

FEDERAL PRIORITIES

OCTOBER 2026

Shire of EAST
Pilbara
THE HEART OF THE PILBARA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Shire of East Pilbara acknowledges the Traditional Owners throughout this vast region and their continuing connection to the land, waters and community.

We pay our respects to the members of these Aboriginal communities, their cultures, and to their Elders past, present and emerging.







MESSAGE FROM THE SHIRE PRESIDENT

ANTHONY MIDDLETON

The East Pilbara's contribution to Australia is built on the people who live and work here. They deserve reliable infrastructure, access to services and communities that are safe and welcoming.

Across Newman, Marble Bar, Nullagine and our remote Aboriginal communities, distance and ageing infrastructure affect everyday life. A road closure can interrupt access to food and healthcare. Airport capacity affects travel for residents and workers, while community facilities create opportunities for young people and families to connect and participate.

The Shire is investing heavily to address these needs. We are asking the Commonwealth to build on that commitment through a partnership that recognises both our community responsibilities and the national importance of this region.

The Newman Youth and Community Hub demonstrates what governments can achieve together. We welcome continued cooperation to deliver the infrastructure and services our communities need, and ask federal Members and Senators to support the practical priorities set out in this document.



MESSAGE FROM THE SHIRE CEO

STEVEN HARDING

The Shire of East Pilbara has committed substantial local funding to the infrastructure outlined in this document. We are progressing projects that support our communities and the resources sector, while carrying responsibilities that extend well beyond the capacity of a small resident population.

Delivering across our vast region requires funding that recognises remoteness, construction costs and the demands placed on roads, airports and essential services. Resident population alone does not capture the scale of that task.

This document sets out where Commonwealth partnership can make a practical difference: closing infrastructure funding gaps, improving aviation safety and road resilience, and supporting services that make full use of the Newman Youth and Community Hub.

Through Resilient by Design: Building a Sustainable East Pilbara, we are planning for how infrastructure will serve our communities over the long term. We welcome discussions with Commonwealth representatives and agencies on funding and delivery arrangements that reflect the East Pilbara's national role and enable these priorities to progress.

EAST PILBARA OVERVIEW

The Shire of East Pilbara is **the largest local government area in Australia** and sits at the centre of the nation's most valuable export region. Yet it is home to barely 10,500 residents and funds local infrastructure underpinning billions of dollars in national export revenue from a small population base.

372,571km²

Larger than Victoria, Tasmania, and the ACT combined.

45,500 people

Approximately **10,500 residents** (2021 Census), plus an estimated **35,000 fly-in fly-out workers**.

19,091 jobs

(2021 Census).

17.9% Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders

The Western Australia and Australia is 3.3% and 3.2% (2021 Census).

\$48 billion annual economic output

With a GRP of \$30 billion - 35% of Western Australia's mineral wealth.

Pilbara & Kimberley

WA State electorates.

92% local roads are unsealed

3,310km local roads total.

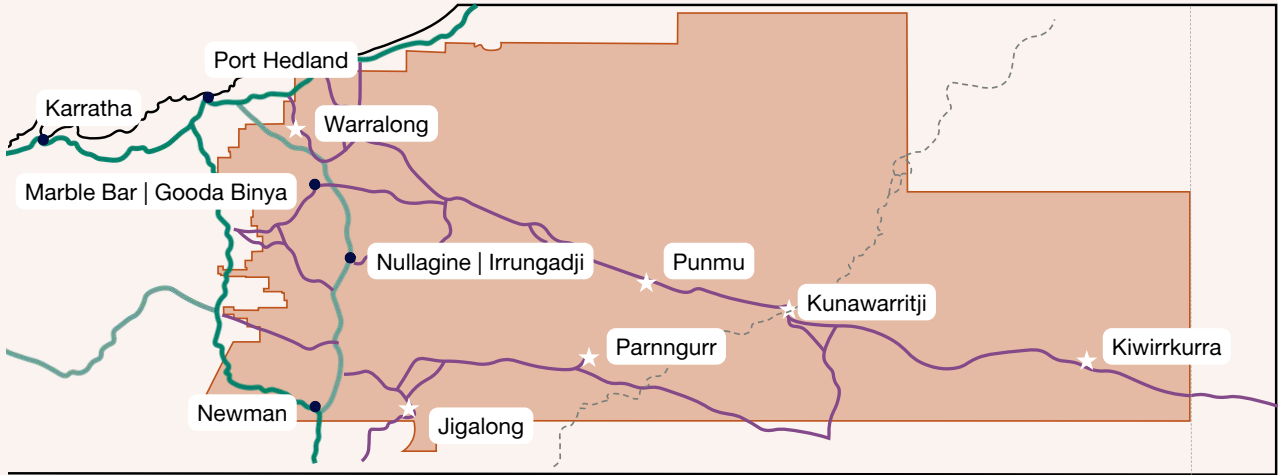
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Federal electorate.

