



Housing Issues in Broome

A Shelter WA Discussion Paper,
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About Shelter WA

Shelter WA was established in 1979 and has developed into one of Western Australia's peak non-profit housing research organisations.

Shelter WA works towards eliminating homelessness, housing disadvantage and housing stress. We aim to ensure that all low income households' are able to gain access to housing that is secure and appropriate to their needs, at a price they can afford.

Shelter does this by focusing its research on households in greatest need of housing and low income households which experience severe financial difficulties in the private housing market. These households are situated in the bottom 40% of the income distribution and are paying more than 30% of household income on housing.

Shelter WA specialises in monitoring changes to housing affordability through analysing data and producing research for policy makers to base their decisions. We conduct annual surveys and State-wide public consultations so that the community has a significant input into Shelter's research and policy direction.

Shelter WA supports its activities through contracts with the Department of Housing and Works and research consultancy projects.

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Introduction

This discussion paper provides an evaluation of the current housing issues in the Town of Broome. The report was initiated in response to the chronic lack of affordable housing in Broome. The report forms part of Shelter's ongoing work identifying regional housing issues in West Australia.

The paper looks at various components of Broome's housing system in an attempt to draw out some of the underlying problems related to the inadequate supply of affordable housing and social housing. The report examines:

- Demographic factors affecting housing demand and housing need;
- The private housing system and the public rental system; and
- Homelessness

The paper includes some policy ideas for discussion that are aimed at addressing Broome's growing housing problems.

Key Housing Issues facing the Broome Community

The Town of Broome is situated in the south west corner of the Kimberley region. It has its own unique range of housing issues, influenced by its geographical location, impacts of its growing tourism industry and high population growth.¹

Broome's population rises significantly between April and October. The growth is predominantly due to Broome's attractiveness as a tourist destination - reflected in the 18 507 people counted in the Shire on census night 2001, 6487 or 35 % of these people were visitors. This population surge increases demand for housing and along with a limited availability of land are important drivers of Broome's high median house price and median rent.

¹ For the 25-year period, 1976 to 2001, the average annual growth rate was 5.3%, with average annual growth rate variations of between 3.6 % and 6.7 %, See Department of Planning and Infrastructure, 2005, *Report of the Broome Planning Steering Committee*, www.dpi.wa.gov.au

Demographic impacts on housing in Broome

Population Growth

If there is limited availability of land then population growth will clearly have a major impact on housing affordability.

The Shire of Broome experienced the largest population change of any local government in the Kimberley region increasing by 3,430 (6.2% p.a.) between 1996 and 2001 (see Table 1). This represents the second largest growth rate of any local government in the State.²

Table 1 shows the historical estimated resident population for the ABS census years between 1976 and 2001. The WAPC population projections to 2021 show lower average annual growth rates. The Historic average growth calculated at 5% reflects the historic growth experienced in Broome over the last 25 years. If this rate continues the Shire's projected population to 2011 is 21 500, increasing to 27 400 in 2016 and 35 000 in 2021.³

The Aboriginal population increase for Broome between 1996 and 2001 was 750 (4 % per annum) compared to 255 for 1991 to 1996 (1.6 % per annum).⁴

Table 1: Historical and projected population growth in the Shire of Broome

Period	Historic growth: ABS Census		WAPC Projections		Historic average
	Population Increase	Average historic (annual)	Population increase	Growth rate	Population increase at 5% growth
1976-81	690	3.60%			
1981-86	1643	6.70%			
1986-91	1964	5.90%			
1991-96	1879	4.40%			
1996-01	3430	6.20%			
2001-06			2400	3.40%	3604
2006-11			2400	2.90%	4700
2011-16			2700	2.80%	5900
2016-21			2900	2.80%	7600

Sources, Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Estimated Resident Population*; Western Australia Planning Commission, 2005, *Western Australia Tomorrow, Population projections for planning regions 2004 to 2031 and local government areas 2004 to 2021 August 2005*, WAPC, Perth

Taking a wider look at regional population growth the Kimberley is forecast to undergo a 50% increase in its population by 2021. From June

² Western Australian Planning Commission, 2004, *Broome: Country Land Development Programme*, WAPC, Perth.

³ See Western Australian Planning Commission, 2005, *Report of the Broome Planning Steering Committee*, www.wapc.wa.gov.au/Publications/770

⁴ Ibid.

