



# Aboriginal Short Stay Accommodation Project

## RAPID REVIEW OF THE GERALDTON ABORIGINAL SHORT STAY ACCOMMODATION PROJECT

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

August 2021

In June 2021, an organisation called Keogh Bay was contracted by the Department of Communities to deliver the: *Rapid Review of the Geraldton Aboriginal Short Stay Accommodation (GASSA) Project*.

A summary of findings from this Project is presented in this document. The summary does not include every stakeholder comment or finding, rather those that were commonly communicated or critically important.

### BACKGROUND

Geraldton is a large regional city which provides a hub for employment, amenities, health services, social care, education and training. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander<sup>1</sup> people living in the Midwest Gascoyne Region (and broader) regularly travel into Geraldton (also known as Jambinu) for a variety of reasons. This includes accessing facilities and services which are not available elsewhere, as well as visiting family and friends, attending funerals, maintaining kinship/social relationships and to meet cultural responsibilities.

Having somewhere affordable, appropriate, and safe to stay whilst undertaking these activities is essential and is a basic human right. However, as far back as 2012, reports from the local community have indicated that there are insufficient accommodation options available in Geraldton that are appropriate and suitable. As a result, Aboriginal people are often 'squashed up and squeezed in' whilst staying with family connections that live in Geraldton.<sup>2</sup>

On 14 August 2020, the State Government announced the proposed development of a new Aboriginal Short Stay Accommodation (ASSA) Facility in Geraldton (known provisionally as the GASSA). This announcement included \$18 million in capital funding, committed as part of the *WA Recovery Plan* suite of initiatives, for site acquisition, design, construction and fit-out.

Keogh Bay would like to acknowledge the Midwest Aboriginal Organisations Alliance (MAOA) for their support, as well as the stakeholders who provided input into this important project.

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<sup>1</sup> From this point forward the word Aboriginal will be used to describe Aboriginal, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Torres Strait Islander people.

<sup>2</sup> AHURA. *Between Places Indigenous Mobility in Remote and Rural Australia*. Accessed 1 July 2021 at [https://www.ahuri.edu.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/2863/AHURI\\_Positioning\\_Paper\\_No81\\_Between\\_places\\_Indigenous\\_mobility\\_in\\_remote\\_and\\_rural\\_Australia.pdf](https://www.ahuri.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/2863/AHURI_Positioning_Paper_No81_Between_places_Indigenous_mobility_in_remote_and_rural_Australia.pdf)

Keogh Bay would like to respectfully acknowledge the Yamatji Peoples who are the Traditional Owners and First People of the land on which this Project relates to and which many people were engaged upon for this project. We would like to pay our respect to the Elders past, present and future.



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## THE GERALDTON ABORIGINAL SHORT STAY ACCOMMODATION

The GASSA will be built in Geraldton, with the primary aim of providing short-term accommodation for people visiting the regional centre from outlying towns and communities. It was determined that the GASSA would embody the principles of the current ASSA facilities operating across Western Australia in Broome, Derby and Kalgoorlie-Boulder.

Whilst some basic features for the GASSA have been drafted, and a potential site identified, there remains uncertainty regarding the size (number of beds and bedrooms), the scale, and the scope of the build, as well as how to best accommodate the needs of the intended users. The accommodation also needs to be placed-based i.e. it must be tailored to the needs of the Midwest Gascoyne Region as well as the Aboriginal communities and language groups who will use the GASSA.

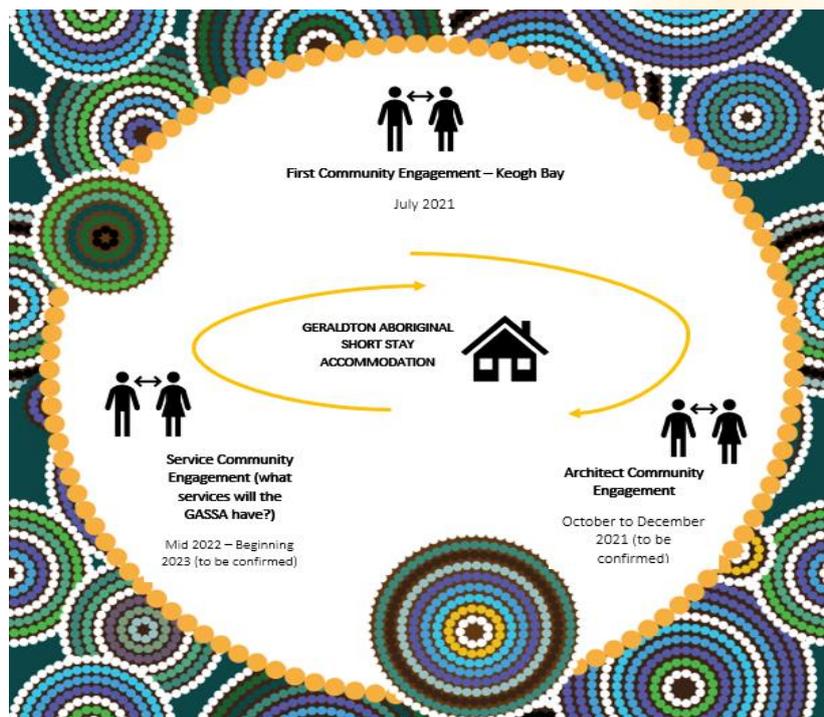
## OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

