



RRR NETWORK

# RRR Roundtable

ISSUES PAPER

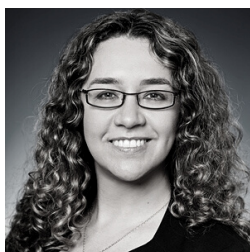
2021



## CAN THE REGIONS COPE WITH INCREASED DEMAND?

With international and domestic travel restrictions in place WA has experienced increased levels of intrastate tourism. On a whole this is a positive outcome, but it has been problematic in terms of capacity, supply chains, road safety and available services. What is working? What is not? Can the regions cope with increased demand? The below women shared their perspectives on Thursday 20th May, 2021 at Mineral Resources Park.

This Roundtable was sponsored by Bailiwick Legal and Women in Tourism and Hospitality WA.



**Jessica Shaw, MLA, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Tourism; Culture and the Arts; Heritage**- is the Member for Swan Hills in the WA Legislative Assembly. Jessica was appointed Parliamentary Secretary in her second term of office following re-election in the 2021 State Election. Jessica moved to the electorate more than 13 years ago and is the first local resident to represent the Swan Hills community in many years. Prior to entering politics, Jessica had a successful career in the private sector. She was a commercial executive in the energy industry before being elected at the 2017 State Election.



**Lisa Shreeve, CEO, The Busselton Jetty** - is proud to work with a community of passionate locals who saved the Busselton Jetty after Cyclone Alby and continue to volunteer their time to the town's heritage icon. Lisa has a BA IN Business, a Masters in Regional Development, has Environmental Auditing qualifications, has worked in the non-profit, public sector and private sector for the past 28 years, most recently as General Manager of Veolia Transport WA trading as South West Coach Lines, a internationally owned business with over 200 staff.



**Julie Hillier, Harris River Estate (Collie)** - is a professionally accredited facilitator & coach in Human Resource Management & Organisational Capability building experience obtained in the variety of sectors including oil & gas, mining, construction, resources, NFP & Higher education sectors. In addition to having worked in corporate roles, remote locations, offshore and onshore gas processing facilities, she has also worked at a senior level in the Oil & Gas / Sub-sea construction industry globally. Julie is currently the Alliance Culture & Executive Coach to the Bunbury Outer Ring Road Project Leadership Team.



**Sally Pullin, The Beachhouse at Bayside (Albany)** - has a diverse background in tourism and hospitality over a 30 year career. Sally's early career included the International Hotel sector through customer service, accommodation, and conference sales management before moving to renown Melbourne caterer Peter Rowland Catering as a Group Venue Sales Manager. In 2007 Sally and her husband relocated to Albany to join her family's premium hosted accommodation business, The Beach House at Bayside, which was inducted into the Qantas Australian Tourism Awards Hall of Fame in 2018. Sally sits on the board of Tourism Council of WA, and along with continuous improvement in her own business, her passion is in ensuring regional tourism micro-businesses have an industry voice.

Since the pandemic, WA has experienced increased intrastate tourism. Tourism is forecast to double in size by 2030 as one of the fastest growing economies in the world. In Australia, it is a key economic driver at national, state, territory, and local levels throughout and the outlook is very promising. Tourism stakeholders must plan effectively now and be ready to adapt to change to leverage the projected opportunities. Within the WA's regions, some towns have struggled to manage the levels of tourist arrivals and the associated service demands.

As the COVID-19 pandemic persists, long-term residents in the Wheatbelt, Kimberley and Midwest shared their experience and views on tourism in regional WA. Approximately 25% experienced an increase in their work hours since the pandemic. Pre pandemic, before March 2020, 75% of these regional residents' vacation at local and interstate destinations, while 25% of them generally go overseas. Post pandemic, October 2020 until now, 50% of residents vacation in WA, 25% interstate and 25% chose not to go on holiday.

From the business perspective, businesses have experienced an increase in tourism over the past 12 months and some have benefitted from Jobkeeper and Tourism Business Survival grant since the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic widened the gap between winners and losers in the tourism industry. Some of the winners included businesses in accommodation, cafes, restaurants, bars and clubs, while entertainment, arts, recreation, excursion and tour operators being among the losers. However, about 75% of respondents were not very satisfied and 25% were not at all satisfied with the level of support provided by the government to regional tourism in WA.