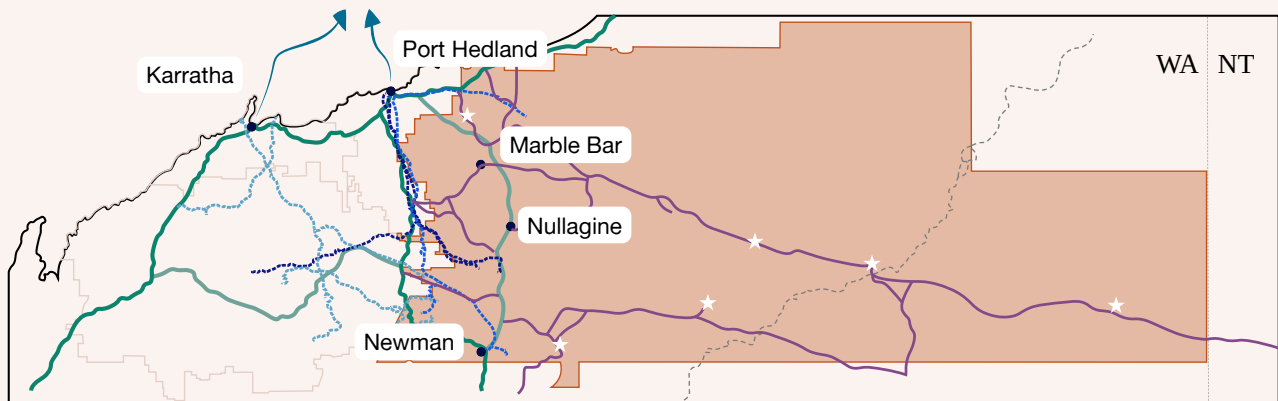


KEY MAPS - PILBARA REGION

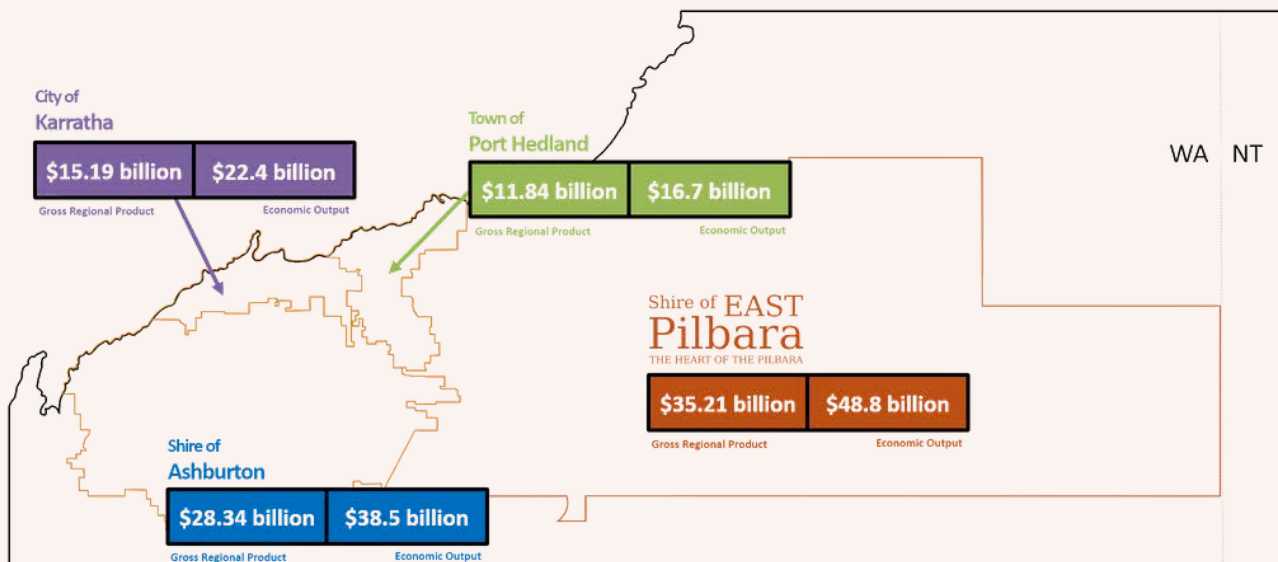
TOWNS & COMMUNITIES



KEY TRANSIT ROUTES



GRP & ECONOMIC OUTPUT



LEGEND

- State border
- Local Government Area boundaries
- Maritime shipping routes
- Pilbara rail network
- Roads – National routes
- Roads – Key State routes
- Key access roads – Shire of East Pilbara
- Canning Stock Route
- Towns
- ☆ Communities

THE ENGINE ROOM OF THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY

The Pilbara is routinely described by the Prime Minister and federal ministers as the engine room of the Australian economy, and the figures bear this out. **Western Australia produces close to 99% of Australia's iron ore - almost all of it from the Pilbara - and iron ore remains the nation's single largest export.** In 2024–25, iron ore shipped through Pilbara ports earned roughly \$153 billion and accounted for around 81% of Australia's iron ore trade and 43% of all iron ore traded globally. Australia supplies about half of the world's seaborne iron ore.

The East Pilbara is at the heart of this. Its principal town, Newman, was built in 1966 to service BHP's Mount Whaleback - the single-biggest open-pit iron ore mine in the world. BHP's Newman operations alone produce in the order of 78 million tonnes of iron ore a year, railed more than 400 kilometres north to Port Hedland for export.

Western Australia received \$8.5 billion in iron ore royalties in 2024–25, with 2025–26 estimated at \$8.8 billion. **Iron ore accounts for around 87% of the State's royalty income.** Very little of that revenue returns to the local government carrying the cost of the roads, the airport and the town infrastructure that the industry depends on.

MT WHALEBACK MINE, NEWMAN





A REGION OF VAST SCALE

Two comparisons for members unfamiliar with the region:

- Of the 193 United Nations member states, the Shire of East Pilbara is larger than 131 of them, including Germany, Vietnam, Italy, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.
- Driving entirely within the Shire, Newman to the community of Kiwirrkurra, near the eastern boundary with the Northern Territory, is 1,194km - slightly further than the 1,186km drive from Canberra to Brisbane. Driving across the whole Shire takes around two days from east to west and about six hours from north to south.

People and services are spread thinly across that distance. Alongside Newman, the Shire includes the historic towns of Marble Bar and Nullagine and a network of remote Aboriginal communities including Jigalong, Punmu, Kunawarritji, Parnngurr, Kiwirrkurra, Warralong, Irrungadji and Gooda Binya.

PEOPLE AND TRADITIONAL OWNERS

The Shire is home to an estimated 10,500 permanent residents, with a further 35,000 fly-in fly-out workers supporting resources operations across the region. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 17.9% of residents, well above the state and national average. Twenty-one per cent of residents speak a language other than English at home, with Aboriginal languages the most common at 10% - Martu Wangka the most widespread among them. There are 15 Aboriginal corporations representing the Traditional Owners of the lands in the East Pilbara, including the Martu and Niyaparli.

The Shire's resident population is not a reliable measure of the population its assets serve. Beyond residents, the Shire's roads, airport and town services support a large non-resident workforce, heavy freight generated by the resources sector, pastoral operations, visitors, and residents of remote communities who depend on local roads for access to food, fuel, healthcare and education. Commonwealth funding formulas built on resident population understate that service task by a wide margin.

THE INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING GAP

The defining challenge for the Shire is the gap between the wealth generated in the region and the resources available to the local government that services it.