2004 to 2005 the Kimberley increased its population by 820 people (2.3% growth).⁵ This is much higher than the average annual growth rate of 1.5% for the State over the same period.⁶

Age Structure

With nearly 70% of Australian households in owner-occupied housing, this has been described by many as the 'natural' form of tenure.⁷ However, now that house prices are well out of the reach of median and low income households, opportunities to enter the homeownership market are dwindling. This affects different age groups moving through different life-cycle stages. Younger people tend to be less inclined to form homeownership households due to a variety of reasons (i.e. partnering and having children) and are more mobile than people in other age groups. In the case of Broome, declining affordability will also put mounting pressure on social and private rental to accommodate its high proportion of younger households.

Recent projections of Broome's age structure by the WAPC (2005) reveal that:

- The 0-19 age group is expected to remain at a significant one third of the total population from 2006 through to 2021. In 2001, the Shire of Broome had proportionately more persons in this age grouping than the rest of the State (21%).
- The 15-29 age group is expected to make up nearly one in four of the population (23%) for 2006 through to 2021;
- The number of persons over 50 is expected to increase sharply between 2001 (14%) and 2011 (20%) but will still be below the overall State proportion of 31%; and
- The indigenous population is much younger with a median age of 22. The overall median age for the Kimberley region was 28 in 2004 and is forecast to remain the lowest in WA to 2021⁸

Household Composition

According to the *ABS 2001 Census* there were 7,909 households in the Kimberley region in 2001. Most of these (54%) were located in the Broome Townsite. Within the town 70% of households were classified as family, a further 22% as lone person, with 8% being group households. This was a higher proportion of group households than Western Australia (3.7%). The *ABS Australia Social Trends 2006* revealed that in 2003–04,

⁵ See Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, *Regional Population Growth, Australia 2004-05*, Cat. No. 3218, www.abs.gov.au

⁶ See West Australian Planning Commission, 2006, *Country Land Development Programme: Annual review 2005*, WAPC, Perth.

⁷ See, Reeves, P, 2005, *An introduction to Social Housing*, 2nd ed, Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford

⁸ See Western Australian Planning Commission, 2005, *Population projections for planning regions 2004 to 2021*, WAPC, Perth.

group households had the highest rate of renting amongst young adult households at 83%.⁹

Housing

Housing for Younger People

A key feature of the Broome demographic profile is its very low median age which is projected to be constant over the next few decades.¹⁰ The *ABS 2001 Census* demonstrated that Young adults are more mobile than people in other age groups. In the 12 months prior to the *2001 Census*, 34% of people aged 18–34 years had moved address, compared with 12% for the population aged over 34 years.¹¹

The *2001 Census* also revealed that 36% of the Shire of Broome's total population on Census night was made up of visitors. Tourists and visitors represent temporary populations who occupy houses and other accommodation during their stay in Broome. The implications are that Broome will have to look at providing a range of affordable tenure types to accommodate its mobile and growing population.

Housing Tenure

Figure 1 shows the proportion of different types of housing tenures in Broome. It demonstrates that 45.4% of dwellings are either fully owned or being purchased 20.6% are being rented from a private landlord or real estate agency, and 21.6% are in public and community housing. The remaining 13% of dwellings was categorised as 'other' and included Government Employees Housing Authority (GEHA), other employer provided rental accommodation. This compares with the State averages shown in Figure 1 at around 68% owned or purchased, a similar proportion of private rental at 21%, with other/not stated making up 8% and a much smaller market presence of social housing at less than 5%.¹²

Social Housing

Social Housing is not for profit housing. In WA it comprises public housing, community housing and Indigenous and non Indigenous housing associations. The market presence of community housing in Broome is low (1.5%). In contrast, public housing has a significant share of the Broome housing market (20%). The Kimberley region also has a significant share

⁹ See Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, *A Australian Social Trends 2006*, Cat. No. 4102.0, www.abs.gov.au

