

Prospect *US*

Future directions for
Marble Bar

Document prepared for the Shire of East Pilbara by Creating Communities Australia, May 2010





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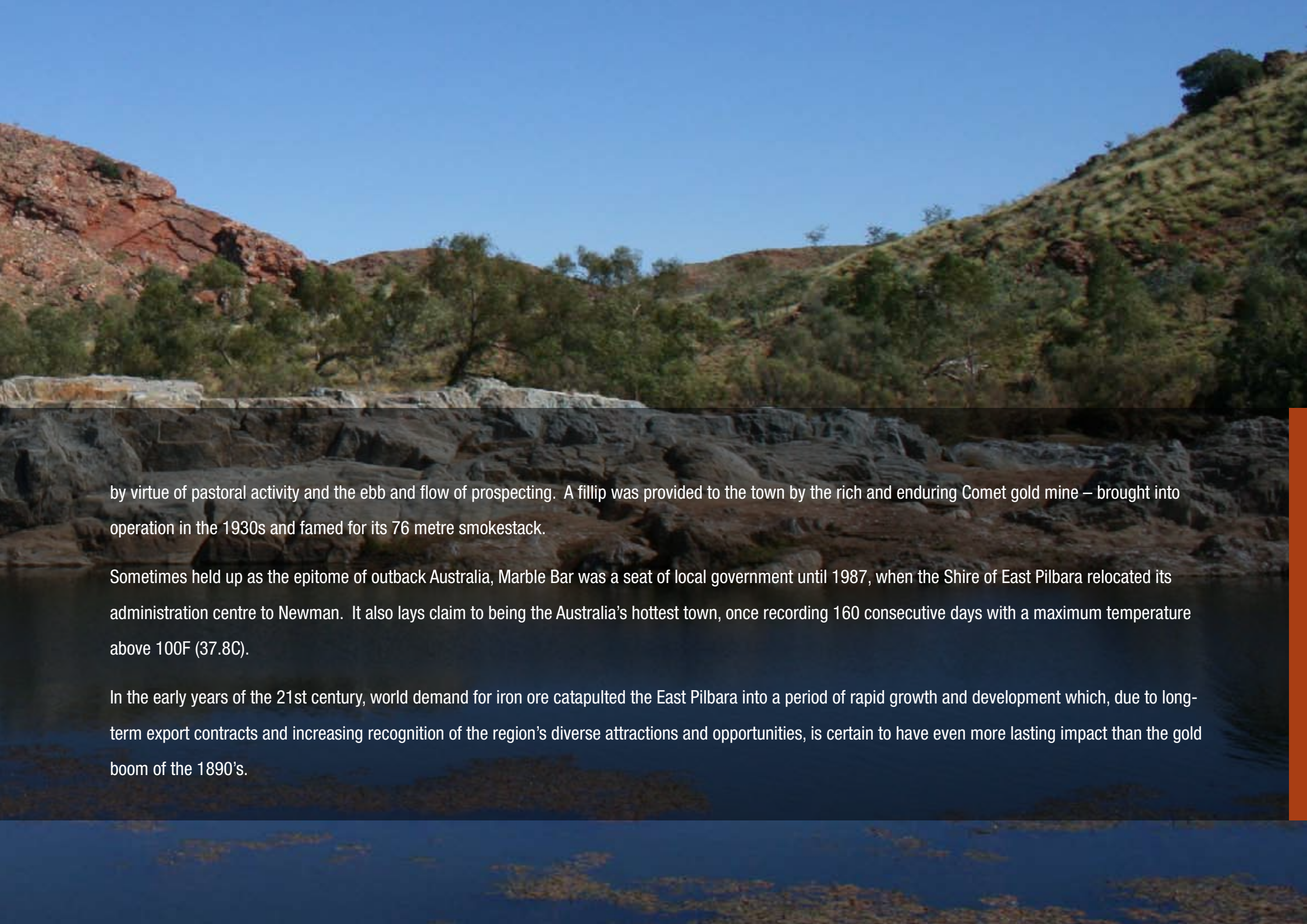
An Outback Heritage

Occupation of the rugged country now comprising the Shire of East Pilbara region spans tens of thousands of years. Interconnected groups of Indigenous Australians demonstrated autonomy, mobility and innovation in adapting to a harsh natural environment, socially and spiritually sustained by bonds of kinship, language, ritual and a deep-seated attachment to the land.