The aim of the Project was to develop an evidence-based report, outlining community expectations, on how the GASSA could be developed and designed in terms of size, scale and scope.

Specific Project objectives included:

- a review of data to evidence current and future demand for the GASSA
- a breakdown of potential accommodation use (crisis and non-crisis), and
- engaging with key stakeholders to ensure the GASSA was designed in a placed-based manner.

The Project had short timeframes (two months) due to internal government process deadlines but formed one part of a broader consultation process for the GASSA (see below).



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## PROJECT DESIGN

Keogh Bay collected desktop, qualitative and quantitative data, such as:

- historical reports, previous surveys and evaluation reports about the current ASSAs in Western Australia
- stakeholder consultations
- a site review of the Broome ASSA
- a review of demographic, service and population data.

Stakeholders were recruited from contacts given by the Department of Communities, MAOA and Keogh Bay. A 'snowballing' recruitment method was then initiated to identify additional stakeholders. An informal survey was also used to collect feedback in the short project timeframe.

In total, 68 stakeholders were formally consulted, including 44 Aboriginal people (65 per cent). A number of other Aboriginal people in the Region were informally consulted through Keogh Bay's local Aboriginal Director and are not included in this count. There was a fairly even spread of male and female stakeholders consulted.

Stakeholders of the following communities/language groups were reached, at a minimum (noting not all stakeholders were asked about their community/language group so this list is actually broader): Wadjjarri, Naaguja, Baiyungu, Malganggna/Mulgana, Tharndardi and Southern Yamaji, plus others not explicitly discussed. Stakeholders residing in Geraldton, Meekatharra, Mullewa, Mt Magnet, Buttah Windee, Yalgoo, Carnarvon, Shark Bay and Wiluna were consulted.

The types of stakeholders consulted included:

- Aboriginal people with a lived experience / potential accommodation users
- Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and networks
- non-government organisations
- government agencies
- shire councils
- peak bodies
- other organisations.

## PROJECT LIMITATIONS

There were some limitations to the Project, which should be noted.

Much of the data was obtained from the *Census of Population and Housing 2016* which is collected and published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). There are well known issues with Census data in terms of its application to Aboriginal populations, particularly in remote areas.

Other limitations included that:

- The Project scope did not include collecting information on the location of the GASSA, the operation of the GASSA, its workforce and services, unless they specifically impacted on the GASSA build. However, important and critical information on these areas was heard from stakeholders and was therefore submitted to the Department of Communities.
- Due to the short project timeframe, the number and location of stakeholders was limited. Keogh Bay has suggested that the next round of community engagement



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activities should be broader and allow significant time for consultation planning and engagement.

## FINDINGS

Many stakeholders communicated that they were excited about the possibility of the accommodation being developed as long as the facility was of a high quality and provided a safe place to stay (culturally safe and safe from violence/alcohol and drug use).

Common community expectations included that the GASSA should have an Aboriginal name to instil a sense of ownership. Some stakeholders also felt that there needs to be greater communication that the GASSA is for all communities and groups within the Midwest Gascoyne Region.

## USE OF THE ACCOMMODATION

Health reasons and funerals were raised most frequently by stakeholders as 'non-crisis reasons' for travel into Geraldton. However, other important reasons included cultural business, social and shopping trips, employment, education and training, justice, environmental/situational factors and other reasons.

The GASSA may also drive an increase in people staying overnight in Geraldton, if it is affordable and developed in a way that is seen as positive in community.

Organisations in Geraldton also expressed significant need for crisis accommodation in Geraldton. However, capacity limitations, build specifications and accommodation management may need to be carefully considered if the accommodation was used for both crisis and non-crisis reasons.

### LENGTH OF STAY

The number of days that accommodation users would stay at the GASSA would likely be varied by each person/family and their reason for travel into Geraldton. However, a common length of stay period of time mentioned by survey respondents, and within the current ASSA data (noting patterns of ASSA use may be different in the Midwest Gascoyne), was between two and seven days.

### PEAK TIMES OF USE

Peak times for GASSA use may include school holidays, the Christmas period, school trips and for funerals.