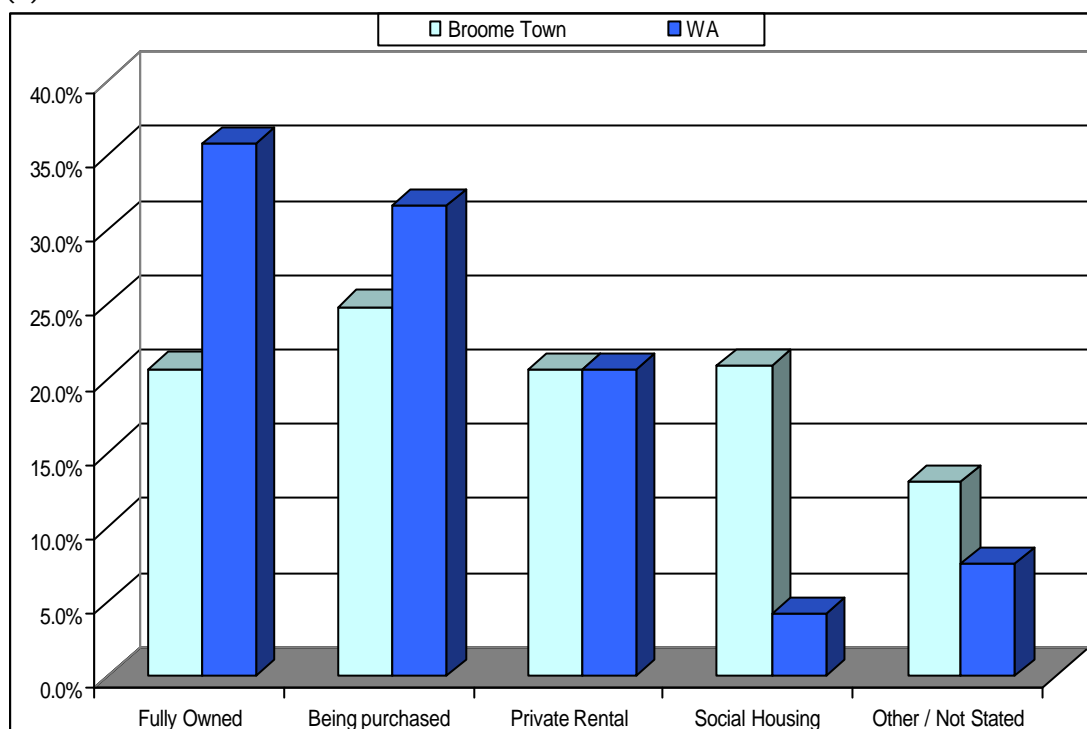
¹⁰ See Shelter WA, 2003, *Meeting Youth Housing Needs in Broome Through Collaborative Practice*, www.shelterwa.org.au

¹¹ See Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, *A Australian Social Trends 2006*, Cat. No. 4102.0, www.abs.gov.au

¹² See Shelter WA, 2003, *Meeting Youth Housing Needs in Broome Through Collaborative Practice*, www.shelterwa.org.au

of public housing (18%) and this is markedly higher than for WA's other regional areas (with the exception being Port Hedland).¹³

Figure 1: Proportion of Housing Tenure in Broome and WA in 2001
(a)



(Source: ABS 2001, Population and Housing, Census Data)

The comparatively large proportion of social housing is needed in Broome because of a range of factors, some of which include:

- An Indigenous unemployment rate of 9.9% compared to non-Indigenous unemployment rate of 4.9%.¹⁴ The latter figure had increased to 5.7% for the September quarter 2004;¹⁵
- Proportionally lower household incomes' for Indigenous people in comparison to non-Indigenous people;
- A high proportion of Broome wage earners employed in the comparatively low wage Retail sector which is the single biggest employer in the Shire of Broome and together with the accommodation, cafe and restaurant sectors employs 1330 ¹⁶ people and;
- Comparatively high median house prices (see Figure 3 below).

All these factors contribute to an increase in demand for public rental, and this is exacerbated when there is no affordable housing alternative.

¹³ See Department of Housing and Works, 2005, *The State Housing Commission Market Presence Report (2005)*, DHW, Perth.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ See Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, *National Regional Profile 2001-2004*, Cat. No. 379.0.55.001, www.abs.gov.au

¹⁶ See Western Australian Planning Commission, 2005, *Report of the Broome Planning Steering Committee*, www.wapc.wa.gov.au/Publications/770

The Department of Housing and Works currently has a waiting list of 437 applicants for public housing in the Town of Broome, some of which have been waiting since April 2002 to be allocated a property (Table 2). It is understood that this is creating overcrowding in existing housing, as those on the waiting list do not have other accommodation options.¹⁷