European settlement followed an expedition led by Frank Gregory in 1861. Gregory's report of pastures along the De Grey River opened an era of pastoral activity in the Pilbara, with pastoralists ranging ever more widely. Traces of gold were noticed at Marble Bar in 1888, confirmation of the existence of alluvial gold in 1891 sparked a significant gold rush. The townsite was gazetted in 1893, and town lots were snapped up after their release in 1894.

The Forrest Government's confidence in the district was reflected in the construction of impressive stone public buildings at Marble Bar in 1896.

The operation of a railway from Port Hedland between 1911 and 1951 provided Marble Bar with a transportation lifeline, and it subsisted as a regional centre



by virtue of pastoral activity and the ebb and flow of prospecting. A fillip was provided to the town by the rich and enduring Comet gold mine – brought into operation in the 1930s and famed for its 76 metre smokestack.

Sometimes held up as the epitome of outback Australia, Marble Bar was a seat of local government until 1987, when the Shire of East Pilbara relocated its administration centre to Newman. It also lays claim to being the Australia's hottest town, once recording 160 consecutive days with a maximum temperature above 100F (37.8C).

In the early years of the 21st century, world demand for iron ore catapulted the East Pilbara into a period of rapid growth and development which, due to long-term export contracts and increasing recognition of the region's diverse attractions and opportunities, is certain to have even more lasting impact than the gold boom of the 1890's.

Our vision



1 OUR VISION

The Shire of East Pilbara is a place of **intersecting paths and destinies**. For millennia Indigenous people traversed this land, nurturing culture and language, and regenerating the country. In the 21st Century, the **communities** of our Shire represent vibrant intersections connecting **people, environment, economy and culture**, and are a testament to our **common heritage**.



*“The Shire of East Pilbara is the **heart of the Pilbara**. Productivity within the Shire powers regional development, keeps ports busy and drives growth in the economies of our state and nation. Our local government is both **conscious and proud** of its responsibility to **serve the communities** that enable this activity to continue.”*

Cr Lynne Craigie

Shire President, Shire of East Pilbara

*“**Communities are homes** to our most valuable resource: people. The Shire is committed to **building partnerships** and **developing opportunities** to resource its communities.”*

Allen Cooper

Chief Executive Officer, Shire of East Pilbara

Our little gems



2 OUR LITTLE GEMS

The smaller towns of the Shire of East Pilbara are seen by some as little more than places to refuel, recharge and replenish. They break journeys to isolated workplaces, encampments, and such regional centres as Newman, Hedland and Karratha. They also punctuate tens of thousands of road-trips annually, with tourists drawn by the region's plentiful sources of fascination – from extraordinary wildflowers and protected wilderness areas to a rich Indigenous culture, tales of rugged explorers and pastoral pioneering, gold prospecting and a spectacular mining history.

Yet the smaller towns of the world's largest local government area are also places where hundreds of people choose to reside. They are the little gems of the Shire of East Pilbara – proud and significant communities. Indeed, it is salutary to note that around one third of the Shire's people reside outside its seat of local government, Newman. They have survived fluctuations of

fortune for more than a century, and the resilience of these towns is likely to hold them in good stead throughout the 21st Century. In recent memory, moreover, their prospects have rarely looked brighter.

The Shire of East Pilbara's strong commitment to the future of Marble Bar is reflected in this document, which is companion to a similar document on Nullagine. Outlined within are strategies, proposed actions and intended outcomes clustered around five broad focus areas applying to both towns.

In charting directions for its smaller towns, the Shire is paying due attention to the needs and aspirations of residents, paving the way for dialogues and partnerships with State and Commonwealth governments, industry, not-for-profit and non-government organisations.