The Shire maintains a road network of 3,310 kilometres - equivalent to the drive from Perth to Melbourne - of which about 92% is unsealed gravel and formed road. Its \$12 million annual resheeting budget renews only around 120 kilometres a year, roughly 4% of the 2,947 kilometres requiring treatment. **The network deteriorates faster than it can be maintained.**

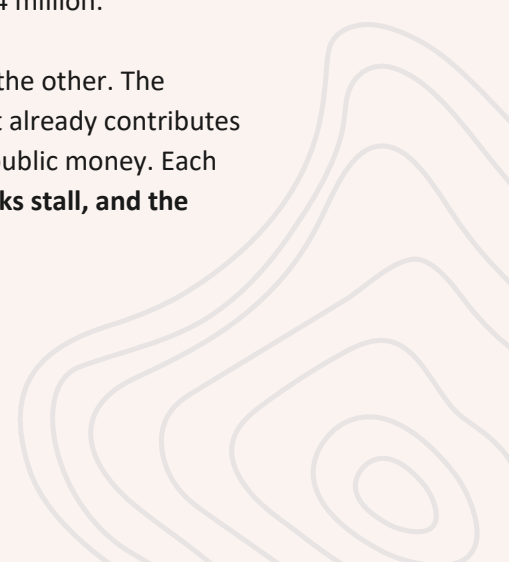
Much of the town infrastructure the Shire now owns was originally built by industry and handed over without an accompanying funding base. The Newman Wastewater Treatment Plant was constructed by BHP in 1981 and transferred to the Shire in 1996. **In almost every other Western Australian town, that asset would be owned, funded and upgraded by the State-owned Water Corporation.**

This is not only the Shire's assessment. In November 2025, the Western Australian Auditor-General tabled Maintaining Regional Local Roads, in which the Shire of East Pilbara was one of five audited local governments. The Auditor-General found that the asset preservation model used to distribute the local roads component of Commonwealth Financial Assistance Grants was implemented in 1990 and has never been reviewed. **It accounts for neither road condition nor a local government's capacity to fund maintenance from its own revenue.** In 2023–24, metropolitan local governments in Western Australia recorded an asset preservation surplus. Regional local governments recorded a gap of \$345.8 million - 44.7% of assessed need. Many roads in the Shire of East Pilbara have deteriorated to levels below the adjacent landscape, with the result that the road itself has become a stormwater drain.

Three further pressures compound this:

- Financial Assistance Grants have fallen from one per cent of Commonwealth taxation revenue in 1996 to 0.49% in 2026–27.
- The Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program, the recent Commonwealth program best suited to a council in the Shire's position, ended on 30 June 2026.
- In July 2026, the State Government declined the Shire's proposed differential rate on transient workforce accommodation, on the basis that it placed too much of the rates burden on the mining sector - in a local government area where mining is 92.2% of the economy and the primary source of heavy vehicle use on local roads. The decision required a revised budget that reduced local road maintenance funding by approximately \$4 million.

On major projects, the State Government and industry each tend to defer to the other. The State's position is that industry should contribute; industry's position is that it already contributes substantial royalties and taxes and that public assets should be funded with public money. Each position is coherent on its own terms. **The consequence is that essential works stall, and the cost falls to a single local government.**



WHAT THE SHIRE HAS ALREADY COMMITTED

The Shire is not asking the Commonwealth to fund projects it has not backed itself. Every project in this paper carries a substantial local contribution, drawn from rates, reserves, user charges and loans. **We've committed a total capital spend of \$117.3m.**

NEWMAN WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT

\$49m (ex GST)

via 40-year loan;
no external contribution.

NEWMAN YOUTH & COMMUNITY HUB

\$6.3m

Shire share of the
\$33m project.

NEWMAN AIRPORT TERMINAL

\$25m

via Airport reserves.

NEWMAN AIRPORT TAXIWAY & APRON

\$35m

Stages 1A + 1B, own-source
revenue and reserves.

LOCAL ROADS 2026-2027

\$14.5m

Record annual own-
source roads budget.

For a local government with approximately 10,500 residents, this is an exceptional financial effort. **The \$49 (ex GST) million wastewater loan alone commits a significant share of the Shire's discretionary capital capacity for the next four decades, and constrains every other project described in this paper.**



ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

OPPORTUNITY	WHAT WE ARE ASKING OF THE COMMONWEALTH	QUANTUM
Newman Wastewater Treatment Plant Stage 2	Co-funding for the stage that achieves environmental compliance for wastewater discharge.	\$25 million.
Newman Airport redevelopment	Direct investment in the terminal following the unsuccessful regional Precincts and Partnerships application.	Towards \$106 million; the Shire has committed \$25 million.
Pilbara airspace safety	A fresh CASA review on current peak-period data, a decision pathway to controlled airspace, and a digital control tower at Newman.	To be determined following CASA review.
East Pilbara roads	A multi-year State–Commonwealth investment program, reform of funding for remote Aboriginal community access roads, and disaster recovery arrangements that restore condition rather than function.	\$195.56m costed in 2024, of which \$94.9m is remote community access.
Marble Bar Road	Federal investment with the State to complete the sealing of a strategic regional corridor.	To be confirmed following completion of business case.
Newman Youth & Community Hub	Commonwealth-funded services located in the completed Hub.	Service funding; capital is committed.
Evacuation Centre	Awareness of, and support for, the emerging business case.	No ask at this stage, federal funding will be sought following business case development.

OUR COMMUNITY MANDATE

Every priority in this paper delivers an objective in the Shire of East Pilbara Strategic Community Plan, adopted by the Council in July 2026. The Plan was built from engagement across Newman, Marble Bar, Nullagine, and the Shire's remote communities. The advocacy objectives in the Plan were set by East Pilbara residents and ratepayers.

Complete the upgrade so this essential infrastructure is safe, reliable and up to modern standards - supplying treated water to parks and green spaces, and providing an essential service homes and businesses depend on.

**Newman Wastewater Treatment Plant
SCP Objective 1.05**

Complete the redevelopment, including the terminal upgrade and taxiway expansion, to meet increasing demand and secure the primary transport gateway for residents, tourists and the FIFO workforce.

**Newman Airport redevelopment
SCP Objective 1.10**

Advocate to the Australian and State Governments for improved housing and infrastructure in remote Aboriginal communities, and increased federal and state funding towards Shire local roads that provide access to Country.

**East Pilbara roads
SCP Objective 1.11**

Advocate for the sealing of the final section of Marble Bar Road, unlocking a fully sealed connection between the Shire's three towns and strengthening tourism, economic development and transport network resilience.

**Marble Bar Road
SCP Objective 1.09**

Advocate for, develop and strengthen children's, family and young people's services through a collaborative, community-driven approach bringing together government agencies, schools, service providers, community organisations, industry partners and local stakeholders.

**Youth & Community Hub
SCP Objective 2.05**

Advocate for increased investment in facilities, services and programs that expand opportunities for participation in sport, recreation and fitness across the Shire.

**Recreation & Evacuation Centre
SCP Objective 2.02**

Pursue the future development of a purpose-built recreation and emergency evacuation facility for Newman, with the former Newman Club site as a preferred location.

**Recreation & Evacuation Centre
SCP Objective 2.01**

Strengthen the East Pilbara's resilience to cyclones, flooding and natural disasters - providing effective emergency management and disaster recovery, building strong relationships with government partners before disaster strikes, and advocating for investment in resilient, fit-for-purpose evacuation facilities and lifeline roads.

