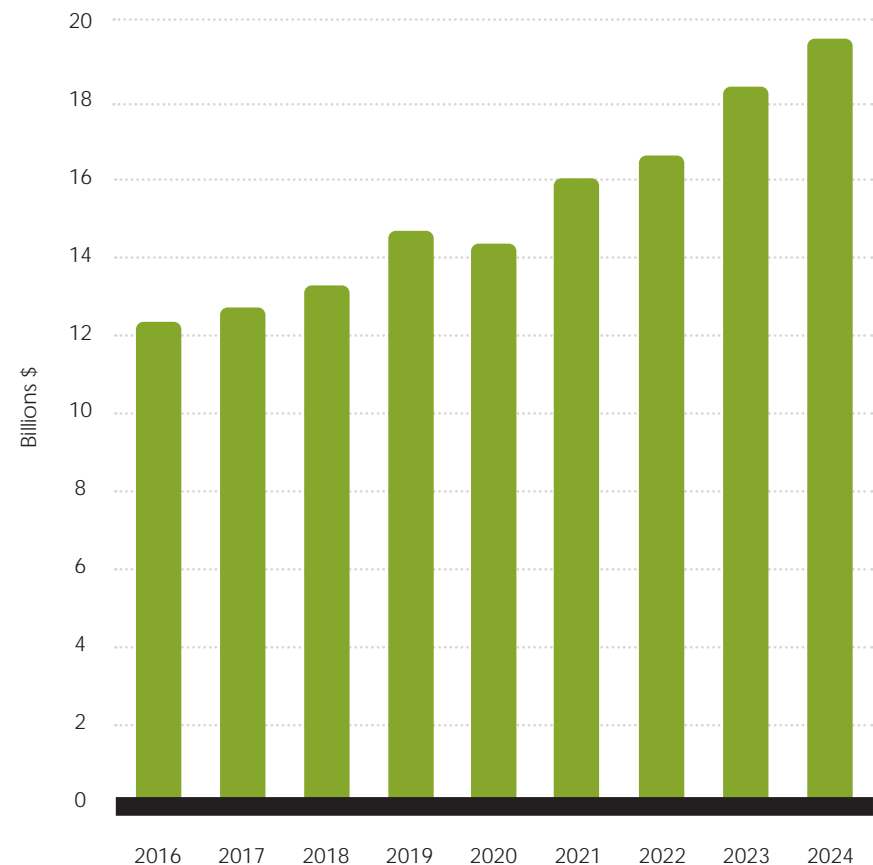


Figure 1 – South West Gross Regional Product, nominal terms, 2016-2024

Source: ABS 2021 Census Place of Work Employment (Scaled), ABS 2022/2023 National Input Output Tables, and ABS June 2024 Gross State Product.

3.1 Framework for Analysis

With the regional data and megatrends highlighted, an opportunity exists to look at South West data and overall prospects, and then discuss through the lens of agreed regional development determinants as established by the Council of Australian Governments and accounting for both the Australian Government's regional priorities and the Western Australian Government's regional strategic vision as delivered through the South West Development Commission (SWDC).

3.1.1 Determinants of regional development

- Connectivity and infrastructure: Access to international, national and regional markets (including supply chain infrastructure and digital capacity).
- Regional employment and business: Comparative advantage and business competitiveness boosted by clustering, R&D and a strategic regional vision.
- Human capital and skills: Adaptable and educated workforces supported by further and higher education facilities.
- Sustainable (economically, environmentally and socially) communities and population: supporting liveability, natural resources, opportunities and jobs.
- Effective cross-sectoral and intergovernmental partnerships and integrated regional planning: collaborative approaches provided by regional leadership, shared goals and including the Aboriginal community.

3.1.2 Pillars of the Western Australian Government's regional strategic themes in the South West

- Attracting new investment and business activity.
- Facilitating a robust pipeline of infrastructure investment.
- Providing ongoing support for the revitalisation of Collie.
- Providing ongoing support towards Bunbury's urban development and expansion.

In relation to these themes, SWDC notes priority sectors where significant growth and diversification opportunities exist for the region:

- Energy (including renewables).
- Technology and advanced manufacturing.
- Mining and Mining Equipment, Technology and Services (METS).
- Primary Industries, including Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing.
- Tourism, events and creative industries.
- Trade and investment.

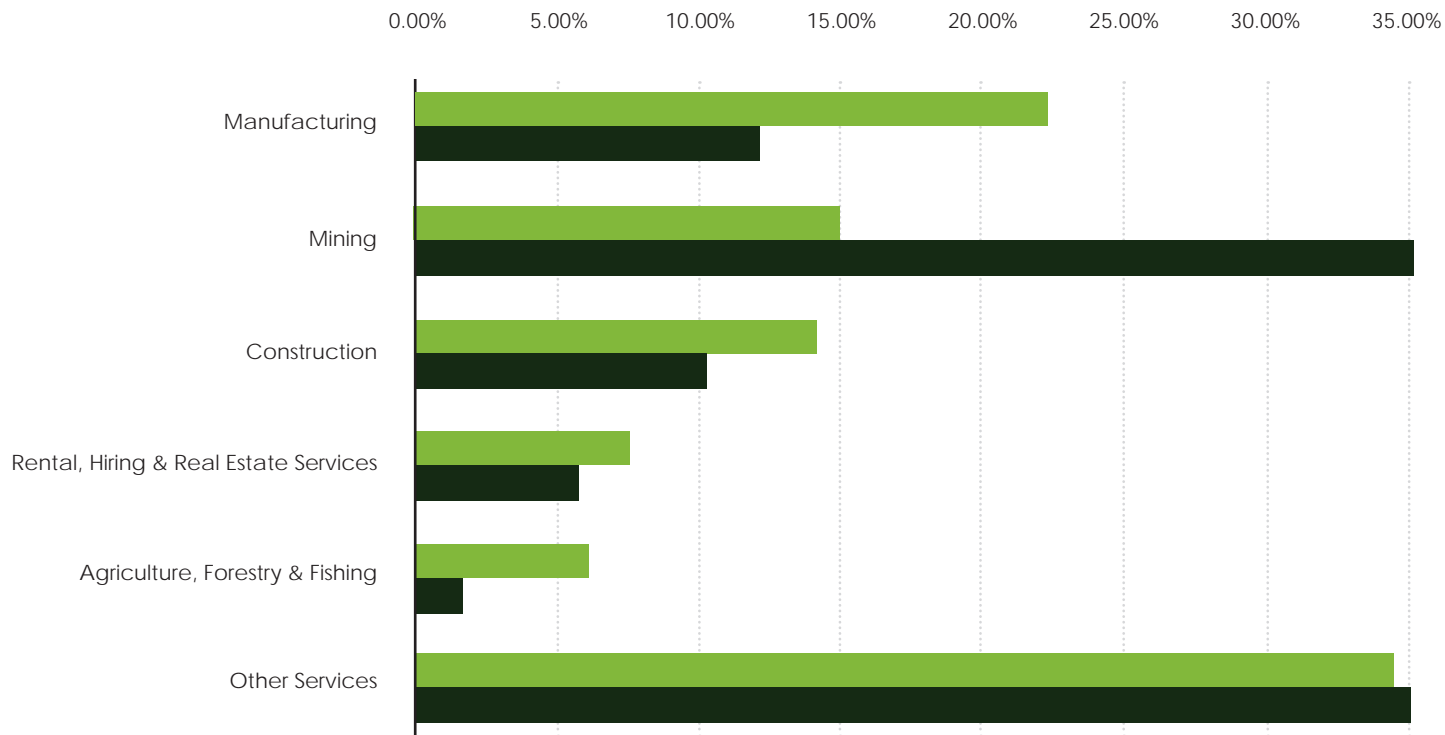


Figure 2 - Structure of the South West and Western Australian Economies, percentage share of output by sector REMPLAN 2024

Source: ABS 2021 Census Place of Work Employment (Scaled), ABS 2022/2023 National Input Output Tables, and ABS June 2024 Gross State Product

■ Sector's share of South West Economy %
■ Sector's share of WA Economy %

3.1.3 Regional SWOT

This forms a mix of domestic and bigger picture prospects and pressures

STRENGTHS

- Regional economic diversity
- Resources processing
- Transport infrastructure (road, rail, airport, maritime)
- Clean, green brand/reputation
- Softwood timber industry cluster
- Position in Asia and on the Indian Ocean
- Geo-landscapes and natural beauty
- Regional liveability and lifestyle attractors
- Proximity to the State capital
- Sustainable population
- South West Health-Education Precinct

WEAKNESSES

- Distance from major population centres
- Population demographic, particularly ageing in some areas
- Critical mass of people in the hinterland
- Number of seasonal/low paid jobs
- Water infrastructure for agriculture, industry and urban liveability
- Reliance on seasonal workforces
- Reliability of energy
- Constricted housing supplies and high rents
- Limitations on waste facilities
- Lack of fill materials for development

OPPORTUNITIES

- High tech manufacturing and digital technologies
- Public/private sector decentralisation
- Growth in agriculture and food demand
- Growing Bunbury as WA's second city (in every sense)
- Waste as a resource
- Renewable energy
- Proximity to SE Asian markets and Busselton-Margaret River Airport
- Alternative building and infrastructure construction practices
- Education to meet skills needs
- Climate studies and pilot projects
- Improved tourism product
- Increasing liveability

THREATS

- Housing and worker accommodation shortages
- Climate change and declining rainfall
- Water security, quality and quantity
- Slow pace of energy transition
- China trade relationship
- Poor appetite for long term investment (plantations)
- The cost of energy and commodity price volatility
- Ageing population
- Biosecurity and disease
- Investment in long-standing resources has flat-lined
- The cost of doing business in the South West
- Bushfire and coastal inundation

3.2 Region and Prospects

The region and its prospects will be discussed in reference to trends that point to the future and best practice economic development principles. Infrastructure Australia (2021) and the Regional Australia Institute's Regionalisation Ambition 2032 both acknowledge the increasing attraction of small cities and regional centres which is highlighting infrastructure gaps, barriers to regionalisation and enabling investment.

3.2.1 Connectivity and infrastructure (access to markets)

Distance is an economic hurdle than can only be surmounted by world class infrastructure – roads, rail, port, airports, intermodal hubs and data superhighways. It is important to acknowledge that the South West's regional centre is 185km from the world's most isolated capital city. Quality infrastructure is therefore a supply chain facilitator of market access and enabler of competitiveness.

It is important to note that with much of business being digitally based then communications are as essential as traditional transport infrastructure. The South West's relative global remoteness is mitigated by quality fibre connections and paves the way for attracting decentralised public and private workforces to a region featuring outstanding natural beauty and liveability.