Our priorities



3 OUR PRIORITIES

In working to develop the amenity and sustainability of its towns, the Shire of East Pilbara embraces five core aspirations.

The Shire's objective is to develop and implement strategies that support:

1. PEOPLE of vitality.

Focus: *The diversity and quality of education and skills development options; employment options; health services; and access to recreational, leisure and creative activities.*

2. COMMUNITIES of substance.

Focus: *The fostering of harmonious communities acknowledging a shared heritage; strong community groups, networks and governance; relevant and affordable community services; and the provision of equitable and well-managed community infrastructure.*

3. ECONOMIES of strength.

Focus: *Infrastructure supporting economic development, partnerships with industry and tourism.*

4. ENVIRONMENTS of balance.

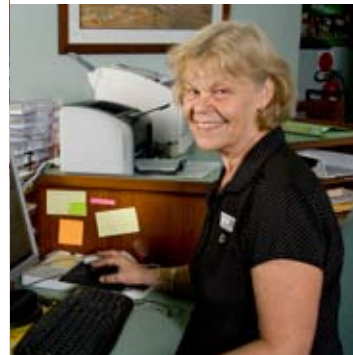
Focus: *The maintenance and environmental management of iconic Pilbara landscapes for generations to come; reduced ecological footprints; and the development of clean, green towns.*

5. PLACES of connection.

Focus: *Shire-wide planning and a quality regional road network; the quality and supply of housing and land for industry and commerce; the provision of safe places and spaces; and accessible, amenable towns.*



Our shared challenge



4 OUR SHARED CHALLENGES

Communities in the Shire of East Pilbara have more in common than their occupancy of a region that fuels the Australian economy and plays a significant role in global trade.

Most people who call the north-west of Western Australia home have a love of the open air, an appreciation of the environment, a sense of pride in their heritage, and a willingness to roll up their sleeves to accomplish goals. Certainly, community groups in our smaller towns do an admirable job in undertaking projects and organising events. The Shire recognises this work and will continue to extend its support to these groups whenever possible.

The Shire also recognises that Marble Bar and Nullagine have a number of common problems and shared sources of vexation. Major concerns include:

- Land availability and affordability
- Indigenous development
- Economic development
- The positive engagement of youth
- The effective coordination of government services.

ProspectUs is founded on an understanding that to address issues within one town, community or population group ultimately serves the interests of all residents in the Shire. Many of the issues faced by Pilbara towns are interrelated, and require the commitment and collaboration of a broad range of stakeholders.

It is clear, for example, that a lack of land availability within towns has a highly deleterious effect on economic development. It decreases land affordability, increases cost of living, and encourages resource companies to opt for fly-in, fly out employment contracts – in effect, artificially capping growth by immobilising economic triggers. In turn, lower resident populations decrease incentives for small business ventures, while tourism is constrained through a lack of accommodation. Land shortages can also mean that government employees in such areas as education and health care cannot be housed appropriately or retained, and there are also adverse consequences for Indigenous development.

Clearly, therefore, planning for individual towns must also be reflected in broad strategies for development. The Shire of East Pilbara maintains an open door and seeks to play a leading role in the identification of partners and cultivation of partnerships for the benefit of the community.

Relationship-building within smaller towns and communities of the Shire of East Pilbara will also pay dividends. In a local government area increasingly dominated by a major regional centre, the Shire is committed to the facilitation of effective channels of communication and development of a stronger Shire profile in its smaller towns, providing local opportunities for needs to be articulated, grievances aired and strategic alliances formed.



Our indigenous communities



5 OUR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

While Indigenous development does not fall directly within the sphere of local government operations, it is another major challenge. At the time of the 2006 national census, the total population of the Shire of East Pilbara was 6,544 persons, of which 21.8% indentified as Indigenous.