Information from the *ABS 2001 Census* confirmed that overcrowding in Broome is a very serious issue with 31% of Indigenous households and 12% of non-Indigenous households living in overcrowded conditions. The figures were also backed by research undertaken for the Kimberley Region Aboriginal Health Plan, which found that 18% of family households have more than one family in them. This translates to close to one in three Aboriginal families sharing a house with one or more other families.¹⁸

Table 2: Public housing waiting list in Broome as at February 2007

Year of allocation	Aug-02	Jul-02	Apr-02	Nov-02	
Family Type	Seniors	Singles	Family		
Housing Type	1 bedroom	1 bedroom	2&3 bedroom	4&more bedroom	Totals
Applications	39	128	259	11	437
Dwellings	66	61	553	46	726

(Source, Department of Housing and Works, 2007)

The greatest concentration of the Kimberley population resides in the Town of Broome (85%) and therefore we would expect significant public housing demand coming from within the town centre (Table 2)

Table 2 shows there is a significant gap between demand and supply for one bedroom singles dwellings. It reveals that singles applicants currently have a five year waiting period before they are housed.

The Department allows people to purchase houses after seven years; however, high market prices in Broome are restrictive and most cannot afford to buy these homes. In addition the current housing market in Broome makes it difficult for the government to replace stock and with community housing stock being very low, the only alternative is the private market.

Private Rental

The shortage of affordable rental has significant implications for any town or region. When the population is as transient as Broome's with its significant surges in population during its peak tourist time then the impact on rental vacancy rates will be immediate. Lack of affordable rental will also affect Broome's economy through making it difficult for businesses to attract and retain staff.

¹⁷ See Western Australian Planning Commission, 2005, *Report of the Broome Planning Steering Committee*, www.wapc.wa.gov.au/Publications/770.

¹⁸ See Shelter WA, 2003, *Meeting Youth Housing Needs in Broome Through Collaborative Practice*, www.shelterwa.org.au

The influx of seasonal employees will compete with other sections of the community seeking access to housing, contributing to the higher rental demand and pushing up rental costs.

Figure 2 indicates that this has been a key factor in sustaining such high median rents in Broome. In December 2001 median rents in Broome were nearly 1.5 times that of Perth. Figure 2 demonstrates that the difference has closed considerably from December 2004 to December 2005 with Broome's median declining to 40% greater than Perth's median housing price. This coincided with Perth's highest recorded annual increase in median rent, which grew by 28% over that period.¹⁹

In general Broome's median rents have remained high compared to the metropolitan region, fluctuating between a high of \$365 in December 2001 to a low of \$320 in December 2005. The fact that they have remained high during the off peak period (between April and October) suggest that the Broome housing system has tight vacancy rates.²⁰ This has the potential to put low income households up against higher income groups in competition for scarce private rental. This could lead to growth in such households experiencing housing stress²¹ and growth in the homeless population.²²

Recently released ABS data revealed that Australia wide around 51% of low income households is experiencing housing stress in the private rental market.²³ In Western Australia, 85,122 households receive Commonwealth Rental Assistance (CRA).²⁴ After receiving CRA, 27.6% or 23,500 households remained in housing stress, and 37.6% of recipients were not in housing stress before they received CRA.²⁵ This means that CRA was successful in eliminating housing stress for just over one third (34.8%) of CRA recipients.

¹⁹ See Shelter WA, State of Affordable Housing in Western Australia in 2006, www.shelterwa.org.au

²⁰ When vacancy rates are low and demand is increasing landlords are able to choose from a larger pool of applicants. Higher income groups normally fair better in this type of competitive market.

²¹ Housing stress refers to households in the bottom 40% of the income quintile that pay more than 30% of the gross income on housing costs.