Image by City of Bunbury

Roads

The South West has a quality road network that has benefited from upgrades to the Collie Highway and Wilman Wadandi Highway (WWH) works with associated duplication of the Bussell Highway. The WWH boosts links with the 1350ha Waterloo Industrial area, Kemerton and the Bunbury Port. The new outer ring road will service the timber precinct as well as facilitating the smooth flow of traffic to the Capes.

A future bottleneck is likely to be the Busselton Bypass which will require duplication though to Vasse. The bypass will service Yalyalup Industrial Park close to Busselton-Margaret River Airport, connecting to south of Vasse and Carbanup in 15-20 years. Before that, the Vasse-Dunsborough link will require enhancement and additional works are likely to be needed on the main Forrest-Bussell Highway corridor. Extra passing points will be necessary on the South Western Highway.

Rail

The main Perth-Bunbury line (Claisebrook-Picton) line has been close to capacity for some time, particularly from Brunswick to Picton where freight from Worsley and Collie join the line to Bunbury Port and contribute to 40 movements per day. There remain limitations on containers and constraints due to the lack of standard gauge tracks (21-tonne axle loads). Long term growth at Kemerton would also benefit from a rail spur to service investment.

Investigations into the re-establishment of the Greenbushes rail line have been ongoing but challenged by mineral price volatility.

Bunbury-Perth passenger services will be restored by the end of 2025 with two new three-car Australind train sets. These will enter service at the same time the Armadale line is reopened.

Bunbury Port

The port operates across the Inner and Outer Harbours, although management of the southern section of the latter has been handed to the WA Department of Transport. This will free up land for integration into the Bunbury Waterfront project over the coming decade.

The Inner Harbour features 400ha of quality and available development land with potential to accommodate overflows from Kwinana and Fremantle. Bunbury Port has continued to meet regional trade demand since it was founded in 1864 and adapts to market changes. Current trade continues to be 17-18mtpa. Organic growth is expected in the years ahead.

While the Westport Taskforce recommendations on container options focused on Perth, about 30,000 TEUs (Twenty-foot Equivalent Units) are now generated in the South West each year. Pressures on the Western Trade Coast has maintained interest in Bunbury as a roll on/off (ro-ro) port, and several studies continue to focus on the future trade scenarios on the West Coast.

Regionally, the port has a critical role in facilitating trade and servicing the resources sector which produces the bulk of the region's output wealth. With changing energy demands, the port is experiencing greater engagement with renewable energy projects and will continue to facilitate the future energy trade requirements for the region.



Image by Bunbury Port

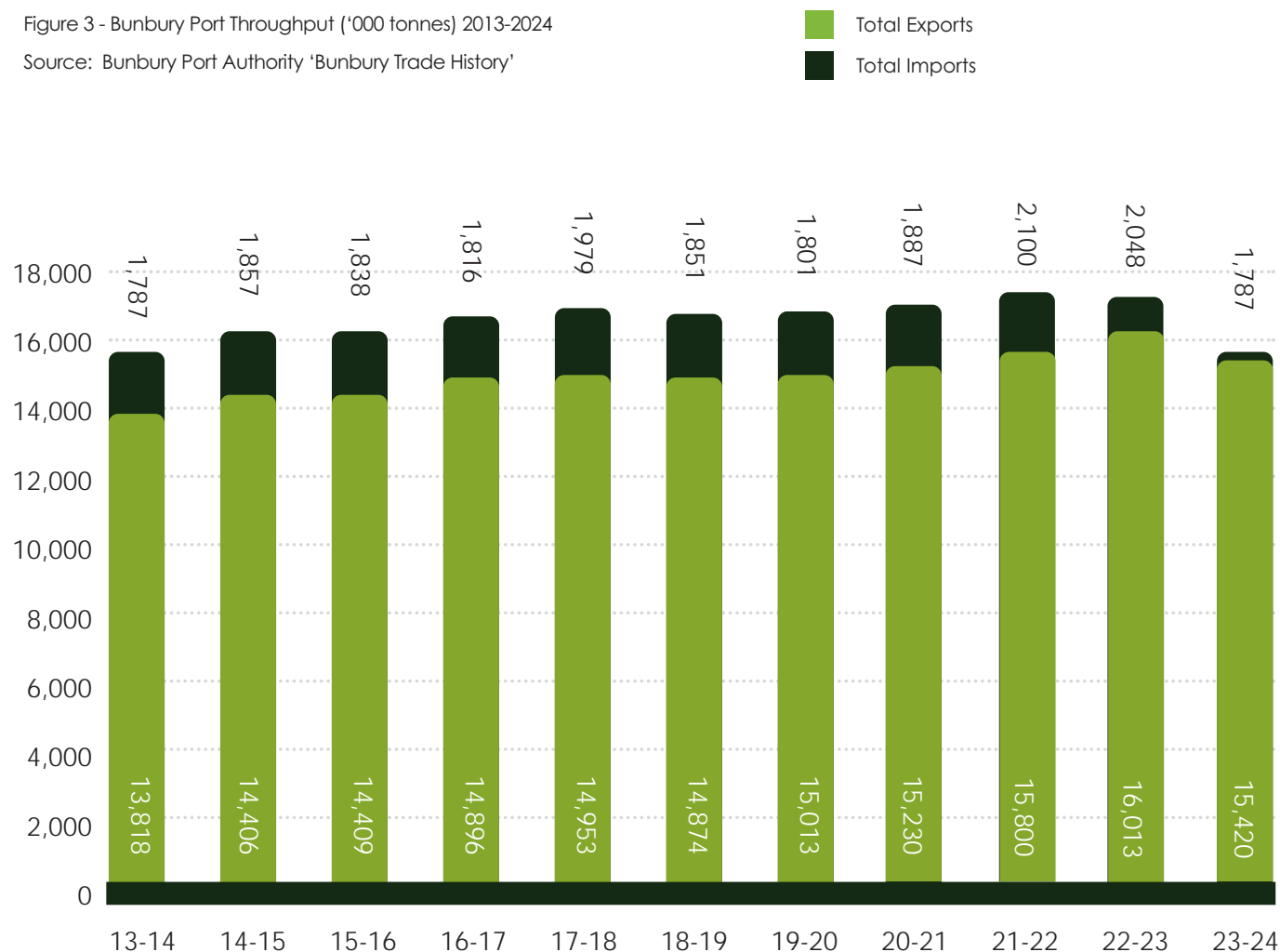


Strategies to support Energy and Water Infrastructure

- Encourage investment in renewable energy production and battery storage to decarbonise the future.
- Envision renewable energy as boosting the credentials for industry and the South West's clean/green reputation.
- Three-phase power provision for light industry precincts and water supplies at a pressure necessary for fighting fires.
- Progress the Myalup-Wellington water project to tackle salinity and trigger investment in piped irrigation.
- Encourage R+D and investment in water infrastructure and improve irrigation efficiency through consolidated schemes.
- Monitor the legislated introduction of water trading as a tool to drive efficiencies in a drying climate.
- Increased use of 'waste' water resources for reuse and/or aquifer recharge.
- Integrate sustainable water and power principles in any retrofit or new builds.

Figure 3 - Bunbury Port Throughput ('000 tonnes) 2013-2024

Source: Bunbury Port Authority 'Bunbury Trade History'



Airports

Busselton Margaret River Airport is the region's principal airport. Airside redevelopment work features a 2520m runway supporting Code 4E commercial aircraft (Boeing 737 and Airbus 320, 330) with the capacity for services to reach China. The airport's key passenger carrier is Jetstar which flies direct to Melbourne and Sydney.

BMRA aims to serve the region's tourism potential as a powerful economic driver on the back of up to 250,000 passengers projected to pass through the BMRA in 2026. Those numbers will exceed the capacity of existing landside infrastructure and underpin the rapidly growing pressures to develop a fit-for-purpose terminal.

The airport currently has 41 scheduled Fly in Fly out (FIFO) charter flights that service mine sites in the state's Mid and North West, 3 direct services per week to Melbourne and 3 direct services per week to Sydney. The introduction of a tri-weekly Busselton-Perth service will encourage both domestic and international visitation. In 2023-24, a total of 156,095 passengers passed through BMRA. This number is forecast to reach 190,000 in 2024-25 when all the figures are in.

Additionally, the airport serves ad hoc charters, tourism operators, emergency services (DFES, RFDS) and a growing general aviation community. With BMRA's close proximity to Perth, the regional facility is also an alternate airport for airlines when Perth Airport may not be available. Potential for the airport includes expanded destinations in Australia and overseas, serving passengers and freight. The airport benefits from extensive and nearby greenfield development opportunities which could serve freight as well as transport logistics, aircraft engineering and maintenance, and other industries.

Bunbury Airport has WA's highest number of light aircraft movements after Jandakot in Perth. Bunbury services private aviators and supports three flying schools as well as the region's rescue helicopter and seasonal water bombers. The site is home to more than 50 hangars and 100 aircraft. Expansion would require the realignment of the South Western Highway.

Manjimup Airfield caters for various aviation services such as the RFDS, emergency fire-fighting, private aircraft and has a small number of FIFO flights.