Both Marble Bar and Nullagine are home to aboriginal communities. Among the issues faced by these communities are an insufficiency of housing; poor housing quality; a lack of capacity to execute or access maintenance services; poor environmental health and waste management; unreliable water and power supplies; deficient roads maintenance; and low-level access to health and social services.

The Shire of East Pilbara is actively working toward closer relationships between Indigenous communities and local government. The Shire is a long-time advocate of legislative change to allow for the rating of Aboriginal Lands Trust (ALT) property, and its aboriginal affairs policy backs initiatives which enable the delivery of services to non-rateable Aboriginal

communities. It is also Shire policy to recognise ‘the benefits of cooperation with all levels of Government, regional councils and Aboriginal community organisations in the planning and delivery of programs and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’.

In line with these policies, the Shire argues that it is increasingly important that the apportionment of responsibility for Indigenous communities is addressed by all tiers of government. The Shire is positioned to play a key role in interagency coordination in a wide range of matters, but is unable to lead the way until appropriate funding arrangements are put into place. The Shire of East Pilbara stands ready to assist communities on ALT land to attract funding to support local government in meeting service requirements, and is keen to support the Department of Indigenous Affairs and other organisations and stakeholders to achieve desired outcomes.



Our shining examples



6 OUR SHINING EXAMPLE

The Shire of East Pilbara believes that Marble Bar and Nullagine have the capacity to take their place among Australia's most outstanding remote towns. In at least one sphere, they are already well on the way to setting the rest of the nation a shining example.

Both towns experience intense sunlight during most of the year, and this is set to be used to full advantage. Horizon Power has announced plans to establish new state-of-the-art solar power stations in both Marble Bar and Nullagine, producing clean, green power using proven technology on a scale unprecedented in Australia. The plans include the installation of 1008 solar modules in Marble Bar and 900 solar modules in Nullagine. A single-axis, horizontal solar tracking system will follow the path of the sun in each town throughout the day.

The power stations are expected to set new benchmarks for hybrid diesel islanded systems, with extremely high renewable energy generation. More than 60% of daytime load for the towns will be produced from sunlight. This equates to a saving of 35-40% of diesel and 1,100 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions annually. The new stations will also be significantly quieter than existing power stations which have been operating since 1973.

Marble Bar and Nullagine may be small towns, but they are leading the way in this field and harnessing a powerful resource often overlooked in Australia – sunshine. In so doing, they are likely to receive nationwide – if not worldwide – attention.



Our town



7 OUR TOWN: MARBLE BAR'S EXISTING CONTEXT

THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Marble Bar's local economy is currently small and lacking stimulus.

However, the town's history and character provide residual interest for tourists and seasonal tourism is significant. The Marble Bar Race Weekend is an outstanding community event and, as the biggest annual attractor of visitors, a boon to the local economy. Importantly, there is the potential for a boost to the town's economy if plans by Moly Mines Ltd go ahead. A mining workforce nearby could be the catalyst for the establishment of some light industry to service trucks, plant and equipment, and also for the expansion of local retail businesses.

The Shire of East Pilbara is currently the town's largest employer. Other employers include:

- The Commonwealth Government through job providers (Ashburton CDEP, Job Futures, Skilled and IT);
- The Western Australian Government through the Department of Education and Training (Marble Bar School); the WA Police Service; the Department of Health; and the Department of Mines (Mining Registrars Office);
- A number of local businesses (e.g. local contractors, the Marble Bar Roadhouse, the Ironclad Hotel, Levers Discount Store, and Marble Bar Travellers' Stop);



- Resource companies;
- Pastoralists.

In general, Marble Bar businesses experience personnel problems. Employees are difficult to attract and retain owing to a shortage of accommodation, a lack of employment options, and attractions elsewhere. There is also a high cost of living. Groceries are particularly expensive because there are no freight deliveries from Port Hedland.

THE COMMUNITY

Marble Bar has a population of approximately 350. The community consists of local indigenous people from Goodabinya (approximately 60% of the population), transient workers and a small number of long-term residents of European descent.