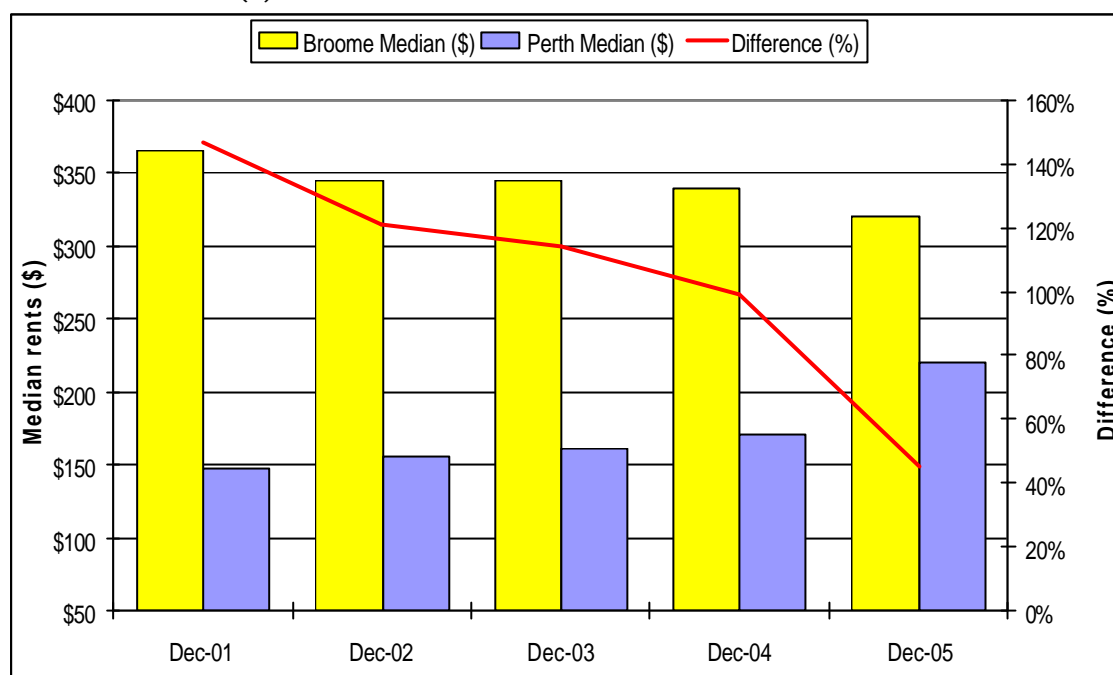
²² The ABS uses the cultural definition of homelessness to enumerate the homeless population. The definition describes 3 levels of homelessness: **Primary homelessness**: people without conventional accommodation; **Secondary homelessness**: people who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another; and **Tertiary homelessness**: People who live in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis, See Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999, *Census of Population & Housing: Counting the Homeless, 1999*, Occasional Paper 2041.0, ABS, Canberra.

²³ See Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, *Housing Occupancy and Costs, 2003-2004*, Cat.No. 4130.0, www.ab.gov.au

²⁴ Commonwealth Rental Assistance is a non-taxable income support supplement paid by the Australian Government to income support recipients who rent in the private rental market.

²⁵ See Productivity Commission, 2006, *Report on Government Services 2006: Housing*, www.pc.gov.au

Figure 2: Median weekly rents in Perth and Broome, December 2001 to 2005 (a)



(Source, Department of Land Information, 2006)

(a) The median rents for Broome are based on three bedroom dwellings. The median rents for Perth are for total dwellings.

CRA is capped and the amount paid is dependent on family size and amount of rent paid. Income limits apply for eligibility. It is not designed to address regional variations in market conditions. Shelter WA has called for CRA to be structured so that it is based on the median rents of metropolitan and regional housing markets and is developed such that recipients pay no more than 30% of household income on rent.