Image by City of Busselton, Busselton Margaret River Airport

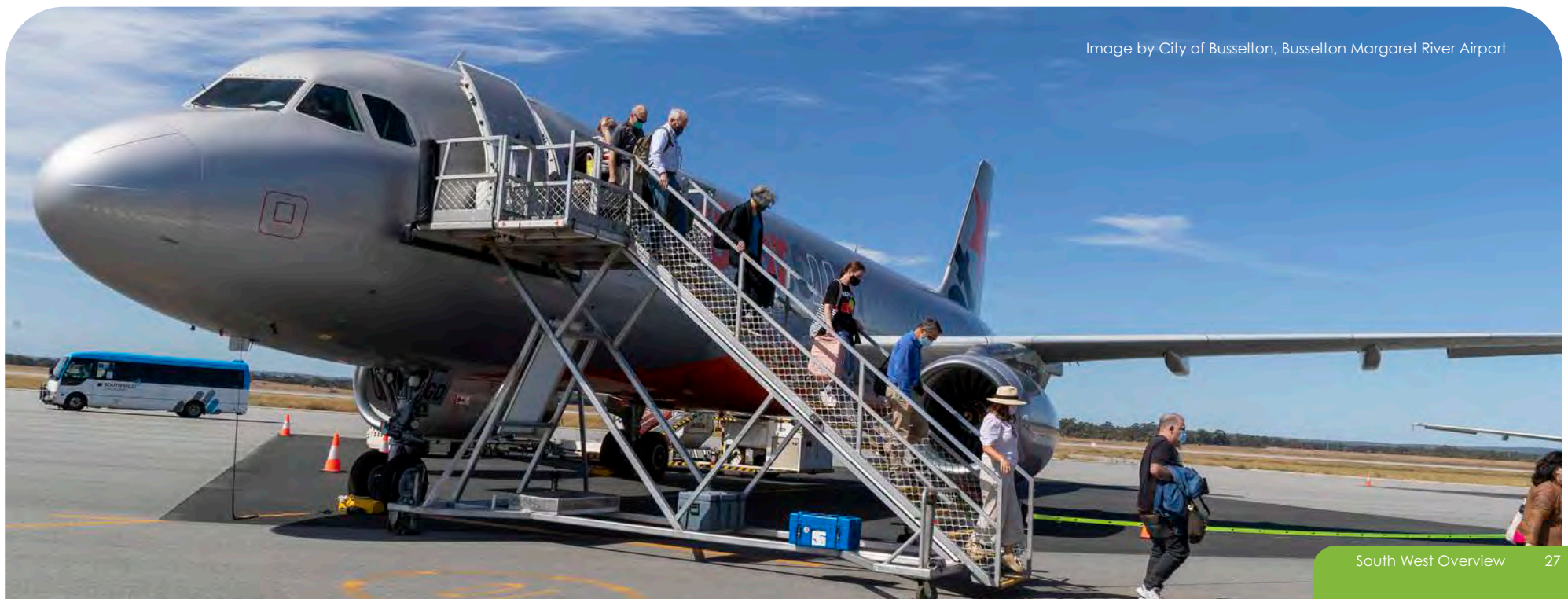




Image by Russell Ord Photography

Energy

The energy landscape is creating opportunities and unprecedented threats in equal measure. The Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) 2025 report concludes that 1,700 MW of ageing coal and gas power stations are expected to retire from 2027-32. There are plans to phase out coal by 2030, but renewable energy projects will not be developed fast enough to cover a predicted 932 MW shortfall in the next two years.

Coordinated by WA Treasury, the SWIS Demand Assessment estimates peak demand in the South West Interconnected System (SWIS) will more than triple by 2042. That means the South West could require up to 51GW of new energy generation and storage capacity to meet the needs of industry over the next 20 years. That will leave the South West with a serious energy demand deficit although 500MW of new grid-scale batteries are help balance supply and demand which is being challenged a lengthening demand period – and growth.

Batteries are also helping to stabilise the grid as Australians 'electrify' their homes.

With shortfall predicted, the reality is that if coal-fired power stations closures are firm, then there will need to be significant (and immediate) energy investment.

Collie is at the centre of the SWIS transmission network and has attracted multi-billion-dollar battery investments. These will help stabilise the grid and better

manage solar. Domestic penetration of rooftop solar in WA is the highest in the world and it is expected to blow out to 50% by 2030.

The 2025 Electrical Statement of Opportunities report notes: "In 2027-28, following the closure of more coal-fired generation, more capacity will need to be procured ... to avert energy shortfalls that are otherwise forecast to become more prevalent. While there is substantial continued interest in battery storage to help maintain reliable supply, investment in storage alone will not suffice. At least 110 MW of new generation sources such as gas, wind and solar generation will be required."

The South West economy is dominated by manufacturing. Albemarle, South32, Iluka Resources, Tronox and Simcoa all have huge energy demands. Resolving the energy challenge is the leading issue in the region. It is unlikely that sufficiently scaled wind infrastructure will be producing energy before 2033-34. It is therefore increasingly urgent that projects are fast-tracked as soon as possible, along with an extended transmission line network to take best advantage of low population and consistent, clean wind opportunities.

The region also needs to look to green hydrogen. The WA Renewable Hydrogen Roadmap supports remote communities and fuelling vehicles, particularly in return-to-base operations such as mining and waste services.



Image by Frances Andrijich, Wellington Dam

Water

Water security will be one of the region's greatest challenges. CSIRO found that the South West was 'one of the most water challenged' parts of the country. Rainfall has declined 15% since 1975 and continues to see a contraction along a NW-SE axis towards Cape Leeuwin.

Agriculture uses about 60% of all water in the region and 185GL Wellington Dam (the State's second largest surface water supply) is increasing in salinity. The dam's salinity levels of 1,000-1,500 mg/L (WA Government) have resulted from clearing in Collie River East Branch and are well above the 500 mg/L total dissolved salts acceptable for potable water. It is also considered too high for sustaining irrigation. Industry leaders believe that water is under-valued and so users can be wasteful, particularly in industry.

The prospects for water security are concerning without significant investment. It is preferred that interventions are pre-emptive rather than reactive.

Telecommunications

The South West is relatively well served by high speed communications, domestically at up to 100Mbps and in Business Fibre Zones at 1Gbps in Bunbury, Busselton, Margaret River and Collie. It is expected that technology advances, particularly with 5G Internet will boost a lot of areas, although fibre offers the greatest stability. The five key functional telecoms drivers include: superfast broadband, ultra-reliable low latency communication, massive machine-type communications, high reliability/availability and efficient energy usage. (PWC 2020)

NBN Co set a world record long range 5G transmission in 2021. That record 1Gbps signal over 7km from a fixed wireless tower is now held by e&UAE's 30.5Gbps set in 2025. Increases in fixed tower technologies will benefit South West due to a concentration of towers. That, Low Earth Orbit satellite progress and other advancements are critical to the region's proposals to create a Digital Innovation District/Advanced Manufacturing and Technology Hub.

Strategies to support Connectivity and Infrastructure

- Complete road and standard gauge rail links to the Port of Bunbury, delivering through the Bunbury Outer Ring Road and associated transport infrastructure.
- Boost supply chain improvement opportunities through an Inter-modal Terminal (IMT). Link industrial parks, the port and interoperable transport connections via the IMT and staging areas, including standard gauge rail.
- Upgrade the port to support projected trade expansion and to cater for additional traffic related to renewable energy projects.
- Plan for the longer term delivery of the Busselton Outer Bypass, investigating options of first putting in place a Dunsborough-Vasse Link.
- Create more passing places on busy single lane roads, particularly the South Western Highway.
- Prepare for the delivery of the Brunswick rail duplication.
- Deliver a study to determine preconditions for faster rail, benefits and opportunities.
- Expand Busselton Margaret River Regional Airport infrastructure to provide visitors with a premium experience and exporters with freight options.
- Consider bigger picture utilities infrastructure to support growth and environmental values.
- Continually drive communications upgrades to remain competitive and to support communities.
- Provide leading edge internet connections throughout the region's rural areas, particularly supporting farming communities

3.2.2 Regional employment and business (comparative advantage and business competitiveness)

Competitive advantage tends to come at the intersection of comparative advantage, good market access and opportunity. The South West's sub-regions feature aspects of different industry sectors although each has focus points based on inherent advantage – resources, agriculture and natural beauty.

Mining, Mineral Processing and Mining Equipment, Technology & Services Sector (METS)

The importance of the mining sector to Western Australia is widely acknowledged, but the mining/manufacturing value to the South West is less well recognised. Mining and manufacturing's value is a third of the total economy and that is growing.

The region is well placed for the future in alumina/bauxite processing, and particularly in lithium-rich spodumene production. The Talison Lithium plant in Greenbushes is in the middle of a 10-year transition. Five years ago output was at 650,000t and last year it was 1.35mt with quarterly sales exceeding \$2bn. By 2027 the forecast output is 2.2mt. With an anticipated mine life of more than 20 years, the Kemerton-based lithium processor, Albermarle is also expanding to meet worldwide demand.

In respect of titanium dioxide, compound annual growth rates of 5.3% are predicted

through to 2032. The region's mineral sands enterprises (Iluka and Tronox) contributed almost \$900m in sales (2022).

The sectoral picture for employment is muddled since the South West is home to a significant FIFO workforce and Alcoa's major alumina plant at Waaerup is located just inside the neighbouring Peel region but the bulk of the workforce hails from the South West with exports going through the Port of Bunbury. Mining in the South West employs more than 3,000 persons in-region, while almost that number travel outside the region for work.

Regional METS prospects are outstanding.

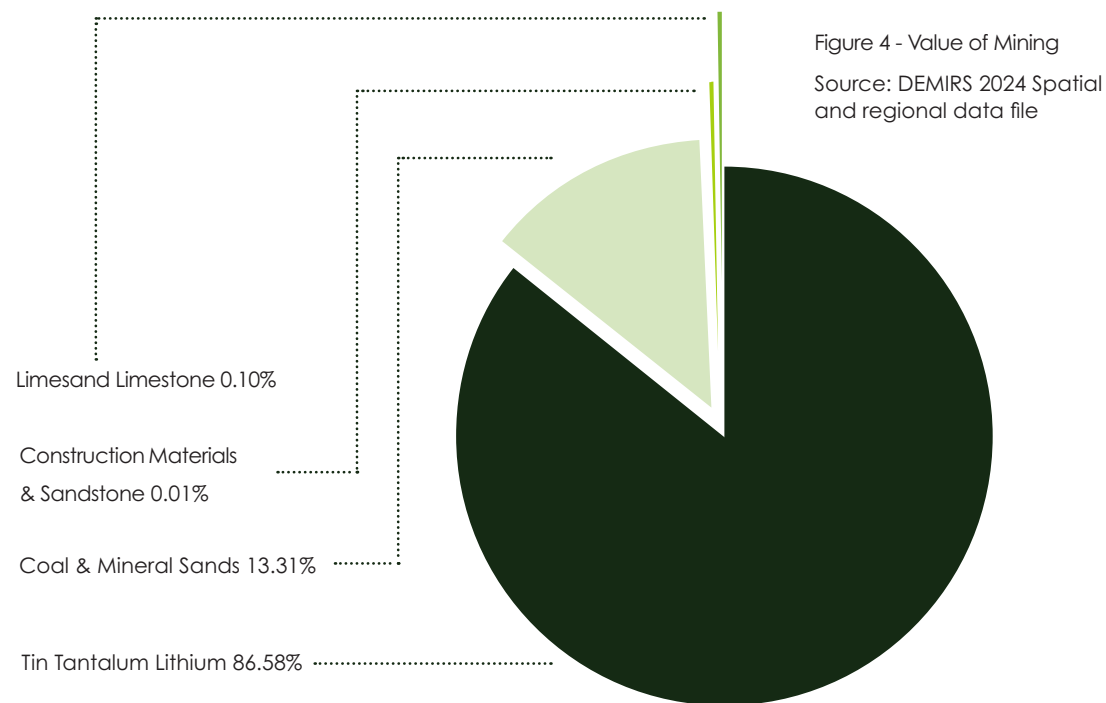
Note - Mineral and petroleum sales are necessarily allocated to a single Local Government Area (LGA) and Region, even though mining and processing operations may be located within multiple LGAs and Regions. Sales are allocated to LGAs and Regions based on where a mineral or petroleum product is originally extracted.