Yet the increase in tourist arrivals to the regions brought disadvantages as well as advantages.

**Some of the main disadvantages include the following:**

- Not enough accommodation for workers due to all local accommodation full. Cannot meet demands of tourists because they cannot attract and accommodate staff. Reliant on backpackers and there are none or very little.
- Lack of staff to cater for needs, possibility of criminal element coming to area, delicate areas "loved" to death.
- Hearing that some communities are not able to cope, lack of accommodation in regional areas, increased dangerous behaviour on regional roads.

**Some of the main advantages include:**

- 100% occupancy now in the Kimberley.
- So much opportunity for new tourism businesses to capitalise on.
- Money for local business, improve knowledge of area, sharing information.

Going forward in this pandemic era and beyond, the future of regional tourism depends on businesses and stakeholders effectively managing the advantages and disadvantages as well as the weaknesses and threats and then accelerating the strengths and opportunities brought on by the pandemic and the increased visitor arrivals in WA regional areas.

The main weaknesses and threats associated to be managed, ranked in order of priority, are as follow:

**WEAKNESSES:**

- Lack of coordination and collaboration between government, regional tourism. organisations, and local tourism operators.
- Lack of funding for tourism development and maintenance of amenities.
- Potential to develop strategies that cannot be realised due to lack of resources and funding.

**THREATS:**

- With tourism growth, investment and infrastructure are required and not all businesses and operators have the required resources.
- Accommodation shortage.
- Skills shortage.
- Insecurity around COVID-19.

The main strengths and opportunities that can be accelerated, ranked in order of priority, are as follow:

**STRENGTHS:**

- Natural attraction/ecotourism.
- Established road network and infrastructure.
- Visitor centre sustainability fund.

**OPPORTUNITIES:**

- Promoting journeys rather than destinations provides opportunities for collaboration.
- Royalties for Regions funding potentials.
- Leveraging of state and federal government partnerships and funding to support local. government activities and investments in tourism.
- Leveraging of partners (Tourism WA and Tourism Australia) to get local stories and tourism product promoted through their marketing activities.

**Conclusion/Recommendation:**

It was evident from the Roundtable that the Tourism industry are upset and concerned with how the pandemic is adversely impacting them. To the point where some historic venues are facing closure or are so understaffed that management of facilities is becoming untenable. The question - can the regions cope with increased demand - divided the room, but the discussion proved that the issues are far deeper as outlined in this summary. Whilst tensions are running high, the industry is willing to explore new and innovative ways to manage the pandemic era and welcome continued discussion with the State Government.

It is first recommended a long-term strategy that plans for the future of our tourism industry whereby the Tourism Industry and the Department of Education explore ways in which to educate and value Western Australian tourism from a young age. To emphasis the importance of learning more about where you live, undertake immersive experiences regarding history and culture and to support WA industries and people first.

**Conclusion/Recommendation continued:**

In the short-term, but connected to the long-term strategy is for the government to consider a subsidy program for WA residents to participate in tourism activities. This would encourage West Australians to explore their region beyond its restaurants and landscapes. It appears that West Australians are interested and willing to travel the regions but the extension of paid tourism activities is less likely. This may be related to the economic environment, i.e. people may have enough funds to pay for accommodation, travel and supplies but paying that little bit more for an activity is an 'add-on' and therefore becomes an option to exercise or not, with evidence suggesting that it is the latter.

Although, the decision to not undertake tourism activities could be much deeper ingrained in the WA psyche. Whilst we understand solutions that rely on government investment is not ideal, it would seem that WA has a tourism culture that has yet to fully appreciate the value of tourism activities. This line of thinking perhaps is also related to an overall lacking of WA identity and motivation behind movements such as 'Perth is OK' or 'Brand Perth'.

The pandemic in Western Australia and subsequent border closures is encouraging West Australians to explore WA and therefore presents an ideal opportunity to tackle ingrained thinking around tourism activities and build a sustainable tourism industry into the future.