Homeownership

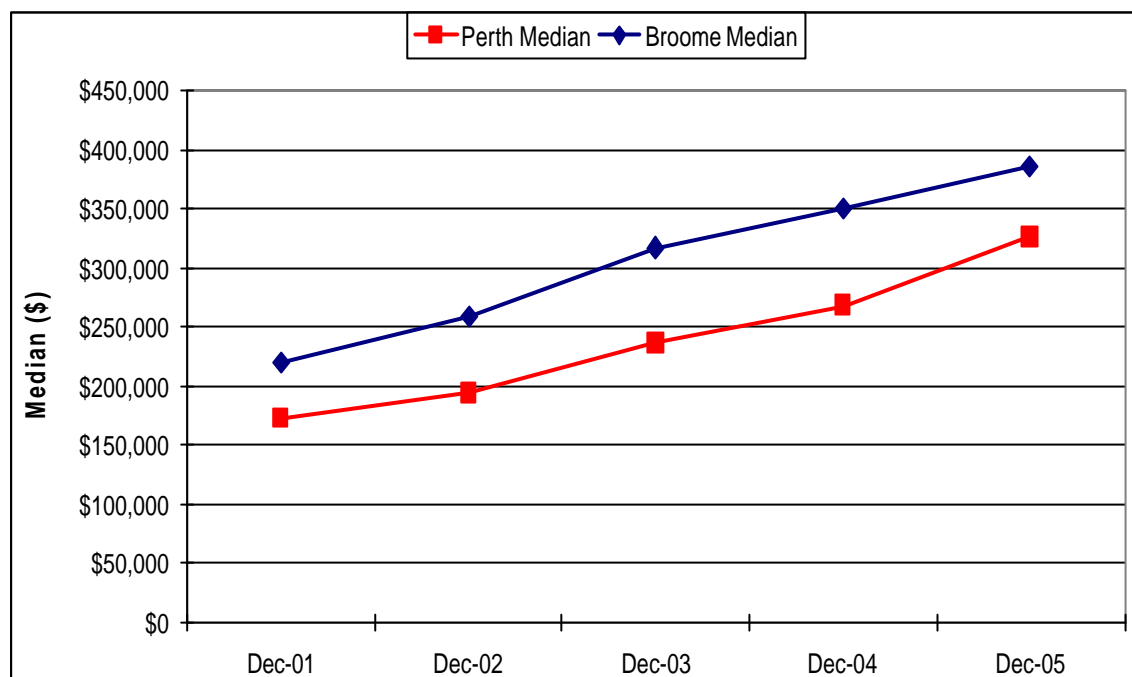
Broome's very high rental costs and median house prices (Figure 3) are indicative of a housing system unable to respond to demand. The supply problem is clearly becoming more acute in Broome and the effect of this is to price many households out of the market.

The impacts of high demand for housing is demonstrated by the differences between the Broome median house price and the metropolitan median housing price shown in Figure 3. In December 2005 Broome's median was \$385,000, whilst Perth's median was \$325,000. Round about this time Perth housing prices had started on a rapid growth phase increasing by 21% for the year compared to Broome's 10% increase. However, Perth's median house price remains much lower than Broome's.

Broome has a large proportion of its workforce employed in the lower wage services sector. Those low income earners will have seen house price growth fast outstrip their wage growth and Shelter WA estimates that households would require an income of \$110,000 to be able to purchase a house worth \$385,000. The median income is currently

\$60,000, so this gives an indication of the housing affordability gap (the difference between the median income and the income required to purchase a median house price).²⁶

Figure 3: Median house prices in Perth and Broome from 2001 to 2005



(Source: Real Estate Institute Western Australia 2005, Regional Centres Market Update)

The effect of high housing costs will continue to exclude many Broome households from the opportunity of owner occupation. With further limitations on land availability together with continued population growth, land and housing costs can be expected to remain high in the medium term.

Commentary

Broome's recent housing price trends are providing some clear signals that a new approach to housing policy is required. Broome's chronic shortage of affordable housing should provide enough impetus for the State government to develop a regional specific approach to affordable housing policy. Developing a basic formula for determining how many new affordable homes are needed in the Town of Broome would be a good starting point.