**Recreation & Evacuation Centre
SCP Objective 1.22**



NEWMAN WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT

THE ISSUE

Newman's Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) was constructed in 1981 by BHP to treat raw wastewater from Newman and nearby mine sites, and to produce recycled water for irrigation of the town's parks, ovals, and green spaces. Ownership passed to the Water Corporation of Western Australia in 1990 and subsequently to the Shire in 1996.

In the more than 40 years since construction, no upgrades have been made to the plant's critical process units. The cumulative absence of renewal investment, compounded by changes in ownership and funding responsibility, has resulted in a poor asset condition rating - **creating significant environmental compliance risks and operational inefficiencies.**

The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) has formally recognised the risk. A recent licence amendment includes a condition requiring the Shire of cease discharged treated wastewater into wetlands northeast of Newman by 2027. **These wetlands sit within a P1 drinking water source protection zone - the most sensitive classification under DWER's framework. Continued discharge poses unacceptable risks to public health and water security.**

WHY NEWMAN IS DIFFERENT

Water Corporation, a Western Australian Government-owned corporation, is the principal provider of water and wastewater services across Western Australia and operates more than 110 wastewater treatment plants. For the overwhelming majority of Western Australian towns and cities, wastewater treatment is a State responsibility, funded and delivered by a State-owned utility with a state-wide revenue base.

Newman is an exception. **As the owner and operator of the plant, the Shire carries a capital obligation that would sit with the State in almost any other Western Australian town.** This is a common legacy of communities that began life as closed company towns: the infrastructure was built by industry, transferred to local government, and arrived without the revenue base that built it. It makes the Shire's fiscal position difficult to compare with local governments whose wastewater is delivered by the State - and it is the reason this project cannot be assessed as though it were an ordinary council capital works proposal.





THE PROJECT: UPGRADE PROGRAM

The Shire has determined a staged upgrade is required to meet compliance obligations, modernise the plant and support Newman's long-term growth.

Stage 1 - currently underway

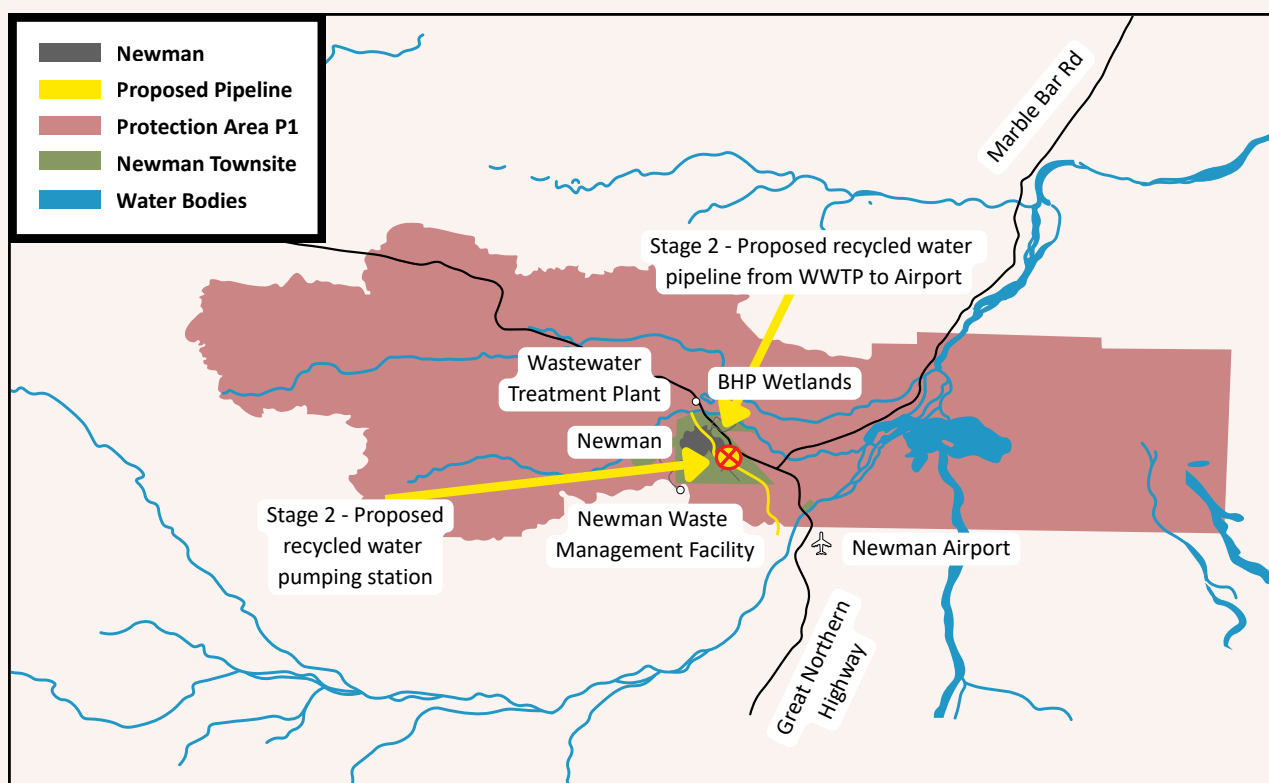
- Construction period: June 2026 to December 2027
- Budget: \$51 million
- Treatment capacity: increasing hydraulic and biological treatment from 1 megalitre a day to 3.6 megalitres a day, more than tripling the volume of wastewater Newman can treat and substantially reducing the risk of partially treated discharge during peak flows and storm events.
- Funding: Entirely from the Shire of East Pilbara, fully loan funding over 40 years - with no contribution from the State Government, Federal Government, industry partners, or the Water Corporation.

Stage 1 will also improve system reliability, as well as addressing the most critical compliance and safety risks. A groundbreaking event was held in May 2026, and the design and construct contract has been executed.

Stage 2 - required for full environmental compliance

- Estimated cost: \$25 million
- Scope: construction of a pipeline and recycled water pumping station to discharge excess treated water outside the P1 drinking water source protection zone
- Funded status: Unfunded

State 2 is the stage that achieves compliance. Stage 1 alone does not.