While Marble Bar's community is proud and resourceful community, the relative transience of Marble Bar's non-Indigenous community, which includes government employees (i.e. school teachers, health workers, police) exerts some impact on community life. Many contribute significantly while residing in the town, but departures can undermine the sustainability of town projects, initiatives and activities. The Shire has little or no influence on comings and goings, but will assist the community in succession planning and continuity measures.

Community consultation reveals evidence of a degree of disunity within the community. Marble Bar's non-Indigenous community is, to an extent, divided by a tendency of some community committees/ groups to work in isolation. In addition, the Indigenous community (Goodabinya) and the non-Indigenous community exhibit a tendency to coexist with toleration while remaining markedly separate.

Social and community services in Marble Bar include Centrelink and East Pilbara Independent Support (EPIS) care services. There is a Catholic Church in Marble Bar, and also an Anglican Church. Community groups include:

- The Marble Bar Progress Association;
- The Marble Bar Race Club;
- The Marble Bar School's Parents and Citizens group;
- The Marble Bar Tourism Association;
- The Marble Bar Telecentre and Business Link;
- The Marble Bar Prospectors' Association.

There are almost 100 people in Marble Bar under the age of 15 years. In recognition of this, the Shire of East Pilbara offers a range of community activities. A Recreation Officer is charged with responsibility for the maintenance of Marble Bar's swimming pool and the coordination of youth, sport and recreation activities in Marble Bar.

Marble Bar's calendar of local events includes movie nights; Blue Light discos; the Marble Bar Race Weekend and its associated events (Annual Ball, Sunday Fair); a Christmas Party; an Australia Day celebration; and an Anzac Day service.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Marble Bar has a high level of community facilities for a town of its size, including:

- *Public library*, located within the Shire's administration offices;
- *Civic Centre Hall*, adjacent to the Shire's offices and providing a multipurpose facility available for a range of community activities and group meetings;
- *Marble Bar Primary School*, with a current enrolment of 57 students (19 pre-primary, 30 primary and 8 secondary), 75% of whom are Indigenous;
- *Old school hostel*, not in use owing to unresolved issues associated with land and building ownership;
- *Swimming pool*, an outdoor public swimming pool normally open five days per week, operated by Shire staff under an arrangement with the Department of Education;

-
- *Youth recreation shed*, owned and operated by the Shire of East Pilbara, recently insulated and providing a drop-in facility with a good range of recreation equipment, a large open-plan activity area with a small kitchen, and internal toilets.
 - *Gymnasium*, a Shire facility set up in another large shed and including a range of fitness and weight training equipment;
 - *Tennis/basketball courts*, multi-marked courts behind the youth recreation shed;
 - *RSL Park*, a passive recreation area in the centre of Marble Bar with playground equipment and shade shelters;
 - *Telecentre*, managed by an incorporated community group in a facility that also accommodates Marble Bar's Visitor Centre run by the Marble Bar Tourist Association;
 - *EPIS Centre*, accommodating the Marble Bar care services.
 - *Marble Bar Race Course*, utilised for a major community event, the Marble Bar Race Day.
 - *Aged persons' units*, owned by the Shire of East Pilbara and leased to residents.

In addition, Marble Bar has an air strip, a health clinic/nursing post, a caravan park, and a cemetery. There is also a popular natural swimming hole and picnic spot – Chinaman's Pool – which is located five kilometres from the town centre on the Coongan River, adjacent to Marble Bar's spectacular 'bar' of jasper.

The Shire of East Pilbara provides a public transport service to both Port Hedland and Newman, operating twice per week. This service is particularly valuable to Indigenous and aged residents without private vehicles, and connects the town with specialised health services.

8 OUR OPPORTUNITIES

With its peaceful lifestyle, relative proximity to a major regional centre and fine scenery it is little wonder that people enjoy living in Marble Bar. The community is a hardy one. There are, however, significant challenges for the town – and the Shire of East Pilbara is committed to addressing these so that the opportunities presented by regional growth are taken up.