South West Region Value (by Commodity) 2023-24

Tin Tantalum Lithium	3,644,996,076
Coal & Mineral Sands	560,293,805
Limesand Limestone	4,097,570
Construction Materials & Sandstone	441,816
South West Total	4,209,829,267

South West Region Value (by LGA) 2023-24

Bridgetown-Greenbushes & Manjimup	3,645,023,698
Collie & Donnybrook-Balingup	463,015,376
Busselton & Augusta Margaret River	101,366,262
Harvey	423,931
South West Total	4,209,829,267



South West Region Mining Employment by LGA

Augusta-Margaret River	7	Bridgetown-Greenbushes	596
Bunbury	1,796	Busselton	69
Capel	378	Collie	2,687
Donnybrook-Balingup	1	Harvey	821
South West Total		6355	

Strategies to support mining competitiveness

- Improving transport efficiency through standard gauge rail and interoperable freight networks connected through an intermodal terminal linking in with the port of Bunbury and the Kemerton Strategic Industrial Area.
- Improving current reliability and capacity in the South West Interconnected System (SWIS) to service existing demand.
- The development of a reliable and cost-competitive green energy grid from 2030 with the capacity to service an increase in future commercial and industrial loads as forecast by the State Government's SWIS Demand Assessment.
- Major streamlining of existing environmental approvals processes that avoid Federal and State Government duplication while preserving existing levels of scrutiny that ensure industry maintains its robust environmental credentials.
- Access to accessible turnkey industry-ready land serviced by power and water.
- Expanded port capacity to facilitate efficient turnaround of imports and exports with storage facilities and laydown areas capable of accommodating both regular trade products and bulk renewable infrastructural imports.
- Government-led incentives to develop markets and innovative uses for by-products.
- Co-investment in downstream value-adding.
- Move towards knowledge clustering in advanced manufacturing, and direct industry input.
- Skills development and industry links to support the sector.



Agriculture

Agriculture, forestry and fishing is a large, fragmented industry that makes contributes \$2.76bn (6.3%) to economic output, with Manjimup the leading area and accounting for more than \$550m in annual output (ABS June 2024 Gross State Product).

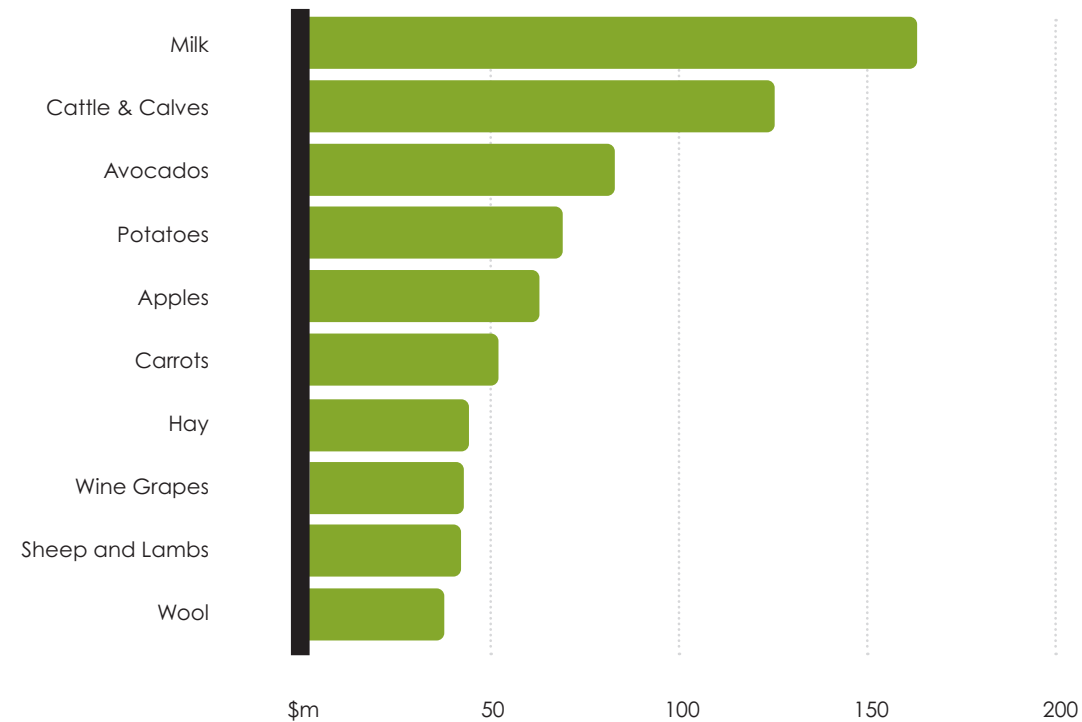
Farming takes up 7,100km² of land area in a region that has typically enjoyed reliable rainfall. However, this calendar year has been one of the lowest rainfall years in recent memory and producers in the region have struggled with livestock management and survival of plantation trees and vines. Re-examining water needs and how to meet them will be critical as efforts to support adaptation and dry season business management pivots from other areas of the state to the South West.

Being home to smaller farms and more intensive production methods than other primary production regions of the state, the South West faces challenges in the management of chemicals, fertilisers and effluent in areas that are closer to water sources and more urban environments. Scale also impacts on investment in mechanisation/technology upgrades which can reduce labour needs, an issue that has blighted the region especially at harvest time.

The future relocation of Boyanup Saleyards creates an opportunity for developing an agricultural precinct. This would be an enabler for collectively working at scale, value adding and manufacturing products to reduce waste. An agriculture precinct would also play to the region's strengths given that industry classifications with more than half the State's total contribution include: onions (100%), avocado (89%), potatoes (86%), apples (84%), dairy production (82%), carrots (53%), and wine grapes (65%).

Figure 5 - Value of agricultural production – South West 21-22

Source: ABS 2021-22 National Input Output Tables



Strategies to support the agriculture sector

- Implement immediate action on adaptation to water scarcity and quality, particularly for irrigation and re-engineering dams.
- Protect the highest quality land for agriculture.
- Introducing regenerative agriculture on marginal land and areas where soils are degraded.
- Support export opportunities in new markets, targeting growth areas and enhance the brand.
- Increase investment in food processing capacity within the region, with an emphasis on clusters and knowledge sharing.
- Facilitate access to investment capital to increase scale of production, value add and diversify.
- Support technological solutions, encouraging R+D and investment in water infrastructure and improve irrigation efficiency through consolidated schemes.
- Monitor water trading as a tool to drive efficiencies in a drying climate.
- Increase high capacity broadband to improve efficiencies in automation.
- Promote policy, identifying regulatory barriers and seeking solutions.
- Support and encourage new common user infrastructure such as saleyards and transport systems.
- Address dryland salinity through value plantations, particularly in the East Collie catchment.
- Find ways to reduce waste and utilise food that does not meet consumer expectations, eg blemished fruit.

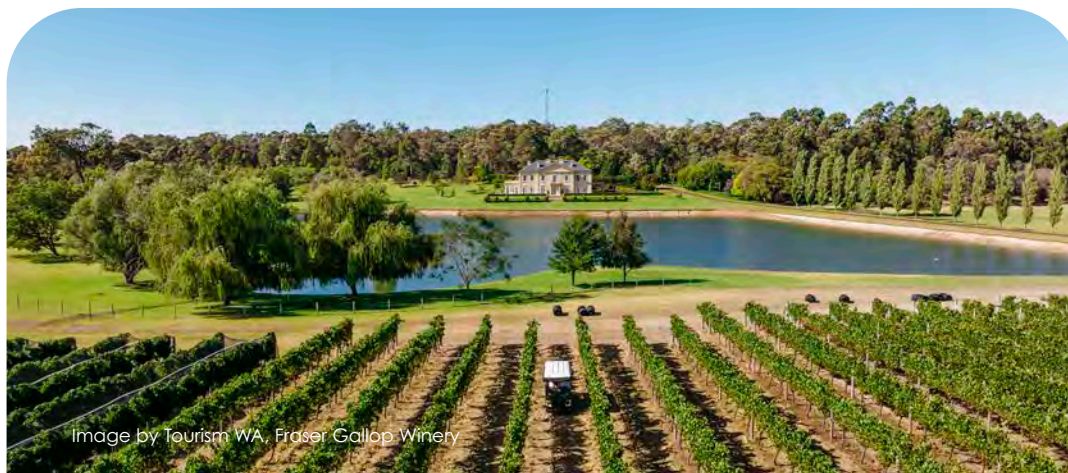


Image by Tourism WA, Fraser Gallop Winery



Viticulture

The value of wine grapes is just over \$50m and the value of the wine and spirits industry is collectively \$245m (2019). However, the value that the brand brings to Margaret River and the region as a whole is far greater.

Of the South West's five wine regions, Margaret River leads the way with 100 cellar doors and about 30,000t of grapes harvested contributing 2% of the national crush. Margaret River remains a standout for exports (1.6 million litres, \$24m, 2024-25) and leads the nation with 67% of wine sold in the top three price brackets.

The removal of Chinese tariffs saw the Australian export market bounce back and underlined in importance as other markets, particularly North America, have declined (Wine Australia, 2025). Weather conditions have been perfect for viticulture, leading to the 2025 vintage being hailed as exceptional for both red and white varieties and akin to the 2023 standout year.

The Geographe wine region continues to grow in reputation along with The Blackwood Valley, Manjimup and Pemberton regions.

Fisheries

Fisheries, particularly aquaculture, has increasingly realised its potential particularly in marron farming at Capel and abalone along the south coast. In respect of fishing, the recreational fishing industry has greater value than commercial operations, with almost 18,000 recreational fishers spending more than \$305m pa in the South West (Recfishwest 2021).

Timber

The timber industry is in the midst of unprecedented change and challenges. Two-thirds of the South West region is native forest but the vast majority of that resource has been set aside for conservation.

South West forestry was traditionally a mix of regrowth native hardwood, plantation hardwood and softwoods. However, commercial harvesting of native forest ended with implementation of the new Forestry Management Plan 2024-2033. This has left WA increasingly reliant on hardwood timber imports, but has created plantation opportunities for softwood (pine) and hardwood (bluegum).

Funded by the Australian Government to 2027-28, the South West Forestry Hub is one of 11 nationally and includes the South West and Great Southern regions. The priorities identified by the South West Timber Hub now focus on supporting growth in plantations and utilisation of forest thinning:

- Undertaking research projects aiming to expand the softwood plantation estate by at least 5,000ha annually, with a focus on integrating commercial trees on farmlands;
- Encouraging full utilisation of the available wood fibre; and
- Ensuring community understanding of the environmental, regional, social and economic benefits from managed forests and woodlands.

