



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia



**PILBARA 2024
LISTENING TOUR**

Acknowledgement of Country

The Commissioner for Children and Young People proudly acknowledges and pays respect to the Traditional Custodians of the lands across Western Australia and acknowledges the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation upon whose lands the Commissioner's office is located.

She recognises the continuing connection to culture, lands, skies and waters, families and communities for all the Aboriginal peoples.

The Commissioner and her team recognise the knowledge, insights and capabilities of Aboriginal people, and pay respect to Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing.

A note about language

For the purposes of this report, the term 'Aboriginal' encompasses Western Australia's diverse language groups and recognises Torres Strait Islanders who live in Western Australia.

The use of the term 'Aboriginal' in this way is not intended to imply equivalence between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, although similarities do exist.

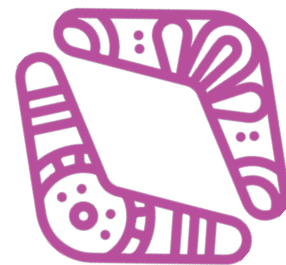
Disclaimer

This report has been prepared by the Commissioner for Children and Young People and is intended to provide the views of those who participated in the consultations and conversations undertaken on in the Pilbara Listening Tour 2024.

Any errors of omission or commission are the responsibility of the Commissioner for Children and Young People.

A selection of quotations is included in this report on the relevant topics. The quotations are generally unedited to ensure the voice of the child or young person is authentically represented.

Editing has only occurred where necessary for clarity, understanding or for confidentiality. In this instance, any changes or omissions have been marked with square brackets or an ellipsis (...).



Credit

The artwork used in this publication was created by children and young people as part of the Student Forums of the Pilbara Listening Tour, and is reproduced with their informed consent.

Alternative formats

On request, large print or alternative formats of this report can be obtained from:

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To best support our children and young people
it's vital that the decisions we make about them and their wellbeing, are
informed by their views and perspectives.

The Commissioner for Children and Young People WA and her team are focused on promoting the rights, voices and contributions of children and young people across the State and monitoring and advocating to improve their wellbeing.

All Western Australians share a collective responsibility to these children and young people to ensure they are heard, valued, healthy, safe and given every opportunity to reach their full potential.

OVERVIEW

The Commissioner, Jacqueline McGowan-Jones, visited the Pilbara in May 2024, to meet with and listen to children and young people about what matters most to them.

From 14-21 May, the Commissioner and her team met with 200 children and young people under the age of 18 in Karratha, Port Hedland and Newman.

The student forums were very successful with more than 90 per cent of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing, when asked if they enjoyed thinking about the questions and having their say.


The Julyardi Aboriginal Corporation supported the Commissioner in meeting with 19 Aboriginal children and young people who had disengaged from the education system and/or were homeless. The format of this session was more relaxed and unstructured, allowing the participants to lead the conversation.

The Commissioner also met with 35 school principals in Karratha, at the Pilbara Regional Principals' Conference hosted by the Education Department WA.

The Commissioner shared preliminary learnings of the Listening Tour and spoke about the Pilbara region's results in the '2021 Speaking Out Survey'. She then facilitated discussion amongst participants about what improvements might be required.




THEIR WORDS



“Ask
before
you assume”



“Keep us
active”



“[We want]
Our voice heard more
and listened to by govt
[not just parents].


Kids deserve this
too.”



“Stop grafitti
and vaping”

Recurring themes of discussion

- Connections to culture, family, friends and a close knit community were highly valued.
- The natural environment, the weather and outdoor activities such as camping, hiking and fishing were very important.
- Most children and young people wanted more entertainment and activities after school and on weekends.
- Concerns about safety - at home, in schools and the community - were common.
- Access to and quality of health services including mental health, was a regular topic.