Homelessness in Broome

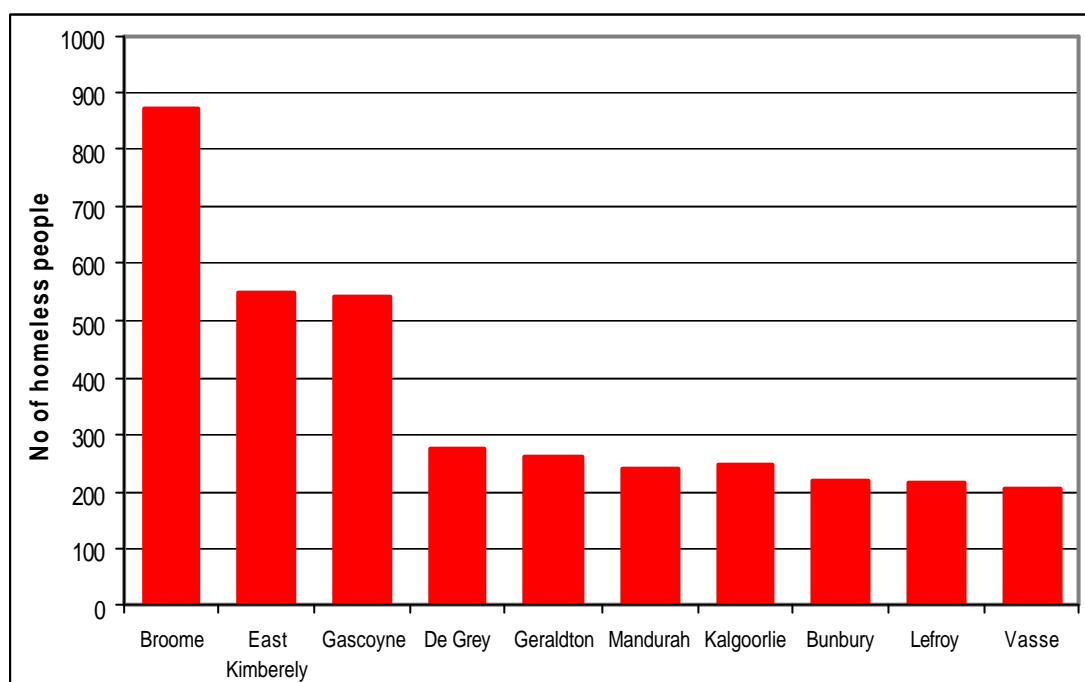
One of the most poignant indicators of Broome's unmet housing need is its alarmingly high number of people experiencing homelessness. on the night of the *ABS 2001 Census* Broome had the largest number of people

²⁶ For a more detailed discussion on the affordability gap, see Shelter WA, 2006, *The State of Affordable Housing in WA in 2006*, www.shelterwa.org.au

experiencing homelessness in regional WA (Figure 4), accounting for one in four (25%) of regional homeless population. In addition Broome's homelessness rate was 689 per 10,000 of the population which was 16 times greater than the metropolitan rate and the second highest for the State behind Wyndham/East Kimberley.²⁷

While detailed information for the Indigenous proportion of homeless people in Broome is not publicly available, data for Kimberley show that they comprise 17% of the State's homeless population, yet constitute only 3% of the State's total population.²⁸

Figure 4: Proportion of homeless people in selected subdivisions in Western Australia



(Source, Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2004, *Counting the Homeless 2001, Western Australia*)

About 70 per cent of Broome's homelessness population were staying with other households and 23 per cent were in improvised dwellings, including sleeping rough. Only three per cent were in boarding houses and two per cent were able to access Support Accommodation Assistance Programme (SAAP), compared to 13% for metropolitan homeless persons - indicating a funding imbalance of SAAP services between metropolitan and regional areas.²⁹

The *ABS 2001 Census* was conducted at a time when there is a substantial increase in the population during the peak tourist period - indicating that the sudden rise in population could be affecting a rise in Broome's

²⁷ See Chamberlain and Mackenzie, 2004, *Counting the Homeless 2001: Western Australia*, Swinburne University, Victoria

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ See Shelter WA, 2006, A profile of households experiencing homelessness in Western Australia: Survey 7, www.shelterwa.org.au

homeless population due to an acute shortage of cheap private rental accommodation.

The most recent homelessness data for Western Australia is published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).³⁰ This publication records information from SAAP agencies on people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. In 2005-06, 90% of all WA's SAAP agencies responded to the AIHW homelessness survey (this included a 100% participation rate from SAAP agencies based in Kimberley). It provides a demographic profile of the State's homeless population (Table 3). Given that nearly 85% of the Kimberley population are located in Broome, this most recent AIHW data is clearly relevant.

Table 3 SAAP support periods: district by client group, Western Australia, 2005-06 (per cent) (a)

	<i>Male alone</i>	<i>Female alone</i>	<i>Couple no children</i>	<i>Couple with children</i>	<i>Female with children</i>	<i>Number of homeless</i>	<i>% of WA homeless</i>
Perth	66%	17%	3%	3%	11%	2,600	23%
Kimberley	2%	49%		1%	48%	1,700	15%

(Source: Australia Institute of Health and Welfare, 2007)

(a) A support period commences when a client begins to receive support and/or supported accommodation from a SAAP agency.