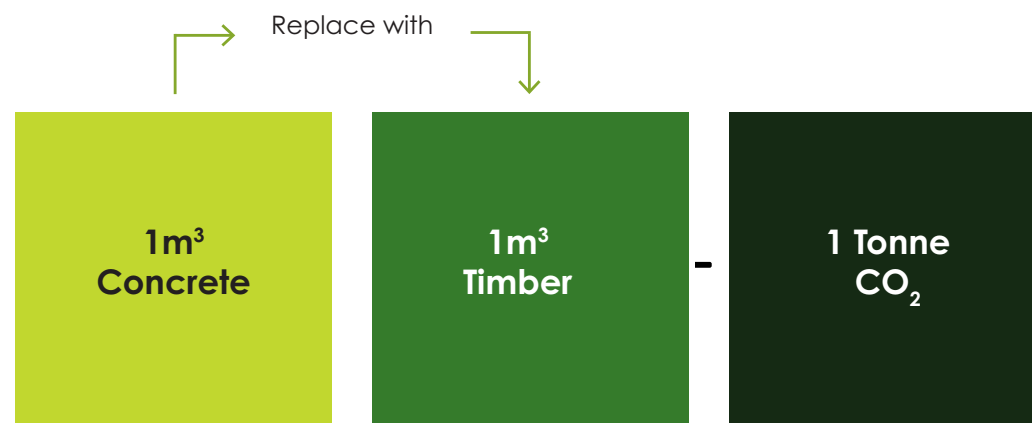
Forestry is being challenged by a drying climate. Geographically, the lower south western part of WA enjoys a natural rainfall advantage, although the 600mm precipitation line is retreating (westward). This is impacting on suitable land to establish more plantations.

The onflow from forestry is manufacturing. The Dardanup timber precinct captures Laminex, one of Australia's leading particle board manufacturers, and Wespine which produces the vast majority of the State's construction timbers. Koppers produces WA's power poles. There are other local interests in fibre processing including WAPRES which processes pine and bluegum for both export and domestic sales. Exports were approximately 870k mt (2023).

Timber sourced from sustainable forest management supports a local processing and manufacturing capability. Processing locally grown and harvested timber adds value and jobs while providing our community with the ultimate renewable

construction material. However, there is a shortfall of plantation softwood and a need for planting at least an additional 50,000ha to sustain existing processing capacity to meet the forecast industry demand in the years ahead. The State Government committed \$350m to plantation softwoods in 2021 but progress has been slow. Considerable opportunities exist for private sector investment in plantations.

New technologies are helping ensure that every fibre of resource is utilised and efficiencies can support opportunities in log peeling, veneer production, and Engineered Wood Products (EWP) including expanding LVL production or alternative cross laminate timber (CLT) manufacturing.



Credit: Planet Ark

Strategies to support the timber and forestry sector

- Expand the plantation estate to ensure a minimum 100,000ha.
- Continue to drive plantation options as a part of minesite rehabilitation.
- Explore opportunities for an Advanced Timber Manufacturing Hub.
- Encourage the adoption of Planet Ark's Wood First policy among Local Government bodies in line with WA Government wood procurement policy.
- Investigate opportunities for developing engineered wood products (laminates, plys, cross-laminate timbers, veneers and more) in the South West.
- Encourage investment in expanding the plantation estate.
- Ensure 'wood first' is embedded in government procurement policies.
- Support and encourage growth of the Dardanup cluster.
- Manage forests in a drying climate, eco-thinning and utilising fibre.
- Support biomass waste as an energy option, maximising the use of fibre and producing bio-char for regenerative agriculture.
- Encourage Aboriginal engagement in forestry, bushfire mitigation and employment in caring for country.
- Investigate the prospects of a demonstration project of 10-20 timber-built homes.
- Support advanced manufacturing of homes, including modular construction methodologies to produce affordable housing.
- Explore how blockchain technologies can provide consumer confidence in sustainable forest-ry practices and supplies.



Image by City of Busselton, Boranup Forest

Tourism

The tendency to measure the impact of tourism in financial terms never hits the mark since its benefits and true value stretch way beyond dollars and cents. Tourism creates vibrancy, echoes lifestyle and speaks to brand messages that reach beyond food and accommodation services (FAS).

While a number of regional communities value tourism, the key industry sector lies in the Capes where tourism jobs (2024) dominate: Busselton 15.2% and Margaret River 17.6%. The sector contributes through FAS but also in retail, services and even manufacturing. ABS metrics note that the FAS category provides 6.1% of all South West jobs. However, the total of tourism jobs for the region is 8.6% compared to tourism employment across Western Australia generally at 5.3%. The economic value of the sector (2024) was estimated at more than \$1.7bn with more than half of that in the Capes sub-region: Busselton \$666m and Margaret River \$325m.

The region clearly benefits from its natural beauty, amazing landscapes and proximity to the Perth intra-state

market. Quality events are also strong triggers for regional visitation which is supported by trails, food and beverage, cultural enrichment and visitors seeking positive/wellness experiences.

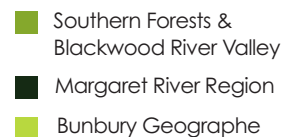
There are significant opportunities for Aboriginal cultural tourism, building on existing attractions, while new trails, improvements to the existing trails and world class cycling tracks add to the region's emotional drivers.

Prospects for an increasingly strong sector abound, but the strength of the sector in local employment is also its vulnerability. Given that the South West is noted as the seventh most tourism dependent region in Australia across different measures (Tourism Research Australia), building resilience through capacity and capability building to manage cyclical changes and shocks is essential. The sharing economy has also affected businesses, with Airbnb having an impact on professional accommodation services.

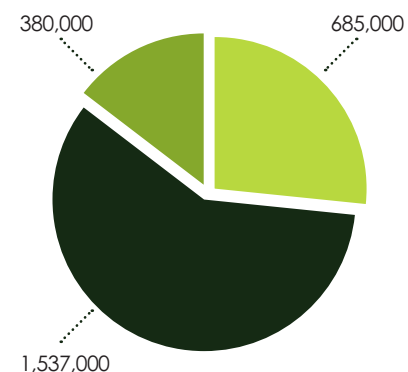
Accommodation and hospitality are traditionally less well paid than other sectors. This can be a challenge when those workers find themselves living in a tourism hotspots where living expenses are typically higher than average. The added complication is the current shortage of affordable housing.

Figure 6 - Domestic Nights in Australia's South West Sub-Regions

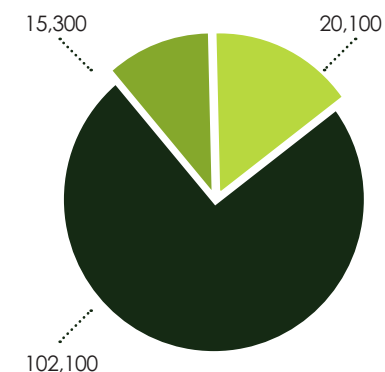
Source: Tourism Research Australia - International and National Visitor Surveys



Domestic Visitation YE Dec 24



International Visitation YE Dec 24



Activities, attractions & events		Bunbury-Geographe	Margaret River Region	Southern Forests & Valleys
Culture & Heritage	Nature/biodiversity	S	S	S
	Arts & creativity	E	S	D
	Aboriginal culture	D	E	D
	History & heritage	D	E	E
	Adventure	S	S	E
	Wine, food & produce	E	S	E
	Events & festivals	S	S	S

S Signature product, well established and represented

E Emerging product is established and growing

D Development opportunity

Source: Australia's South West Tourism Destination Marketing Plan

Domestic Nights in Australia's South West Sub-Regions YE 2021-YE 2023

	% Change 23-24	3 year CAGR* 23-24
Bunbury Geographe	-6.0%	2.8%
Margaret River Region	-2.3%	-0.2%
Southern Forests & Blackwood River Valley	-5.2%	-3.7%

*CAGR = compound annual growth rate

Source: Tourism Research Australia - International and National Visitor Surveys

Strategies to support the tourism sector

- Construct a fit-for-purpose Busselton Margaret River Airport terminal and fit-out to a standard that gives visitors a quality experience with provision to accommodate international tourists at a later date.
- Encourage high quality and eco-certified accommodation developments.
- Invest in first class attractions that add value to the region as a whole.
- Sub-regions should focus on place-based advantages, aligning with the region's Tourism Destination Marketing Plan. For example, experience and product development in adventure tourism and trails, wellness, arts culture and heritage, and agritourism.
- Attract and grow demand in higher yield markets and values-based travellers to identified niches including trails, food and wine, wellness and road trips.
- Build capacity within existing Aboriginal Cultural Tourism experiences ensuring the South West Aboriginal communities are part of the decision making.
- Position the region to demonstrate outstanding environmental credentials.
- Focus on place-based supply side initiatives including sustainability, aviation, niche product development, and leveraging trails investment.
- Co-ordinate and build on events, including business events, that capitalise on the regional airport and conferencing assets.
- Create a suite of high-level events that leverage the region's quality sports infrastructure assets.
- Capitalise on geo-landscapes and the region's unique geology.
- Ensure quality telecommunications connectivity to enhance visitor experiences.
- Leverage and support the ASW regional brand and assets to strengthen strategic marketing across the region.
- Build greater industry capacity and capability to support sustainability of tourism across the region.
- Improve signage (directional signage, placemaking, tourism and dual naming/Aboriginal art) to assist visitors and operators.
- Consider accessibility and implement projects to support all visitors.

Strategies to support creative industries

- Investigate the creation of a Creative Incubator in Busselton, including provision for start-ups, shared spaces, mentoring, business skills training, established business and underpin with a leading edge anchor tenant.
- Provide support and investment in local creatives and precinct development to provide places to connect, network and collaborate.
- Support the continued improvement of high capacity broadband and fibre zones to support the sector, enhancing digital infrastructure to facilitate creative output and maximise potential by facilitating 'creation anywhere'.
- Foster a collaborative ecosystem, learning from successful models in other regions which promote inclusivity, partnerships as a driver of innovation and business growth.
- Embed creative arts in the education system to nurture future talent, ensuring the longevity and vibrancy of the sector.
- Work towards placing the South West in a leadership position through actions and events.
- Embrace a vision that extends beyond traditional employment streams to integrate creative thinking into all industries, so the region is set apart from others and attracts further investment.
- Generate a film-friendly reputation via a supply of capable operators.
- Support 'buy local' strategies to help incubate the sector through local purchasing of digital media and related content.
- Support an Aboriginal art gallery and the expansion of other galleries to grow the recognition of a chain of arts and cultural attractions linking sub-regions.
- Demonstrate that the South West is a creative region through unique, place-based community infrastructure.



Image by City of Bunbury

Creative sector

Economic growth, prosperity and liveability is underpinned by growth in the creative sector with creative roles being integral to many sectors, not just traditional arts and culture.

The South West region has a substantial and growing creative economy, with some hotspot areas such as Bunbury, Busselton and Margaret River showing employment levels comparable to Perth.