“Grown ups should
lead by example,
so don't do
bad things”

Yarns with Aboriginal children and young people highlighted

- Connection to culture, land and Community was extremely important.
- Negative attitudes and actions of police and Community Corrections officers were of great concern.
- Many homeless or disengaged children are looking after their siblings and other family members, as well as themselves.
- Teachers and admin staff don't consider issues experienced by homeless or disengaged children.
- School management doesn't act on safety and bullying concerns, which leads to children avoiding school altogether.
- There is no mental health support available for homeless or disengaged children and young people.

LOGISTICS AND STATISTICS

Prompt questions

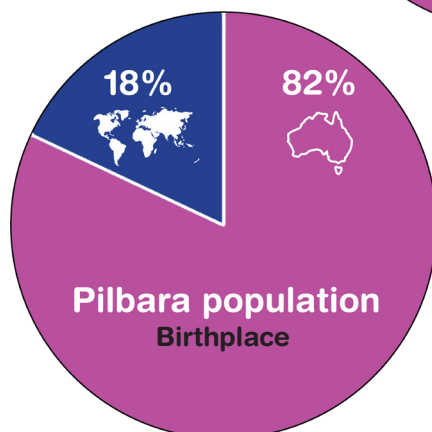
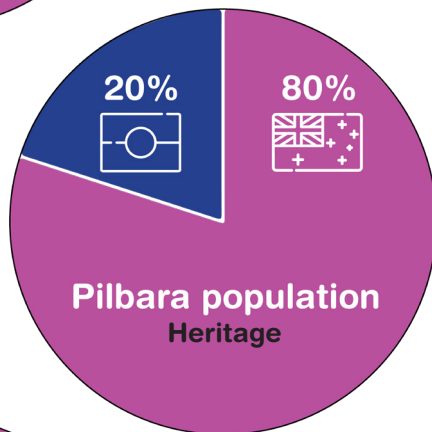
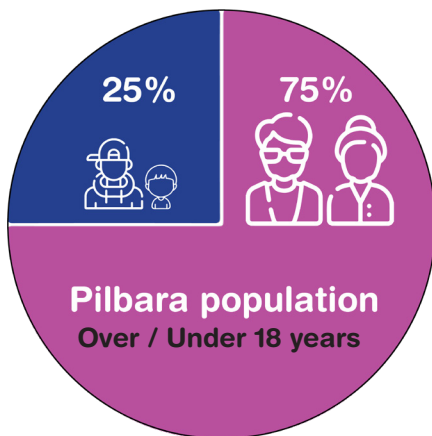
'What do you want me to know?'

'What is awesome about living in the Pilbara?'

'What would make it even better?'

'What three big things should adults listen to you about?'

'How do you think you and your friends should be involved in decisions being made about what happens in the Pilbara?'



Schools and Colleges participating

- Baler Primary School
- Baynton West Primary School
- Cassia Primary School
- Hedland Senior High School
- Karratha Primary School
- Karratha Senior High School
- Millars Well Primary School
- Newman Primary School
- Newman Senior High School
- Port Hedland Primary School
- Pegs Creek Primary School
- St Paul's Primary School
- South Hedland Primary School
- South Newman Primary School
- St Cecilia's Catholic Primary School
- St Luke's College
- Tambrey Primary School

Stakeholders

- Association of Independent Schools WA
- Catholic Education WA
- Department of Education WA
- Julyardi Aboriginal Corporation
- Town of Port Hedland

Figures sourced from ABS data at dbr.abs.gov.au

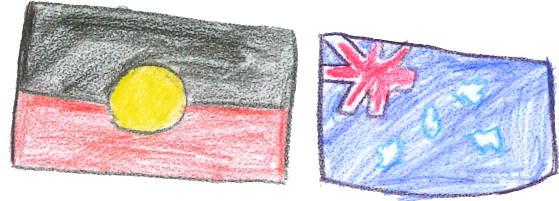


CALL TO LISTEN

Children were asked what grown-ups should listen to them about

They said:

- You should think about our feelings and ask us how we are coping.
- Our words are important. Hear our opinions, ideas and what we have to say.
- We want to have interactive discussions.
- We feel unsafe.
- You should look after the environment.
- Stop vaping.
- Clean up graffiti, litter and plastics.
- Listen and help with our issues like mental health, peer pressure and bullying.