Table 3 highlights some stark differences between the family composition of homeless households in Perth and Kimberley. The key findings from Table 3 below and other *AIHW 2005-06* data revealed that:

- Nearly all (97%) of Kimberley SAAP clients were single female and female with children compared to two thirds (64%) for the rest of WA;
- Perth and Kimberley figures combined accounted for one in three SAAP periods (38%) and the highest and second highest number of homeless households respectively (a combined figure of 4,300 out of a total of figure of 11,400);
- In Western Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples made up 40.7% of the homeless population³¹ yet comprise only 3% of the State's population;
- Over two thirds (72%) of client support was for accommodation; and
- Private rental proved the most difficult type of tenure for SAAP clients to obtain and maintain with one quarter needing assistance to obtain private rental and more than one third (37%) needing financial assistance to maintain a lease.³²

³⁰ See AIHW, 2007, *Homeless People in SAAP: National data collection annual report 2005-06 for Western Australia*, www.aihw.gov.au

³¹ Ibid: See Table 4.7: SAAP clients and support periods per client, by cultural and linguistic diversity and sex of client, Western Australia, 2005-06.

³² Ibid: See Table 8.6: SAAP closed support periods: type of tenure immediately before and after a support period, Western Australia, 2005-06 (per cent).

Where to from here?

Leave it to the Planning System?

In 2005 the *Broome Planning Steering Committee* released a Planning report which identified the need for the release of more land to accommodate population growth and to slow the rate at which land prices are increasing in and around Broome.³³ However, the report indicated that there are unresolved planning issues associated with opening up large areas of land for residential development. Planners are now looking at alternative land bank options to accommodate the projected population growth at 5% per annum to 2021.

The report also recommends a review of housing strategies is required to meet demand including an assessment of existing residential densities and the rezoning of alternative land parcels. Implicit in these planning strategies is the view that tinkering with various elements of the planning system will be enough to meet growing housing demand (including providing affordable housing to a range of different income groups). This approach is no longer sustainable given that housing prices are now growing at a much faster pace than wage growth.

There is an apparent growth in unmet housing need in Broome which needs to be quantified so that housing policies and funds are able to be targeted at those in need of housing assistance programmes.

To date there has not been any major work done on developing affordable housing models to guide the planning of residential development both in metropolitan and regional Western Australia. Typically, planning documents, such as the *Report of the Broome Planning Steering Committee*, provide a broad overview of the land use issues facing Broome within a 10 to 15 year timeframe and include strategies to manage growth.³⁴

Planning reports do not provide an estimation of how much affordable housing is required. Instead they assume that the majority of households will be able to purchase housing and the State government can catch those households excluded from the private market through the provision of social housing?

³³ The Broome Planning Steering Committee is a collaborative group, involving staff of the Shire of Broome, the Department for Planning and Infrastructure, the Kimberley Development Commission, the Kimberley Land Council, LandCorp, Main Roads and the Water Corporation. It has developed the report over two years under the guidance of the Hon Alannah MacTiernan, the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure. The *Report of the Broome Planning Steering Committee* will assist the Shire of Broome with planning decisions and growth for the next 10 to 15 years. See Western Australian Planning Commission, 2005, *Report of the Broome Planning Steering Committee*, www.wapc.wa.gov.au/Publications/770.

³⁴ See Western Australian Planning Commission, 2005, *Report of the Broome Planning Steering Committee*, www.wapc.wa.gov.au/Publications/770

A Housing Modelling Approach

In contrast Shelter WA would like to see affordable housing models developed at the early stages of planning. This will enable policy makers to estimate the need for affordable housing and social rental and develop housing policies accordingly. This approach is used by Local Planning Authorities in the UK.³⁵ This could then become an integral part of short and long term residential planning in Western Australia?

Encouragingly, there are some policy initiatives beginning to emerge that see the need for this type of strategic approach to housing policy. The Department of Housing and Works (DHW) is currently collaborating with the Peel Affordable Housing Taskforce with the aim of developing strategies to increase the supply of affordable rental for low income households.

Shelter WA strongly urges the DHW along with Regional Development Commissions and other government and non- government organisations to establish Affordable Housing Taskforces' for each planning region. In the meantime the growing housing affordability problems in Broome suggests that this region should receive priority attention in the short term through the development of an affordable housing policy and increased government funding for public and community housing.

³⁵In the UK every Local Government Authority has a duty, under the *1985 Housing Act*, amended by the *1996 Housing Act*, to estimate the need for affordable housing in its area by conducting a housing needs survey, See, Reeves, P, 2005, *An introduction to Social Housing*, 2nd ed, Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford

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