While diverse, creatives lie in these categories:

- Core arts and Cultural industries (e.g. core arts such as literature, music, performing art and visual arts and cultural industries such as film, museums, galleries, photographic studios and libraries)
- Creative industries (e.g. sound recording, television and radio, video and computer games, heritage, publishing and print media)
- Wider creative jobs in other industries (e.g. architecture, marketing, advertising, design)

Many creative jobs contribute to the economy but are not located specifically within a creative business. Overall there are 1,467 jobs in the creative sector, but also 1,394 creative jobs that are located in “non-creative” industries. Some examples include computer system and app design across all industries, architectural services in construction, marketing and advertising in almost any business.

Underpinning these ecosystems is the local Capes reputation for quality nationally-recognised events

and festivals such as CinéfestOZ which has helped fuel growth of the screen industry over the past decade. The Bun-Geo subregion encourage creatives to connect through events such as Bunbury Fringe, the Creative Tech Village hub in Bunbury and also a number of maker spaces being supported by local governments.

Retail

A shift in consumer behaviour has seen retail move from the most significant employer in the region to the third, accounting for 10.7% of all employment. It remains a majority employer in the Shire of Dardanup at 14.7%, and a major contributor to jobs in the tourism region of Augusta/Margaret River, and Busselton at 11.9% and 12.7%.

Changes in consumer behaviour has seen some change and has shaped CBDs in recent years. However, Local Governments have responded and there has been significant investment in Busselton and Eaton.

Nevertheless, online options, cost of living pressures, reduced disposable income and increased commercial rents combine to squeeze retailers.

It has also been recognised that shoppers are likely to demand a more enjoyable experience and greater diversity, so a number of smaller and unique outlets are more appealing than national chains.

Strategies across the retail space

- Begin processes to re-vision CBDs to provide drawcard experiences, especially supporting place-based approaches to community connections and small business in the retail space.
- Examine multi-levels in CBDs, utilising spaces above shopfronts to activate spaces by boosting resident populations and changing the lifestyle dynamic.
- Encourage casual/pop-up use of empty retail and office premises.
- Use street art and street furniture to enrich and enliven CBDs, creating unique spaces that reflect the local cultural narrative and attract people.
- Change the feel of shopping areas. Activate walking precincts through traffic calming or re-routing through traffic, particularly in tourism towns.
- Encourage appealing shopfronts, rooftop bars and clusters of impact.
- Green urban CBDs to make them welcoming and reduce summer heat.

3.2.3 Human capital, particularly education and skills

Human capital is a significant contributor to regional development through skills, training, regional resilience and having a capable workforce. This section examines the human capacity of the South West and opportunities to strengthen the region's capability as an input to business competitiveness and overall quality of regional life.

The knowledge and skills of workers available in the labour supply is a key determinant for both business and economic growth. Those with higher education and training earn higher wages and contribute more to the economy through spillover spending (Radcliffe 2020).

The region features Western Australia's largest non-metro TAFE with six campuses in the region, while Edith Cowan University (ECU) South West, Bunbury is the largest regional campus in WA. ECU has more than

30,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students, including international students from 100 countries.

ECU South West features recognised research partnerships, study hubs and learning centres throughout the region, offering a comprehensive range of courses in arts, commerce, science, environmental health, health science, nursing, midwifery, social work and teacher education.

ECU South West also delivers the WA Creative Tech Innovation Hub – WA Creative Tech Village in Bunbury and is establishing the South West University Department of Rural Health. This will offer medical, nursing and midwifery and allied health students practicum placements throughout the region to boost rural primary care workforce, improve health outcomes and give students a taste of rural-regional work.

In addition to the courses offered by South Regional TAFE, there are numerous Registered Training Organisations

supporting the public sector and meeting the needs in the area of apprenticeships and traineeships.

Data from the last decade shows increasing levels of educational achievement, although the South West still lags behind Greater Perth: 4.2% studying toward a bachelor or higher degree versus 1.6% in the South West (2021). The disparity may be due to the cost of education for regional students having to fund accommodation in the city, and the greater mobility of highly educated people.

The number of people undertaking tertiary training is increasing and more of the workforce now holds postschool qualifications with growth recorded in both VET and higher education qualifications.

With increasing technical knowledge required in roles that were once unskilled, it is vital that levels of higher educational continue to progress.

	University or other Tertiary Institution	%	Technical or Further Educational Institution	%	Population
Western Australia	112,067	4.2%	59,902	2.2%	2,676,904
South West	2,813	1.6%	3,799	2.1%	180,443
Warren Blackwood	135	0.8%	268	1.5%	17,615
The Capes	903	1.6%	1,127	2.0%	56,655
Bunbury Geographe	1,775	1.7%	2,396	2.3%	106,173

Figure 7 - Proportion of population 15 years and over attending university or technical education

Source: ABS 2021, Census Community Profiles

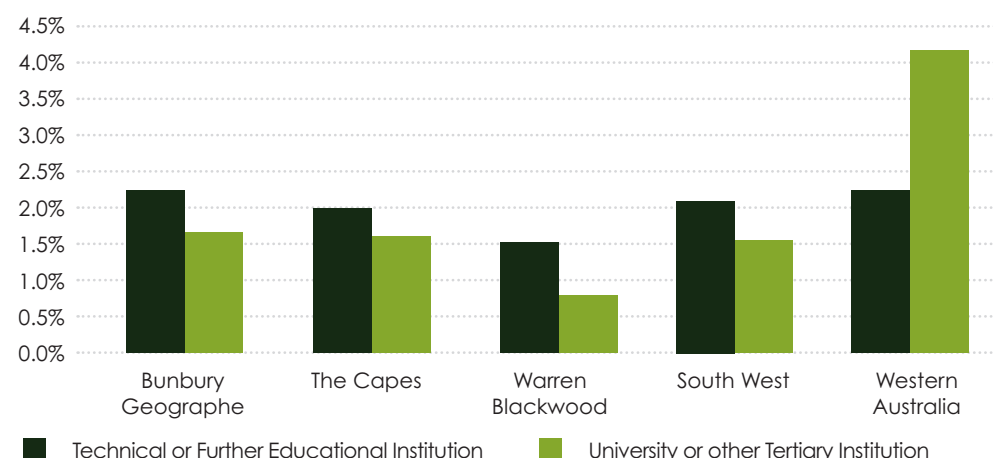


Figure 8 - Labour market outcomes by highest level of educational attainment, 2020 (%) - Australia

Source: Australian Jobs Report 2020

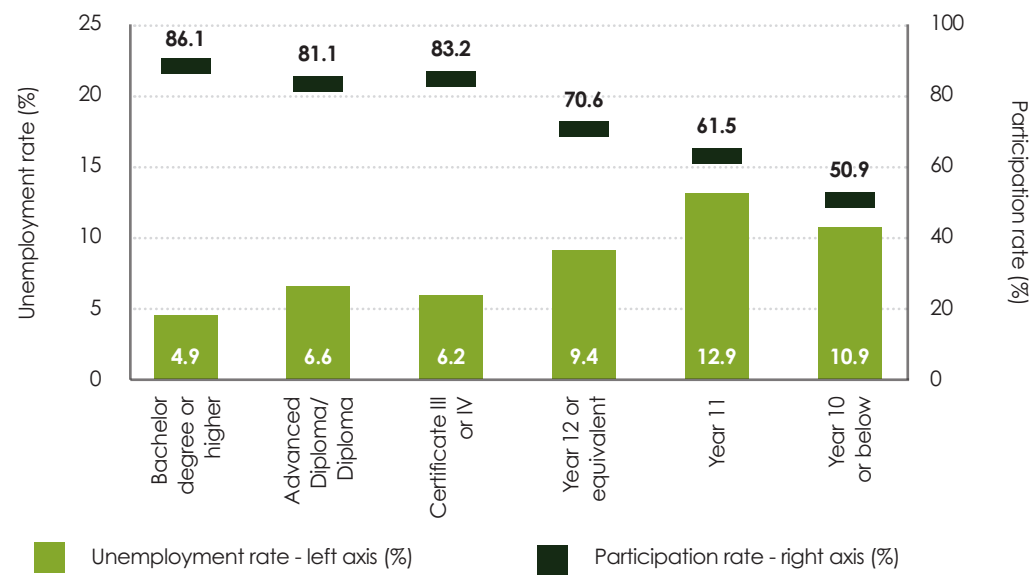
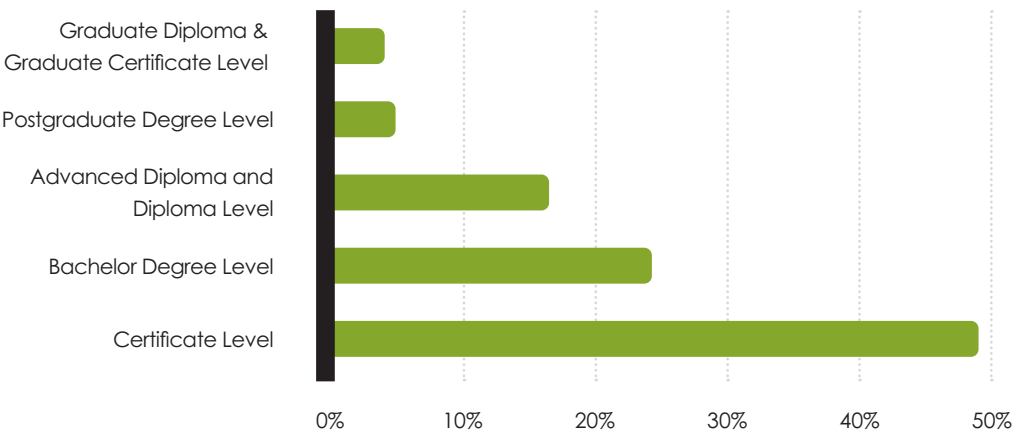


Figure 9 - Highest completed non-school qualification - South West

Source: ABS 2021 Census of Population and Housing



Strategies to support education and skills

- Link ECU's reputation in cyber security, integrating that, IT generally and TAFE training with the development of an advanced manufacturing hub.
- Create customised courses that build digital capacity on existing study, particularly for trades and meeting the needs of Industry 4.0.
- Certified training to meet care needs and employment opportunities resulting from demographic change and the ageing population.
- Blend online learning and attendance as a response to future educational demand and delivery.
- Introduce additional learning support/centres in key areas of regional growth reflecting regional student participation levels.
- Drive co-operation between industry and academia/training organisations to deliver premium training and research outcomes.
- Identify and exploit points of difference in education and training such as industry placements, internships, inter-state or overseas study exchanges for broader experiences and contra arrangements to expose students from overseas/interstate to the South West.
- Explore new ways of packaged learning as an alternative to the traditional three-year degree.
- Investigate options to share childcare services on the South West Campus to support retraining and upskilling.
- Project-based targeted training and skills development to help close the gap and provide work for Aboriginal people.
- Connect industry needs directly with tailored training.
- Adopt procurement policies to support training and Aboriginal economic engagement.