Young people were asked how they wanted to be involved in decisions being made about what happens in the Pilbara

They said:

- We should vote so that we can have a say on how our future is shaped and how the land is used responsibly and looked after.
- There should be a Youth Councillor on each Town Council.
- There should be more support for Youth Advisory Councils. They should be listened to.
- We should receive information on what is being planned and asked for our feedback.
- We should be in School Board meetings and Department of Education meetings.
- Events addressing problems in the community, should be run by young people.



DISCUSSIONS AND THEMES

When asked about what they liked about living in the Pilbara children and young people enthusiastically spoke of the strong ties to family, friends and community.

Community rated highly in discussions across all groups. Belonging to the local, multi-cultural and Aboriginal community was a common topic raised by participants – with pride in their own culture, and emphasis on feeling connected and accepted to others from different backgrounds.

The warm weather, natural landscape, beaches, swimming holes, wildlife and the night sky were favoured. The lack of traffic, urban noise and crowds was seen as a benefit, as was the proximity to the bush, national parks, rock art, gorges and other Pilbara towns.

Love of the outdoors also showed in participants favourite activities particularly a wide variety of sports, camping, hiking, fishing, hunting, boating and biking.

Chickens, turtles, kangaroos, snakes and yowies were also mentioned as being awesome.

However, children and young people were very keen to discuss what was lacking in the Pilbara and put great effort into suggesting improvements.

At the top of the list for all groups was the expansion of retail and fast-food outlets in their town – particularly the popular global chains.

Popular feedback included the need for more entertainment venues and engaging activities after school, on the weekends and during school holidays.

Many participants spoke about being bored – others drew the link with crime and vandalism due to the lack of things to do. There were calls for cinemas, waterslides, greener, cleaner and safer spaces for activities, and an increase in shaded outdoor areas.

A common feature of discussions was safety (at home and school), community security and better policing. Better doctors, hospitals and improved access to timelier healthcare services was also raised.

What became evident in many groups was the need for adults to be more involved in children's mental health. A suggestion from one group was a mental health education program be created for adults.

When asked "What is the most important question you think adults should ask you?", 54% said that they would like to be asked "Are you okay?", "How do you feel?" or similar.



On the theme of education, suggestions included locating a university in the Pilbara, more ATAR subjects, life skills, alternative hours for classes and providing extra learning support for students who needed it to keep them engaged and at school.

While many participants acknowledged the benefits that mining companies have brought to the region, others called for more opportunities outside of the mining industry. A recurring theme was not enough of the wealth the Pilbara generated, is reinvested into the community.

Environment and sustainability were a large part of discussions and suggestions. Many children and young people are focused on clean energy, recycling, eliminating pollution and protecting the environment.

Infrastructure was also a concern, with calls for better roads, flights, buses, zebra crossings, bike paths, housing and homeless shelters.

While there was much pride in the diversity of culture and communities in the Pilbara, discrimination was evident and a call was made for decreased racism against Aboriginal peoples and the LGBTQIA+SB community.

When the Commissioner met with Aboriginal children and young people who had withdrawn from the school system, many of the same topics arose in conversation.

However, other themes related to homelessness and underprivilege were also raised.

In particular,

- Schools not having the capacity to deal with disengaged students including:
 - Students being left to their own devices and not being included in lessons or meaningful studies due to their disruptive behaviour
 - Children not being able to attend school due to their biological parents not being available to sign enrolment forms or not having all required documentation such as birth certificates and immunisation records
- Mental health support for children and young people are not available in the region.
- Bullying and physical abuse were some reasons why children avoid attending school.
- Children needing to look after not only themselves but their siblings and other family members.
- Home not being seen as safe and so children are moving from place to place in order to find a security.
- Stealing often came from the children's need to feed themselves and their siblings.
- Children's hunger pains being a contributing factor in 'sniffing' behaviour.