THE CASE FOR FEDERAL SUPPORT

- **The local commitment is already extraordinary.** The Shire has committed \$51 million of loan funds over 40 years to deliver Stage 1, with no external funding support. For a local government of approximately 10,500 residents covering one of the most remote regions in the country, this is an exceptional financial effort and it commits a significant share of the Shire's discretionary capital capacity until the 2060s, constraining every other project in this paper.
- **Stage 2 is not discretionary.** Without it, treated effluent continues to be discharged into a P1 drinking water source protection zone in breach of the Shire's environmental licence. The 2027 deadline cannot be met through Stage 1 alone, and Stage 2 cannot be constructed within the licence timeframe without funding certainty now.
- **The obligation was created by a regulator, not by the Shire.** A previously compliant asset now requires major capital works to meet a new compliance standard. Where a State or Commonwealth regulator imposes that obligation on a remote local government, there should be an investment pathway attached to it.

Wastewater charges in Newman are already set at the highest level the Shire considers reasonable for our community to carry, and the full \$51 million cost of Stage 1 is being met from our own borrowings. There is no remaining capacity to fund Stage 2, and it cannot be delivered by charging our community more.

Residents and workers in Newman contribute to one of Australia's most productive economic regions and should be entitled to the same standard of investment in essential services and infrastructure - including safe, compliant wastewater management - as Australians in metropolitan centres.

WHAT THE SHIRE HAS DONE

The Shire will be meeting with the Western Australian Minister for Water requesting that the Newman Wastewater Treatment Plant upgrade be classified as a State Priority Project, a potential gateway for Commonwealth co-funding under the National Water Grid Fund.

The Shire has also requested a State capital contribution towards Stage 2, acknowledging the Shire's unique position in self-managing regional wastewater infrastructure in an area of national economic significance.

OUR REQUESTS

The Shire of East Pilbara asks federal Members and Senators to:

- Support \$25 million in Commonwealth funding towards Stage 2 of the Newman Wastewater Treatment Plant upgrade, whether under the National Water Grid Fund or another appropriate Commonwealth source.
- Support the principle that where a State or Commonwealth regulator requires a remote local government to undertake major capital works to meet a new environmental compliance standard, there should be a standing pathway to State and Commonwealth co-investment.





NEWMAN AIRPORT REDEVELOPMENT

THE ISSUE

Newman Airport, owned and operated by the Shire of East Pilbara, is the principal transport hub for the East Pilbara and the primary point of access for the workforce that sustains the region's resources operations. It handles more than 500,000 passengers a year and approximately 43,000 passenger movements a month. **There is no alternative gateway.**

The airport is now operating close to its practical capacity across aircraft movements, passenger flows and infrastructure sustainability. **The terminal and airside facilities were not designed for current passenger volumes, aircraft types or modern aviation standards.**

Terminal Building

The existing terminal was designed to process approximately 150 passengers in a busy hour. Current peak demand regularly exceeds 800 passengers. Without action, ageing infrastructure and capacity constraints will increasingly affect operational efficiency, reliability and safety.

Taxiways and Aprons

The airside infrastructure is equally strained. The existing taxiway and apron configuration limits the airport's ability to accommodate multiple aircraft movements simultaneously, restricts access for larger aircraft, and increase exposure to operational disruption from extreme weather events. Detailed design for a staged taxiway and apron upgrade was completed in November 2025.



THE PROJECT

The Shire of East Pilbara has developed a comprehensive, staged redevelopment plan comprising two interconnected projects:

Terminal Building Upgrade

A purpose-built terminal to service up to six aircraft and 750 arriving and departing passengers simultaneously, meeting modern aviation security and compliance requirements, with construction phased to allow uninterrupted airport operations. Designed design has been completed and ready to progress, subject to funding.

Taxiway and Apron Expansion

A multi-staged, multi-year program delivered under a staging approach that maintains business continuity. Stage 1A and Stage 1B, totalling \$35 million, are funded and construction is expected to start in August 2026. Subsequent stages will be programmed based on funding availability.

The project has been developed with a clear objectives:

- Improved peak-period passenger flow and capacity
- Accommodating simultaneous aircraft movements
- Meeting aviation security and regulatory requirements
- Improving resilience to extreme weather
- Ensuring infrastructure suitable for long-term remote-area operation.

WHAT THE SHIRE HAS ALREADY COMMITTED

Every dollar committed to the Newman Airport redevelopment to date has come from the Shire's own-source revenue and reserves: \$25 million from airport reserves towards the terminal, and \$35 million towards Stages 1A and 1B of the taxiway and apron expansion. That is \$60 million from a local government of approximately 10,500 residents, drawing only on general funds, rates, airport reserves and debt.

Construction cost is the binding constraint. A quantity surveyor's assessment estimates that a comparable terminal in the Perth metropolitan area would cost less than half as much to build.



REGIONAL PRECINCTS & PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM

The Shire lodged an application under the Australian Government's regional Precincts and Partnerships Program in early 2025, seeking federal funding support for the terminal. The application remained before the Australian Government for more than a year and was confirmed unsuccessful on 25 August 2026.

The Shire makes no complaint about the merit assessment. It does, however, ask members to note that the program design could not have delivered this project in any event. Stream Two was capped at \$50 million and required a 50% co-contribution. A fully successful application at the program ceiling would still have left the terminal substantially unfunded.

This is the practical effect of caps and co-contribution requirements in a location where construction costs are more than double the metropolitan equivalent: the largest Commonwealth program available to us was never capable of closing the gap. That is a design problem, not an application problem, and it is why the Shire's request below is for a structural change as well as a project commitment.

STATE AND INDUSTRY COMMITMENTS

Western Australian Government ministers have stated that there is no funding available for Newman Airport, on the view that industry should pay. When major industry partners are approached for a contribution, the response is that industry already contributes substantial royalties and taxes, and that public assets should be funded with public money.

Each position is coherent on its own terms. The result is that no party outside the Shire has contributed, and the cost of a nationally significant piece of transport infrastructure falls to a single small local government. The Shire raises this because it is a recurring pattern rather than an isolated dispute - the same stalemate has stalled the wastewater upgrade described in the previous section.

The current distribution of cost is difficult to reconcile. Newman Airport is the principal access point for the workforce operating in a local government area holding 35% of Western Australia's mineral wealth and generating a Gross Regional Product of just over \$30 billion. An airport that is functionally part of the logistics chain for a nationally significant export industry is being funded by the rates, reserves and user charges of one council.



OUR REQUESTS

The Shire of East Pilbara is seeking federal Members of Parliament to:

- Champion a commitment of direct federal funding for the Newman Airport Redevelopment, in recognition of the airport's role in a region of national economic significance, and the Shire's limited capacity to fund infrastructure of this scale independently.
- Work with the Shire to identify the right combination of Commonwealth funding streams for a project of this scale and location. The Shire is not asking for a single program to carry the full cost of Commonwealth investment – a blended package of Commonwealth funding, alongside the Shire's committed \$25 million, is a realistic structure.