3.2.4 Sustainable (economically, environmentally and socially) communities and population

People

A sustainable population is a prerequisite for regional development, although predicating economic growth on a continually expanding population is environmentally reckless. The South West has not yet had the conversation on an ideal population size, but there remains capacity for growth and a need to plan for a regional population of 300,000 by 2050.

Population forecasting by WA Tomorrow was revised down as a result of very low migration numbers, a Covid impact that will resonate for some years. For the South West the impact is a greater number of aged persons, less aged to 14 years, and the dependency ratio will rise to 38% by 2063 (Intergenerational Report), a trend consistent with other developed nations. The regional population (201,659 in 2024) has grown steadily and at a faster rate than most of regional WA. The coastal strip remains popular with the Bunbury-Busselton axis being home to more than half of the whole region's population and accounting for about 55% of the region's workforce. The urban footprint that makes up Greater Bunbury accounts for almost 80,000 people.

All Local Government areas have grown since 2015 but experience different drivers: net overseas migration; net internal migration; and/or natural increase. The fastest growing local government is the Shire of Augusta-Margaret River followed by the Shires of Bridgetown and Boyup Brook. All areas have gained through net internal migration.

The City of Bunbury is constrained by its boundary and is impacted by the social trend to have less persons per household. The Regional Australia Institute predicts that Greater Bunbury will grow to 172,700 by 2056 and Busselton will grow to 68,500.

Inland communities, from Collie through to Manjimup, are generally more constant and reflect the nature of communities based on primary industry. These communities also feature a higher median age group.



Figure 11 - Jobs in Sub Regional South West by Industry

Source: Data based on: ABS 2024 Census of Population and Housing (Scaled)

Work in Bunbury Geographe (2024 Release 2)

Industry Sector	Jobs	%
Health Care & Social Assistance	7460	15.3%
Construction	5687	11.6%
Retail Trade	4952	10.1%
Manufacturing	4946	10.1%
Education & Training	4558	9.3%
Total of workforce		56.4%

Work in The Capes (2024 Release 2)

Industry Sector	Jobs	%
Accommodation & Food Services	3391	14.3%
Health Care & Social Assistance	3068	12.9%
Retail Trade	2965	12.5%
Construction	2564	10.8%
Education & Training	2154	9.1%
Total of workforce		59.6%

Work in Warren Blackwood (2024 Release 2)

Industry Sector	Jobs	%
Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing	1,873	24.0%
Health Care & Social Assistance	808	10.4%
Retail Trade	678	8.7%
Education & Training	633	8.1%
Accommodation & Food Services	595	7.6%
Total of workforce		58.8%

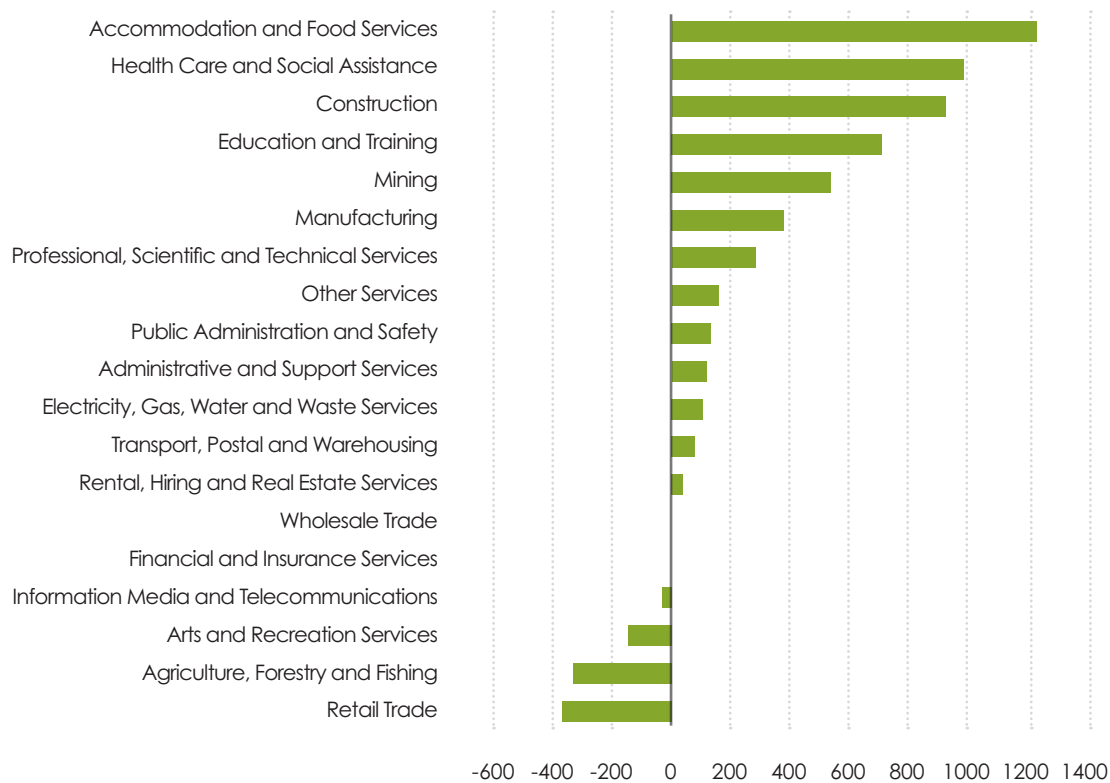


Figure 10 - Projected employment growth by industry, South West Region, five years to 2024

Source: Department of Jobs and Small Business 2019 Employment Projections, five years to May 2024



Figure 12 - Regional population, 2023-24 – South West

Source: Estimated resident population and components, Local Government Areas Western Australia 2023-24

	As of June 30		Movement 2023-24		Natural increase	Net Migration	
	2023	2024				Domestic	Overseas
	No.	No.	No.	%	No.	No.	No.
Augusta-Margaret River	18,633	19,410	777	4.2	77	355	345
Boyup Brook	1,948	1,959	11	0.6	3	2	6
Bridgetown-Greenbushes	5,671	5,797	126	2.2	1	106	19
Bunbury	34,788	35,174	386	1.1	-6	33	359
Busselton	43,984	45,003	1,019	2.3	43	700	276
Capel	19,341	19,701	360	1.9	110	127	123
Collie	9,298	9,408	110	1.2	18	55	37
Dardanup	15,690	15,930	240	1.5	59	105	76
Donnybrook-Ballingup	6,440	6,584	144	2.2	21	84	39
Harvey	30,802	31,495	693	2.2	188	292	213
Manjimup	9,442	9,523	81	0.9	8	18	55
Nannup	1,632	1,675	43	2.6	-1	33	11
South West	197,669	201,659	3,990	2.0			
Western Australia				2.8			

Demographic implications indicate a need to consider active ageing and provide more aged accommodation. Consequently, there will be training and professional opportunities in healthcare. Older residents may be less mobile and require public transport as well as putting more demand on medical services.

Figure 13 - Age Structure of the South West region relative to Western Australia - 2016, 2021, 2036

Source: ABS Census 2016 and 2021 and WAPC (Western Australia Tomorrow) 2016 to 2036

	2016 Census		2021 Census		2036 Estimate	
	SW	WA	SW	WA	SW	WA
0-4 years	6.3%	6.5%	5.4%	6.1%	4.8%	5.4%
5 to 14	14.0%	12.7%	13.5%	12.9%	10.7%	11.0%
15 to 19	6.2%	6.1%	5.8%	5.8%	10.2%	12.5%
20 to 24	4.6%	6.5%	4.2%	6.0%	9.9%	13.7%
25 to 34	1.3%	15.3%	10.6%	14.0%	10.5%	14.1%
35 to 44	13.1%	13.9%	12.8%	14.3%	11.7%	13.6%
45 to 54	14.1%	13.5%	13.5%	13.1%	13.3%	13.4%
55 to 64	3.4%	11.4%	13.7%	11.8%	12.3%	10.6%
65 to 74	10.3%	8.1%	12.2%	9.3%	12.7%	9.4%
75 to 84	5.0%	4.2%	6.1%	4.9%	9.7%	6.9%
85 and over	1.8%	1.7%	2.1%	1.9%	4.1%	3.2%



Image by Tourism WA, Busselton Jetty



Aboriginal people make up 2.7% (nearly 5,000 people) of the regional population. Noongar people are the Traditional Custodians of land stretching from Geraldton to Esperance, and there is evidence of some of the longest connections to the land and waters among all Indigenous people.

The South West connects the traditional boundaries of Wadandi, Pibulmen, Kanenag, Pindjarup and Minang dialect groups represented by Wagyl Kaip (Boyup Brook, Bridgetown, Walpole) to the East, Gnaala Karla Booja (Bunbury, Capel, Donnybrook, Balingup, Harvey, Collier and Mandurah) to the north, and Karri Karrak (South West Boojarah: Busselton, Dunsborough, Margaret River, Pemberton and Nannup) Native Title groups. It is important to note that the region's Noongar people have an exceptionally deep and enduring connection to booja (country) both physically and spiritually.

The South West Native Title Settlement is the largest Native Title settlement in Australian history and comprises six Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) registered in 2021.

ILUAs are pushing forward and creating unprecedented opportunities for the region's Aboriginal people, with huge efforts being made to boost economic engagement through Ranger programs, commercial procurement, education/training and government projects. Other significant opportunities are in culture, knowledge and art.

Figure 14 - Change in the Region's Population 2016 to 2024 by LGA
 Source: ABS Estimated Residential Population, ABS 2021 Census Population & Housing

	Resident Population 2024	Change 2016-2024		Av Annual Growth rate 2016-24
		%	No.	%
Augusta-Margaret River (Shire)	19,410	36	5,153	3.9
Boyup Brook (Shire)	1,959	15	257	1.8
Bridgetown-Greenbushes (Shire)	5,797	24	1,136	2.8
Bunbury (City)	35,174	10	3,254	1.2
Bussetton (City)	45,003	23	8,315	2.6
Capel (Shire)	19,701	15	2,580	1.8
Collie (Shire)	9,408	7	610	0.8
Dardanup (Shire)	15,930	14	1,902	1.6
Donnybrook - Balingup (Shire)	6,584	12	713	1.4
Harvey (Shire)	31,495	19	4,946	2.2
Manjimup (Shire)	9,523	3	270	0.4
Nannup (Shire)	1,675	26	346	2.9
Total	201,659			



Image by Tourism WA,
 Connection to Country, Koomal Dreaming



Sports

Regional communities are bound by sports and high rates of participation, particularly organised sport. Local competition fuels community identity, inclusiveness and a sense of belonging.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime promotes sports and related activities to prevent crime and to effectively build resilience of at-risk youth. Strengthening the life skills of youth is a key objective of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which encourages social inclusion and links across race, gender and age.

