SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Community wellbeing and attitudes to energy transition in the North Perth Basin: Geraldton

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 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. Geraldton, the largest subregion contributed 67 percent of responses to the survey. Six focus groups were also conducted in Geraldton and ten online interviews were conducted with Geraldton residents.

FINDINGS

Community wellbeing

Higher levels of crime in Geraldton were indicated from the survey, focus groups and interviews. Safety concerns were prominent, particularly among women.

KEY POINTS

- People in Geraldton had strong attachment to their local area and high community spirit, but indicated the lowest levels of personal safety among all regions in the Mid West.
- Participants in Geraldton expressed concerns about crime in the town, the high cost of living, housing costs and housing availability.
- The lack of affordable and adequate housing had impacts on the ability to recruit skilled workers and tradespeople to the region.
- Health care and social assistance is the largest employment sector in Geraldton, and people employed in this sector expressed feelings of burn out.
- Environmental concerns around energy development projects include impacts on the natural beauty of the region, potential impacts on groundwater and limited household recycling.
- Participants discussed long wait times for health specialists in the region and felt that health facilities were inadequate. There was hope that the redevelopment of the Geraldton Health Campus would improve health services in the region.

IMAGE 1: Geraldton port (Adobe Stock)

IMAGE 2: Residential street in Geraldton (Adobe Stock)

People in Geraldton felt connected to the natural environment and enjoyed connection within the community through arts, markets, sporting activities and recreational fishing.

Environmental concerns

Participants in Geraldton were disappointed with the limited household recycling in the city and expressed concern about potential waste impacts from energy projects, including renewable energy.

Participants expressed concerns about the large amount of water and energy needed for hydrogen production from nearby projects.

Political dimensions

People in Geraldton felt there were limited opportunities for participation in decisions around energy projects. Participants wanted transparent information about energy projects, including their ongoing costs.

Perceptions of procedural fairness were low in Geraldton with most participants feeling that the gas industry do not listen, or respect community opinions.

Physical infrastructure

Housing was a key concern among participants, with limited affordable housing available in the region.

People in Geraldton also expressed their concern about the limits to economic growth and development in the region with delays with electricity connections and electricity reliability in the surrounding towns.

Concern was also raised about heavy vehicles on the road in Geraldton, but this was less pronounced than the smaller towns in the region.

Economic parameters of wellbeing

There were questions raised about the number and types of jobs that will be created with the renewable energy transition. Concerns were also raised about a lack of lecturers and applicable courses at TAFE.

"We've got a great TAFE. Everything's there, but we've got no lecturers. We haven't got the facilities. We haven't got the housing, and this isn't just in Geraldton. I mean it's across the board and it's not only in Western Australia. It's right across Australia and when I see a state with millions of dollars sitting in the bank and not being utilised where it should be utilised, I get pretty angry about it."

Similar to other towns in the region, participants in Geraldton wanted regional benefits that supported the community, rather than tokenistic benefits from industry.

Health dimensions

Challenges with health care in Geraldton included inadequate aged care facilities, long waiting periods to see doctors and specialists, and a lack of bulk-billing doctors. Mental health issues were noted as a result of stressful work environments, cost of living concerns and housing.

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Produced by Elena Perse for the Curtin Institute for Energy Transition (2025)

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