If the Pilbara is the engine room of the Australian economy, the infrastructure that keeps it running warrants a federal response proportionate to that description. The East Pilbara returns billions of dollars a year to the national economy through export revenue, company tax and royalties.

The absence of a Commonwealth funding stream capable of delivering a \$106 million terminal in a location like Newman is a gap in program design, not a reflection of the project's merit. We would welcome the opportunity to work alongside federal Members and Senators to review how Commonwealth infrastructure programs apply in remote Australia. Our interest extends beyond the redevelopment project, and we offer our experience constructively to assist with the review and design of programs that will determine what remote Australia can build over the next decade.





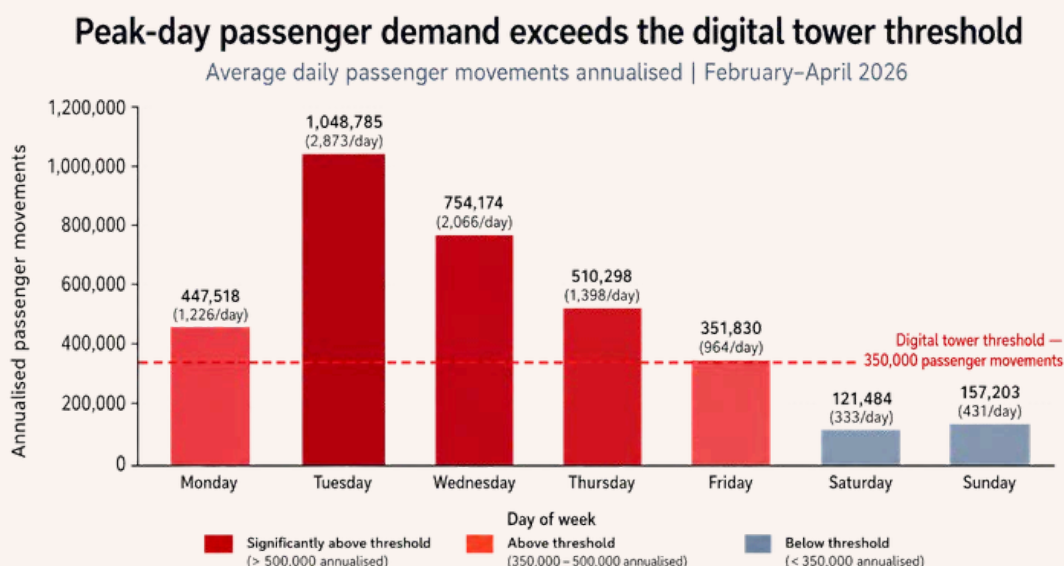
PILBARA AIRSPACE SAFETY

THE ISSUE

Newman Airport operates in increasingly busy Class G uncontrolled airspace, despite carrying traffic volumes and aircraft types more commonly associated with controlled airports. Passenger jets, charter aircraft, mining helicopters, aeromedical flights and light aircraft all operate through the same airspace. There is no local control tower and no air traffic controller sequencing aircraft or providing separation between them.

In Class G airspace, pilots rely on radio calls, position reports and see-and-avoid procedures to maintain separation. That model may be appropriate where traffic is light, predictable and relatively simple. Newman's operating environment is no longer light, simple or predictable.

The graph below shows why annual totals alone do not tell the full story. Newman Airport handles around 500,000 passenger movements each year, but its seven-day average already annualises to approximately 484,000 passenger movements - above the AAPS Class D passenger threshold of 350,000. On the busiest weekday, demand annualises to more than 1 million passenger movements.



Across February to April 2026, Tuesdays recorded the highest average passenger movements at Newman Airport, averaging approximately 2,873 passenger movements per day. Annualised across a full year, that operating profile equates to approximately **1.05 million passenger movements** — almost **three times the 350,000 passenger movement threshold** for a digital control tower.

Source: Newman Airport passenger usage data, February–April 2026.
Annualised equivalent = average daily movements for that weekday × 365.



Note: Annual averages hide the real pressure on peak operating days. The data above shows the intensity of demand when it matters most.

The real safety pressure is concentrated during FIFO peaks. Aircraft travelling at very different speeds - including passenger jets, helicopters and light aircraft - converge within narrow operating windows, often using the same shared radio frequency and the same uncontrolled airspace.

This is not simply a local airport issue. Newman sits at the centre of one of Australia's most economically significant regions. A constrained and congested aviation environment over the heart of the Pilbara is a national safety and productivity risk.

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

CASA reviewed Pilbara airspace in 2023 and left the current uncontrolled classification in place. However, the operating environment has continued to change, and Newman now has clearer evidence of peak-period pressure, FIFO concentration, operator concerns and near-miss risk.

CASA has also since undertaken a targeted review of Flight Information Services in the Pilbara, focused on the adequacy and effectiveness of those services for aircraft operating outside controlled airspace. That review confirmed that industry feedback highlighted cognitive workload as a safety concern, and that limitations in current services can increase pilot workload and distract from critical operational functions.

That matters because Newman's risk is not just about annual passenger totals. It is about when those movements occur, the aircraft mix involved, the limitations of see-and-avoid operations, and the level of pressure placed on pilots during peak FIFO windows.

WHAT THE SHIRE HAS DONE

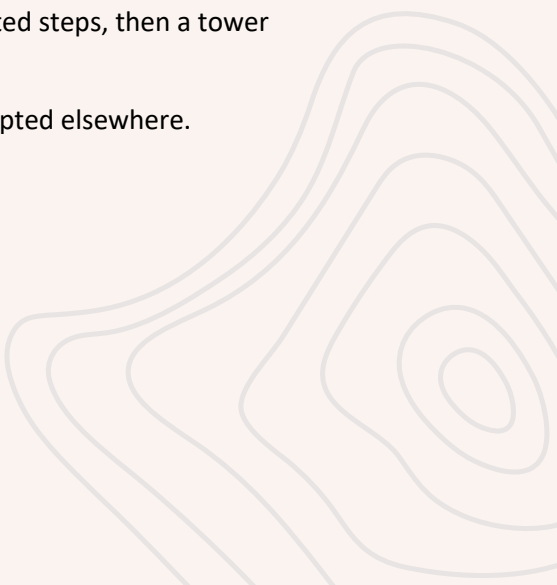
The Shire now holds current local passenger, aircraft movement and peak-period data that shows this picture more clearly than previous reviews were able to capture. That data is available to CASA and to members, and it is the basis on which the Shire asks for a fresh assessment. The Shire has also raised the matter with major aviation operators, and concerns held by Qantas and Virgin Australia reinforce the case for action.