### PEOPLE WHO COULD USE THE ACCOMMODATION

In order to estimate how many people might use the GASSA (and therefore how many beds it may require), Keogh Bay examined 2016 Census of Population and Housing data for 21 areas within the Midwest Gascoyne that are outside of Geraldton<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> 20 local government areas and the Mullewa 'Indigenous Location'.



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The data indicated that there was a maximum of 2,880 potential Aboriginal stakeholders who could use the GASSA in the Midwest Gascoyne Region (noting data limitations).<sup>4</sup> By 2031, it is estimated that there will be a small population increase in the communities examined, which would bring the total potential GASSA accommodation users to 3,198 people.

In addition, on the night of the Census, 218 Aboriginal people, in the communities examined, were away from their home.

A range of other data was examined to understand 'who' may use the GASSA. This data, and stakeholders consulted, indicated that the GASSA should cater for children, youth, families, individuals, and those who may have health and accessibility requirements.

## BED NUMBERS

Aboriginal community members consulted for the Project often reported that a 75-bed accommodation site would not be enough and/or that 100 beds would be the minimum required. In addition to this, there would be large fluctuations in demand for funerals and school trips.

As Census data indicated that 218 people could be away from home during the same night in the Midwest Gascoyne Region (not including Geraldton), even if half of this population at a minimum were travelling into Geraldton, and required short stay accommodation for the one night, this would create full occupancy of a 100 bed GASSA. This would leave no room for the potential crisis referrals also. Examination and comparison of the number of users of the Broome ASSA also supported a potential 100 bed GASSA.

In addition to the above, use of former short-term accommodation in Geraldton (Cameliers Guest House and Boomerang Hostel), indicates that anything less than 62 beds would be unlikely to be appropriate for the GASSA.

It should be noted that the above calculations are proxy in nature due to data limitations. Therefore, the GASSA could consider a multi-staged build approach to test capacity and occupancy requirements. However, there are risks with this approach as people may camp outside the accommodation if they are unable to obtain access to the GASSA due to it being at full capacity.



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<sup>4</sup> ABS. *Census of Population and Housing 2016 Data Pack*. Accessed 8 July 2021 at [https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/LGA55670?opendocument](https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/LGA55670?opendocument)



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## DESIGN OF THE ACCOMMODATION

Community expectations about the GASSA design, included that the accommodation should feel warm, be of a good quality, be private, non-institutional and be developed in a way that aligns and interacts with the natural environment (i.e., has a natural look and fits within the landscape). Aboriginal artwork representing all language groups/communities needs to be carefully considered.

"People will talk with their feet, need to be designed with the mob in mind"



## LAYOUT

The layout of the GASSA could include separate zones screened off by natural plants and have separated clusters of units (or similar) for families, large family groups or language groups (or for users who do not want to stay near other groups). A separate area for people who are vulnerable, need a quiet space or are unwell was also suggested and may need extra security.

## OUTSIDE AREAS

The outside design was discussed as being very important to the community. It's likely to be used for:

- mourning before funerals;
- meeting family, friends and socialising;
- for cooking (including traditional food) and eating;
- quiet reflection time; and
- recreation for children and families.

"Needs space to have space"



In terms of the design, the outside area should again be inclusive of the natural environment and not be too manicured (but still meet accessibility requirements). The outside should be spacious and again allow for some level of privacy for separate groups.

Ideas for outside facilities included fire pits, seating areas, walking paths, outdoor cooking spaces, shade, meeting spaces, a basketball court, a playground and other facilities.

## INSIDE SHARED AREAS

The inside of the GASSA should include recreation areas as well as spaces for eating, cleaning clothes, somewhere for an informal worker to 'have a cup of tea and chat' with accommodation users and meeting rooms for services to visit. Having a tea, coffee and toast station that people could use at any time was particularly important.

## INSIDE ROOMS

Stakeholders communicated that rooms should have access to kitchens/kitchenettes, bathrooms/toilets and be private and safe. Catering to families in a culturally secure way will also be critical. This includes having adjoining doors between rooms for families travelling together but needing separate rooms (e.g., for large families, for support people, for older teenager males who are an adult in culture and are travelling with their mother etc.).

## FACILITIES

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The main facility wanted by stakeholders, within the GASSA, was transport services from the GASSA to different key locations. In addition, having access to bathroom, daily care, clothing, and other items would be useful.

## SUMMARY

Overall, there was significant interest and enthusiasm in relation to the GASSA. There were also strong community expectations about what they would like to see in terms of the build, design, layout and facilities within the GASSA.

Overall principles relating to safety, privacy, ownership, quality, cultural security, supporting people who have specific needs, as well as alignment to the natural environment, were strongly enmeshed across all finding areas. Further, the construction of the GASSA, needs to consider in an ongoing way how it will meet the needs and nuances of all language groups and communities in the Midwest Gascoyne Region.