One young person described being woken up at 4am and taken to lockup because he had breached his bail conditions by not being at the address listed on his paperwork.

He said the police indicated he would be needed for 10 minutes but he spent 8-10 hours in the lockup. "They let me starve in there." he said.



CONCLUSION AND CALLS TO ACTION

It was evident that the majority of children and young people enjoy the lifestyle in the Pilbara.

However, many felt unheard and unsupported.

We must stop penalising children and young people for matters out of their control – for example, not being able to enrol in school due to lack of documentation or removing children from their beds in the middle of the night due to incomplete understanding of the bail system.



Recommendations for Schools

- Always enrol a child and follow up on paperwork rather than refusing education.
- Ensure you ask children and young people about their views, experiences and ideas to improve the supports, programs, services including education, available to them.
- Focus on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and ensure children and young people understand their core rights to good health, education, housing and safety.

Recommendations for Government

- Seek ideas from a broad range of children and young people when considering needs such as community services, youth activities, holiday programs, sports etc.
- Ensure all activities, services and funded organisations are embedding the National Childsafe Principles and have child-friendly complaint systems.
- Pay due regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Recommendations for Courts

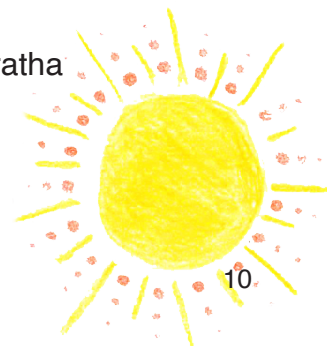
- Consider the cultural context for children and young people being granted bail including extended family context for identifying safe places for bail – which may mean more than one address is included.





CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OF THE PILBARA ASK FOR

- A book shop
- A homeless shelter
- A tennis club
- A university
- A waterpark
- More basketball courts
- BCF
- Being able to stay later at school to study
- Better access to health care services
- Better airports
- Better animal and turtle programs
- Better cinema
- Better disability awareness
- Better hospital
- Better job opportunities
- Better police system
- Better public transport
- Better recycling bins... [that resist the wind]
- Better roads, paths and buildings
- Better shopping centre
- Better sporting facilities
- Better toilets
- Bounce
- Bowling
- Bunnings
- Cheaper flights to perth
- Cheaper prices
- Cleaner parks
- Cleaner waterways
- Coles
- Community security
- Concert venues
- Curfew
- Drinkable water
- Education for adults on mental health
- Equal rights
- eScooters
- Extra school support for extra needy kids
- Flip Out
- Game library
- Go-karting
- Hungry Jacks
- Ice skating
- Indoor skate park
- KFC
- Kmart
- Laser tag
- Less people vaping
- Make school a safe place
- McDonalds
- More air-conditioned spaces at recess and lunch
- More ATAR subjects
- More books in the library
- More bright and colourful [public] art...
- More crosswalk guards.
- More cafes
- More camps
- More careers outside of mining
- More cultural integration at school
- More dentists
- More flights to other places than Perth
- More green areas
- More Indigenous education pathways
- More investment to attract more residents
- More jobs for young people
- More music festivals
- More permanent residents
- More permanent teachers
- More renewable energy
- More safe bike paths on the roads
- More self defence opportunities
- More social areas
- More solar farms
- More sustainability
- More TAFE opportunities for Year 7,8 and 9s
- More zebra crossings
- Paid coaching positions for kids sport
- Places to talk without telling parents
- Reduce waiting times for health services
- Rockclimbing centre
- Rowing
- Safe spaces for activities
- School holiday programs
- School starting and finishing later
- Schools should be more actively supportive of students' mental health
- Sephora
- Shaded courts and sports areas
- Spaces to study that don't shut early
- Speech therapists
- Support animals at school
- Sushi
- Switch away from fossil fuels
- Taco Bell
- Target
- Teachers should get a pay rise
- Three or four days a week of school
- Time Zone
- Train from Wickam to Karratha
- Ziplining





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