SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Community wellbeing and attitudes to energy transition in the North Perth Basin: Eneabba, Mingenew and Three Springs

This joint CSIRO/Curtin University project aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how energy infrastructure projects in the North Perth Basin region would affect the functioning and well-being of local communities.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The Mid West region of Western Australia (WA) is currently host to several exploration licences for natural gas and geothermal resources along with prospective wind and large-scale solar developments. In this context of increasing energy developments in the region, this research provides a baseline understanding of community wellbeing and perceptions of energy developments, particularly gas, in the communities of the North Perth Basin located in the Mid West region of WA.

METHODS

The Curtin Institute for Energy Transition led this research from November 2024 to July 2025, with Federal Government funding provided through CSIRO's Gas Industry Social and Environmental Research Alliance (GISERA). Using a mixed methods approach, the entire research comprised an online survey of 225 residents in Geraldton, Dongara, Mingenew, Three Springs and Eneabba, followed by twelve focus groups and fifteen online interviews. Survey respondents in Mingenew, Three Springs and Eneabba represented 12 percent of the sample responses. Two focus groups were conducted in Mingenew and one focus group each was conducted in Three Springs and Eneabba. An additional four interviews were conducted with Mingenew and Three Springs residents.

IMAGE 1: Stockyard Gully, near Eneabba (Adobe Stock)

KEY POINTS

- The towns reported similar levels of overall community wellbeing with strong attachment to the local area, community spirit and community trust.
- The impact of heavy vehicles on local roads, with costs of maintenance left to local governments was frequently discussed.
- Mining camps were felt to be a detriment to the local community in Mingenew, impacting on social cohesion and wealth transfer from the regions to Perth.
- Participants discussed the benefits of having more people in the region to support local businesses and contribute to social cohesion.
- Housing shortages and affordability were key issues in the region.
- Contributions to the community from industry were felt to be superficial, for example, new jumpers for the local team rather than meeting needs of the community.
- Concerns were raised about the environmental impact of industry, particularly on groundwater and agricultural production.
- Community participation through volunteering and sports were important ways that the communities supported each other.

IMAGE 2: Wildflowers in Coalseam Conservation Park, Shire of Mingenew (Adobe Stock)

FINDINGS

Community wellbeing

Levels of trust with people within the community were higher than other towns in Mingenew, Three Springs and Eneabba. Levels of trust in local community leaders was also higher than other regions.

Residents expressed a strong sense of social cohesion and shared information with each other, which they felt contributed to trust in the community.

Physical infrastructure

Concerns about heavy vehicles on the roads were more pronounced in Eneabba, Three Springs and Mingenew.

There was concern about conventional gas developments extending into other farming areas in Eneabba, Mingenew and Three Springs. Participants consistently expressed concerns about gas well leakages over time across all three areas.

Fire risks are a major concern across the region, particularly from pole top fires occurring in the distribution network.

Unreliable power and significant delays with power connections were seen to affect businesses in the region.

Environmental concerns

Concerns were raised from participants about the decommissioning of wind farms, and the large amounts of concrete and road infrastructure needed on farms with wind turbines.

Participants also expressed some concerns about the potential for developments in the region to impact wildflowers, thus affecting the environment and tourism.

Political dimensions

There was a high level of concern about the state government's Significant Development Pathway as it was seen to limit the ability to make local planning decisions.

There was also concern about state government not enforcing their own planning policies, in relation to the building of mining camps, where they are seen to be a detriment to the local community.

Economic dimensions

Participants expressed concern about limited wider economic and community benefits from industry operating within the region.

Participants wanted workers to be housed within the towns for greater economic and social benefit.

"It will give us some critical mass if we can get them [workers] to move into town. They will support our local businesses, our supermarkets, our eateries, whereas out there they build their own bakery. Everything's on site, their own sporting facilities. Why would they do that when we've got it all here? Because they're spending millions and millions. And if you do the sums, it's actually cheaper to build houses in town than set up mining centres."

Health concerns

Services such as dental vans and daycare services were advocated for by the community.

Like other regions, healthcare is limited with health staff (such as doctors and pharmacists) shared between Shires.

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