Opportunities for Marble Bar exist in the development of strategies in the following areas:

TOURISM

Marble Bar is essentially a 'tourist town'. It will benefit from the development of a Shire-wide tourism strategy and online promotion as a classic Australian outback destination. Opportunities associated with cutting-edge renewable power generation, including provision of an interpretive centre and iconic public art, should also be investigated.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Beyond tourism, economic development more broadly presents significant challenges and opportunities for Marble Bar. Planning in this area will yield worthwhile results in the short and long term. It should also include an engagement by the Shire with the resource companies; the examination of incentives to settle workforces in the town; and support for enterprises that supply and service the resources sector.

LAND USE

State Government policies impinging on the development of town sites are under review, and the importance of land issues makes it imperative that local government actively contributes to this process wherever appropriate.

BUILT FORM UTILISATION/TOWN AESTHETICS

A number of community facilities in Marble Bar are currently closed or unused, and some are in a dilapidated state. On the main street, the old general store building and adjacent Pipunya facility have, for some time, been boarded up and left in poor condition. The telecentre provides a much-needed communication and training facility for residents and visitors, but regrettably the building is inadequate and in poor condition. In addition, the old school hostel and employment training workshop, another Pipunya facility, stands unused. This significantly diminishes the aesthetics of the town, leaves an unfavourable impression with tourists, and has an impact on the collective psyche of the community that should not be underestimated.

COORDINATED SERVICE DELIVERY

Marble Bar suffers from a lack of coordination between service providers, particularly those State Government departments without local representation. The town will benefit from increased leadership by the

Shire of East Pilbara in bringing parties together to maximise information exchange and efficiency.

SPORT AND RECREATION

There is a clear need to improve opportunities for involvement in sport and recreation activities at Marble Bar, and there is a role for local government in meeting this challenge. Community sport and recreation play vital roles in the lives of regional towns, often compensating for the lack of private sector recreation/entertainment options. They bind people together and provide a vehicle for community development. At present, however, there is a disengagement of youth from organised sport and recreation. The Shire is seeking to increase its capacity to staff and fund the planned activation of recreation facilities, and will further explore the potential for partnerships with other stakeholders.

INDIGENOUS DEVELOPMENT AND SERVICE PROVISION

The Shire of East Pilbara is conscious that approximately one quarter of the people of Marble Bar identify as Indigenous. This fact alone provides powerful cause for a commitment by the Shire to Indigenous development but current funding arrangements limit its capacity to exert significant influence. Change is required in this area and the Shire is engaged in dialogues on the future of service provision to Indigenous communities.



Strategies and actions



9 STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

GOAL 1.

PEOPLE OF VITALITY: The diversity and quality of education and skills development options; employment options; health services; and access to recreational, leisure and creative activities.

Priority key for strategies and actions:

Short term

Medium term

Long term

Encourage high quality education and diverse skills development options

- Support EPIS's plans to train Indigenous women to be carers **S**
- Encourage the Telecentre to deliver a variety of adult education programs **S**
- Encourage an inter-agency 'Education Excellence' working group with a view to improving access to education and training **S**

Promote variety and choice in local employment

- Prepare an Economic Development Plan to identify ways of generating local employment and key partners **S**
- Support the development of a variety of Indigenous work placement projects **M**

Support individual and community health

- Advocate for improved health services **S**
- Continue to support 'early years' programs to support parents of young children **S**
- Continue to support a transport service for the community in conjunction with Department of Transport to assist the community to access specialist health services in Newman and Hedland **S**
- Support Healthy Youth Projects **M**
- Support the provision of first aid training courses to the community **M**



Foster artistic and creative expression

- Investigate community interest in forming a local Indigenous arts group **M**

Provide a range of well resourced recreation and leisure options

- Investigate the creation of recreation officer traineeships **S**
- Consult with the community to identify sport and recreation opportunities **S**
- Develop annual calendar of sport and recreation activities with a focus on children & youth **S**
- Investigate opening the Swimming Pool five days per week throughout the year **S**
- Investigate opening the recreation shed on weekday afternoons and on weekends throughout the year **S**
- Work with Marble Bar School to coordinate after school activities **S**

GOAL 2.