PRECEDENT ALREADY SET

Comparable resource-region and regional airports have had their airspace settings strengthened, and those settings have moved in response to the data, in both directions:

- **Karratha and Broome:** both had control towers re-established by Airservices in 2010–11 in direct response to resources-driven traffic growth. Both now operate as controlled airspace through peak periods, reverting to self-separation outside those hours.
- **Port Hedland:** after traffic rebuilt, an interim on-field information service was established in 2013 - the proportionate middle step between self-separation and a full tower.
- **Ballina-Byron:** a 2020 near-miss between two aircraft triggered a staged response - surveillance services first, then a CASA review built on 41 safety occurrences in 13 months, leading to a control tower commencing in mid-2026. Review, graduated steps, then a tower once the case was made.

Each of these is, in effect, Newman's argument for air safety already accepted elsewhere.



WHAT THE SHIRE IS ADVOCATING FOR

The Shire is calling for CASA to revisit Newman's airspace settings using current passenger, aircraft movement and peak-period data, and for a clear pathway toward controlled airspace with defined implementation timeframes.

The Shire's preferred outcome is a digital control tower. A digital tower, also known as a remote tower, delivers air traffic control services without a conventional tower being built and staffed on site: controllers use high-definition cameras, surveillance feeds and integrated displays to manage aircraft remotely. For a location like Newman, this is the most practical and cost-effective way to introduce genuine air traffic control and provide proper separation between aircraft.

The Shire acknowledges that lighter, interim measures could be considered. The current and forecast risks justify advocating for the stronger solution now. The objective is not to make Newman operate like a capital-city airport; it is to give Newman an airspace model proportionate to its genuine risks, traffic mix and growth - so that safety stays ahead of demand, rather than catching up after a serious incident.

OUR REQUESTS

The Shire of East Pilbara is calling for a commitment now to improve airspace safety at Newman Airport. That commitment should include:

- A CASA review using current passenger, aircraft movement and peak-period data
- A risk-based decision that accounts for peak days, on which Newman operates at more than one million passenger movements annualised
- A clear decision pathway to controlled airspace
- Defined implementation timeframes
- A digital control tower, to deliver proper separation without a conventional on-site tower

Newman and the East Pilbara should not have to wait for a serious incident before action is taken.





EAST PILBARA ROADS

\$200+ MILLION INVESTMENT BACKLOG

The Shire maintains 3,310 kilometres of local road, of which 92% is unsealed gravel and formed road. In 2024, before Cyclone Zelia, the Shire costed the capital works required to bring 41 roads across the network to a reasonable and maintainable gravel standard, excluding drainage structures and concrete floodways.

2024 LOCAL ROAD NETWORK ASSESSMENT

Roads in the assessed maintenance grading program	41
Total length	2,539.7 km
Capital required to reach a reasonable road standard	\$195,560,000
Average capital cost per kilometre	\$77,001
Annual maintenance grading cost estimate	\$4,487,000
Grading working days required per year	726

The Shire's \$12 million annual resheeting budget renews around 120 kilometres a year - roughly 4% of the 2,947 kilometres requiring treatment. The network deteriorates faster than it can be maintained. That costing predates Cyclone Zelia; the Shire's current working estimate of the restoration task is in excess of \$200 million.

ROADS TO REMOTE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

Of the 2,539.7 kilometres assessed in 2024, 1,201 kilometres (47.3%) exist primarily to provide access to remote Aboriginal communities. The six largest capital requirements in the Shire's entire road network are all remote Aboriginal community access roads.

These communities are self-determining and operate through a direct relationship between Traditional Owners and the Western Australian Government. The Shire holds no assets in them and delivers no infrastructure services within them. It does, however, carry the statutory responsibility for the roads that reach them.

There is no rates income from these communities and minimal state and federal investment in the roads. Ratepayers in Newman and the surrounding Hamersley Range area therefore subsidise road maintenance for communities more than 700 kilometres away - on roads that also carry mining and tourism traffic, including mid-point access to the Canning Stock Route, for which the Shire receives no offsetting income.

At the current level of federal funding, it would take more than 120 years to resheet these roads.

CYCLONE ZELIA

Cyclone Zelia formed off the Pilbara coast on 11 February 2025, intensified to Category 5, and crossed the coast near the De Grey River as a Category 4 system on 14 February. The following day near Marble Bar the river peaked at 10.23 metres, approximately two metres above the previous flood record set in 1998. Great Northern Highway was cut for an extended period, isolating communities across the Pilbara and the Kimberley. Residents were evacuated from Warralong and Gooda Binya. Across the East Pilbara the cyclone stripped pavement material from more than 20 roads and caused extensive washouts.

Under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements the State leads recovery and the Commonwealth co-funds. In Western Australia the Department of Fire and Emergency Services administers the arrangements and Main Roads WA assesses the works. The Shire evidenced \$49.76 million of damage across a 20-road recovery program. Initial assessments totalled \$18.29 million - 37% of the Shire's costed estimates.

Tranche	Shire estimate	Initial DRFAWA assessment	Funding gap	Funded
1	\$8,720,353	\$4,969,919	\$3,750,434	57%
2	\$17,497,151	\$7,257,321	\$10,239,830	41%
3	\$16,301,935	\$3,279,905	\$13,022,030	20%
4	\$7,245,304	\$2,781,086	\$4,464,218	38%
Total	\$49,764,743	\$18,288,231	\$31,476,512	37%

The gap is more extreme at individual road level. On Kunawarritji Road, the Shire's costed estimate was \$5,089,567 against an initial assessment of \$357,142 (7%). On the Talawana Track, Balfour Downs Road and Mount Divide Road together, the Shire's estimate was \$10,867,960 against \$1,495,321 (13.7%).

The disagreement was never about whether the damage had occurred; that was confirmed on the parliamentary record. It was about assessment methodology and evidence standards. Three matters drove it: evidence requirements designed for a different kind of network, requiring location-specific photographic proof of pre-disaster condition across thousands of kilometres of remote unsealed road; desktop assessment, in which for several damaged roads the officer conducting the review in Port Hedland was physically closer to the damage than the Shire's own team in Newman; and the treatment of remote mobilisation, which on some Shire costings represents 60–70% of construction cost. On one item of work, the State estimate allowed three days where the Shire assessed that more than 20 would be required.