While socially important, sports and recreational industries are generally under-rated as economic drivers for smaller industry sectors, community cohesion and tourism. They contribute to economic diversity and generate opportunity.

Sport West (2023) found the social return on investment in organised sport delivers an estimated gross benefit of \$10.3bn per year in Western Australia. For every dollar of economic and social investment into sport, more than \$7 of economic and social benefit are fostered.

As greater value is put on personal time and interests, discretionary spending boosts sectors from recreational fishing to racing and pacing. The South West racing and pacing industry supports thoroughbred racing in Bunbury and Collie, and trotting clubs in Bridgetown, Bunbury, Busselton and Collie. Bunbury Turf Club is the region's premier facility. Bunbury enjoyed an almost \$30m upgrade which has enabled year-round training and racing in what is the leading regional facility in Western Australia. The redevelopment also saw the creation of 150 state-of-the-art horse stalls with remodelled access, and some new buildings.

As a result of the redevelopment, it is estimated that the uplift in total direct expenditure generated by training activities at Bunbury racecourse will amount to \$30.8mpa by 2028-29.

Offering unsung value to the recreational sector are community sports facilities as regional and intra-regional attractors for events that drive visitation. So too are motorsport facilities such as Manjimup Cosy Creek, Bunbury Speedway and Collie Motorplex, the latter features a 2.6km track, the longest in WA. Given its out-of-town location and proximity to overnight accommodation, Collie Motorplex has genuine potential to rival the State's premier circuit over the long term.

Upgrades to Hands Oval has seen professional AFL brought to Bunbury. The West Coast Eagles played twice in 2025 while Fremantle will play in 2026. The Australian Women's National Soccer Team, the Matildas will play Panama in Bunbury in 2025.

While traditional structured sport remains popular, outdoor recreational activities have seen growth. Activities make a huge contribution to the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities in the South West. Every day, the region's unique

outdoor lifestyle is enjoyed — whether walking, riding, exploring, exercising, paddling or engaging in a range of outdoor adventures activities.

The South West has a growing network of tracks and trails from the walk and cycle iconic tracks and trails (Bibbulmun 1,000km, Munda Biddi 1,072km and Cape to Cape 125km) to bridle trails, kayaking and various other speciality routes from the arts to food and wine. In addition, the WA Government has committed to the completion of the Wadandi Track to form a continuous 109km route from Busselton Jetty to Flinders Bay in Augusta.

Everyday participation bridges differences in race, faith, gender and age which leads to greater social cohesion. Tracks and trails enhance liveability, provide access to nature, they educate and positively brand the South West.



ABS Census of Population and Housing

Socio-Economic Indexes for Australia (SEIFA), 2021

	SEIFA
South West	991
Augusta-Margaret River	1,031
Boyup Brook	995
Bridgetown-Greenbushes	1000
Bunbury	944
Busselton	1,019
Capel	1,016
Collie	908
Dardanup	1,006
Donnybrook-Balingup	987
Harvey	998
Manjimup	959
Nannup	978



Image by Destination Harvey Region

Community

Compared with the State as a whole, people in the South West are more likely to be married, own their own home, live in lower density areas and have lower levels of mortgage debt.

However, the region scores below the average based on the Socio-Economic Indexes For Areas (SEIFA) which measures relative disadvantage – employment, income levels, educational achievement and internet access. SEIFA scores have flaws but do provide a general picture, noting where interventions would be useful.

Weekly household incomes are most commonly in the \$2,000-\$3,499 range, with more than a quarter of all households falling in these statistical brackets. The figures may trend slightly higher since Census data relates to the area where the person was resident at the time ie. the region's FIFO workforce would be recorded in other area data.

Arts and cultural activities

The economic contribution of the arts is well recognised in the South West. The region features Australia's largest film prize through CinéfestOZ, Western Australia's premier country music event at Boyup Brook and a multitude of food-related events which contribute to the regional brand through promoting excellence in agricultural production.

Events drivers include Southern Forests produce, regional wines and Cabin Fever Festival among many others that include premium drinks and food as key components of mixed packages. The Capes region features Margaret River Open Studios which attracts thousands of visitors each year to experience art in many forms. There are also regional music events from the Bridgetown Blues and Boyup Brook Country Music Festival, to Busselton's Jazz by the Bay and capacity for travelling shows at the region's entertainment centres.

The region has a wealth of other cultural connections – field days, cars and medieval carnivals – that add to the richness of the community as well as the economy in providing impactful visitation triggers.

Strategies to support sustainable communities

- Promote Bunbury as Western Australia's second city to attract more investment to the region.
- Improve public transport connections, particularly supporting youth and older people.
- Work to create more inclusive communities and close the gap across education, health, housing and jobs.
- Greater acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians through wider use of signage and art to boost regional identity.
- Boost Aboriginal recognition, engaging to grow the appreciation of distinctly South West tourism offerings and common use of the Noongar six seasons.
- Make the South West, Western Australia's regional sports capital for state-wide competitions and visitation triggers.
- Continue to develop facilities supporting state level country sports – hockey, professional basketball, state cricket, soccer carnivals and other sports.
- Utilise premier sports infrastructure for training pathways to develop talented youth.
- Maintain community sports facilities to enhance regional liveability, connectedness, lifestyle, youth engagement and active ageing.
- Invest in the region's sports facilities, engaging activities with community, youth, active ageing and health.
- Complete the development of Hands Oval to host AFLW, WAFL and AFL pre-season games and hold a long-term view to host a WAFL team.
- Consolidate interest in tracks/trails with a focus on managing and raising the standard of existing assets.
- Acknowledge the importance of volunteerism as a social glue.



Environment

The South West Natural Resource Management region incorporates 26 LGAs and is at the heart of the South West Botanical Province, one of only 36 biodiversity hotspots in the world, highlighting its rich diversity of flora and fauna. The NRM region also features four wetland systems of international significance recognised under the Ramsar Convention. The coastal environment is one of the South West's greatest assets in cultural, community, economic and environmental value. The Southern Forests are also of great value, noting that two-thirds of the entire region is made up of State forest, National Parks and regional parks.

The region enjoys a Mediterranean climate with hot dry summers and wet winters. The region is facing climate pressures, particularly declining rainfall and sea level rises. CSIRO's most comprehensive assessment of water yield found that the South West was one of the most water-challenged regions in Australia, noting a 15% decline in rainfall since 1975. With modelling suggesting a declining surface water yields of 24% in the next decade (CSIRO) then water issues must be considered a regional priority.

Further, the Bureau of Meteorology reports that WA temperatures have increase by 1.52°C (BoM 2024) since records began in 1910 and the Climate Commission found that local sea level rises have been the highest in Australia at 7.4mm/pa since the early 1990s, a combination of isostatic and eustatic influences. In 2010 the WA Planning Commission specified that SLR should be taken as +0.9m by 2100 while a Department of Transport's state-wide assessment highlights the South West as extremely vulnerable: Bunbury and Busselton were recently listed among the top three WA locations at "extreme" susceptibility to coastal inundation. The latest data ranges exceed 1m and does not account for storm surge.

The South West is Australia's canary in the cage, pointing to opportunities for academic research and pilot interventions in climate adaptation strategies in everything from home design and energy to bushfire and extreme weather events.

It is an increasing challenge to manage risks posed to the South West which is under pressure given that its landscapes are a drawcard that in turn requires management to save it from those who seek to experience its natural beauty.

Strategies to improve environmental outcomes

- Protect and enhance surface and groundwater resources, including wetland and waterway health.
- Increase the use of 'waste' water resources for reuse and/or aquifer recharge.
- Include aspects of green canopy and water sensitive urban design in CBD redevelopments and upgrades.
- Support carbon farming and Planet Ark's Wood Encouragement Policy to lock up carbon.
- Encourage access to forest environments to promote a greater understanding and appreciation of the region.
- Encourage weed and pest management on both public and private land.
- Protect and create habitat for the region's threatened native species.
- Future plan with coastal retreat in mind and develop local strategies for increased storm events and sea level rises.
- Consider fire risk, fuel load and thinning for healthier forests.
- Identify and mitigate against coastal erosion and inundation risks.
- Engage Traditional Custodians in environmental roles, caring for the land, forests and protecting it for future generations.
- Acknowledge farmers as key land managers, encouraging regenerative practices and undertaking actions to conserve soils. Encourage consumers to consider carbon kilometres, buy local and work with seasonally available food.
- Support the circular economy, utilising waste as a resource for reuse and repurposing.
- Change thinking to first consider repair and upgrade rather than replacement.
- Always consider the impact of population growth and sprawl on the region's environment.
- Work with communities so everyone understands that healthy environments are everyone's business.



3.2.5 Collaboration

Forming the final part of the determinants of regional development are effective cross-sectoral and intergovernmental partnerships – and integrated regional planning. While collaborative approaches can ebb and flow, the South West's planning and business environments have traditionally featured strong levels of partnership.

Working together for the purpose of prioritising government investment in the region raises awareness of critical issues and creates a focus for all sides of government. The collective can present a funding rationale based on good evidence and co-operation within sectors is also a powerful tool with clusters gaining their own momentum, concentrating knowledge which aids overall business competitiveness. The South West features a strong and united timber sector, dairy industry, health and education alliances, creative sector and business unity through the region's Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

In conclusion, regional development success is not a single champion charging out ahead of the others on a trusty steed. The battle for improving the region is fought on multiple fronts by an army which operates from the same plan. The power is in the region's interest – not individual interest.

This document aims to sit as a long-term vision for the South West. It works unreservedly with, and supports, the South West Development Commission's 2024-27 three-year action agenda, subregional planning strategies and other pieces of work. This in itself is a valuable collaboration with multiple stakeholders involved.

Strategies to support partnerships

- Invest and engage in true collaboration to ensure shared and committed ownership of solutions.
- Create specific roundtable groups to support action agendas such as the Advanced Manufacturing and Technology Hub project.
- Local Governments align in sub-regional and regional planning to prioritise those proposals that have genuine regional reach.
- Work with Aboriginal people to help close the gap and hold informal stakeholder group meetings to share information.
- Implement a whole-of-region waste strategy for critical mass and shared benefits.
- Standardise Local Government building requirements and create cross LGA teams to share resources.
- Build relationships with traditional owners for input on projects and possible employment outcomes.
- Work at all levels, prioritising regionally and delivering locally.
- Encourage clusters and information sharing to exploit synergies for mutual gain.