COMMUNITIES OF SUBSTANCE: The fostering of harmonious communities acknowledging a shared heritage; strong community groups, networks and governance; relevant and affordable community services; and the provision of equitable and well-managed community infrastructure.

Priority key for strategies and actions:

Short term

Medium term

Long term

Promote diverse, harmonious and caring communities

- Support cross cultural activities

L

Build strong community groups, networks and governance

- Provide facilities for community groups and community events
- Initiate quarterly Community Shire Briefing Sessions
- Support the Marble Bar Progress Association
- Support training to increase the capacity building of local community groups
- Support the development of an annual award to recognize community input and volunteers
- Support the development of a Youth Leadership Program

S

S

S

M

M

M

Encourage high rates of participation in community activities and events

- Initiate an interagency community services working group to improve access to community services
- Continue to support and utilise the community newsletter and 'The Marble Bar Directory' as key resources for community information and communication

S

S

Provide relevant and affordable community services

- Provide school holiday programs **S**
- Partner with youth service providers to deliver youth projects throughout the year **S**

Ensure well managed and equitable provision of community infrastructure

- Support the installation of a playground facility at Goodabinya **S**
- Work with Marble Bar Primary School, Aboriginal Lands Trust, Department of Indigenous Affairs and the Pipunya and Goodabinya communities to investigate the potential for alternative uses of the old children's hostel **M**
- Ongoing review and maintenance of the Peri Smith Retirement Units **M**
- Upgrade the Pioneer cemetery **M**

Celebrate the shared heritage of Marble Bar

- Continue to support the Marble Bar Race Weekend and other significant local events **S**
- Investigate opportunities to undertake an oral history project **M**

GOAL 3.**ECONOMIES OF STRENGTH:** Infrastructure supporting economic development, partnerships with industry and tourism.

Priority key for strategies and actions:

Short term**Medium term****Long term****Provide infrastructure to support economic development**

- Support the development of a town website in conjunction with other community groups

M**Build a thriving and diverse economy**

- Develop a Local Economic Development Plan

S**Develop strong partnerships with industry**

- Play a leadership role in establishing partnerships with local industry to support local employment and community development

S**Manage the tourism asset**

- Provide a water point in an appropriate location within town for tourists
- Incorporate a local tourism plan in whole of Shire planning

S**M**

GOAL 4.

ENVIRONMENTS OF BALANCE: The maintenance and environmental management of iconic Pilbara landscapes for generations to come; reduced ecological footprints; and the development of clean, green towns.

Priority key for strategies and actions:

Short term

Medium term

Long term

Reduced the town's ecological footprint

- Promote recycling and instigate a community waste recycling program
- Review waste strategy

S

S

Cultivate a clean green town

- Increase dog control measures
- Plan and implement a tree planting program

S

M

GOAL 5.

PLACES OF CONNECTION: Shire-wide planning and a quality regional road network; the quality and supply of housing and land for industry and commerce; the provision of safe places and spaces; and accessible, amenable towns.

Priority key for strategies and actions:

Short term

Medium term

Long term

Plan well for the future

- Review and update Town Plan **S**
- Council to ensure adequate resources to support the needs of the town **S**

Ensure the release of adequate amounts of housing, industrial and commercial land

- Encourage an interagency working group to address land release and housing supply **S**

Create vibrant civic spaces of intersection and interaction

- Activate the town through an annual calendar of events and activities **S**
- Continue to support resources to maintain the existing Heritage Walk Trail **S**
- Continue to enhance the visual amenity of the town centre **M**

Ensure safe spaces and places

- Promote community involvement in Emergency Services **S**

Build connected and accessible towns

- Work with mining companies and the State Government to improve the regional road network and the condition of main roads (i.e. Nullagine Road, Newman Road, Hillside Road, Boreline Road) **S**
- Continue to review the public transport service provided by the Shire **S**
- Continue to enhance the visual amenity of the town centre **M**

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