TURNOFF TO PARNGURR - SEPT 2026



DAMAGED VEHICLES IN JIGALONG - SEPT 2026

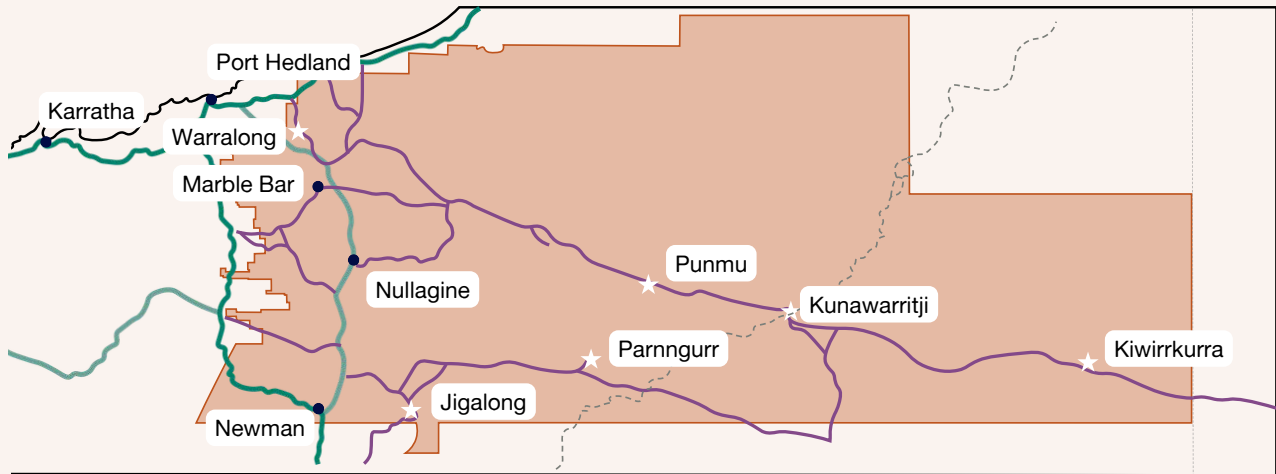


A RECENTLY CRASHED VEHICLE ALONG
THE ROAD TO JIGALONG - SEPT 2026



ROAD TO JIGALONG - SEPT 2026

In August 2025 the Shire asked the Western Australian Minister for Emergency Services to convene a taskforce bringing together the Shire, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, Main Roads WA, WALGA and the National Emergency Management Agency to break the deadlock. The request was declined. The impasse ran for eight months.



LEGEND

- State border
- Local Government Area boundaries
- Roads – National routes
- Roads – Key State routes
- Key access roads – Shire of East Pilbara
- Canning Stock Route

COMMUNITY IMPACT

While the technical process continued, the consequences accumulated in the communities:

Punmu. In December 2025 a road train carrying approximately five months of food and supplies was damaged on the cyclone-affected access road; the community recovered the load itself over a 36-hour operation in temperatures around 40 degrees. In April 2026 - fourteen months after the cyclone - the scheduled food delivery was cancelled because no driver was willing to attempt the route. The transport company had been the only operator prepared to make the delivery and, after the damage to its vehicle, could not carry the commercial risk. Approximately 130 people were left with about six weeks of food and were warned that residents may have to leave. The community's coordinator has warned that without proper repair, families may be forced to relocate, which would end a Martu way of life. The Shire has funded emergency grading from its own resources, but that is a temporary measure.

Jigalong. The Youth and Cultural Centre supports 40 to 50 children a day and drives fortnightly for groceries. Two staff were involved in a serious rollover on a damaged section of road: a tyre blew at 80 km/h and the vehicle rolled six times. Both occupants survived. There have been similar crashes involving staff and service providers on other cyclone-damaged sections.

Health and cultural access. Road closures pushed some patients onto the weekly mail plane, so that a short consultation could take up to two weeks. Delivery of healthcare, education and social services became harder and more expensive. People struggled to travel to visit family and to meet cultural and funeral obligations.

A second cyclone. On 26 January 2026 Cyclone Luana crossed the region. Although short-lived, its inland rain path crossed Kunawarritji Road, adding fresh damage to a route still awaiting permanent repair almost twelve months after Zelia. The Shire funded emergency works again from its own revenue.

Across the wider network. The strain is not confined to the remote communities. Concentrating crews, graders and contractors on cyclone-damaged priority roads inevitably stretches finite resources thinner across a 3,310 kilometre network. Pastoral stations, small businesses and tourism operators who rely on these roads for stock movement, freight, staff and trade contend with rougher surfaces, vehicle damage and slower, costlier, less reliable journeys. The answer is not to trade one part of the Shire against another; it is to resource a network of this size properly, so that recovering one road does not come at the expense of maintaining the next.

As the only tier of government physically present in these communities, the Shire became the visible point of accountability for a funding impasse it did not control. In October 2025 residents publicly demanded action on road conditions and there were calls for the Chief Executive Officer to resign. That frustration was legitimate. Communities did not want to hear about disagreements between layers of government; they wanted their roads repaired. By that point the impasse had ceased to be only a financial risk to the Shire. It had become a risk to public trust in government generally.



ONE OF MANY 4WD VEHICLES IN THE
JIGALONG CAR GRAVEYARD - SEPT 2026

WHERE IT STANDS

Between February and April 2026 the Shire accepted funding offers for the first three tranches, and the final tranche has since been resolved, with scope approved for all roads by July 2026. Modest improvements to the offers were secured, but the funded treatments remain well short of a like-for-like rebuild. In accepting the first offer the Shire recorded in writing that it does not consider the approved treatment restores all damaged roads to a safe pre-disaster condition, and that repairs undertaken to that treatment may be vulnerable to significant damage in future flooding or cyclonic events.

The Shire accepted because continued delay carried a greater cost to its communities than an inadequate treatment. That is the trade-off the current arrangements force on remote councils: accept a treatment the council expects to fail in the next severe weather event, or keep arguing while communities wait.

On current programming the construction window runs from August 2026 to June 2027, and communities are likely to see improved road access between February and June 2027 - more than two years after Cyclone Zelia. **Any cyclone in the 2026–27 season could slow or reset that progress.**

The grading-based treatments the arrangements fund do not replace the gravel washed away. Without replacing the wearing and base course, road levels keep dropping with each event until the roads act like stormwater drains - which is precisely the condition the Auditor-General found. Disaster recovery for Zelia is now settled, but it restores only the narrow function the arrangements fund, at a fraction of the real cost, and not the condition or resilience these roads need.

Meanwhile the Shire has lifted its own roads budget to a record \$14.5 million - while the State's decision in July 2026 to decline the Shire's proposed differential rate on transient workforce accommodation required a revised budget reducing local road maintenance funding by approximately \$4 million.



WHAT ACTUALLY WORKS

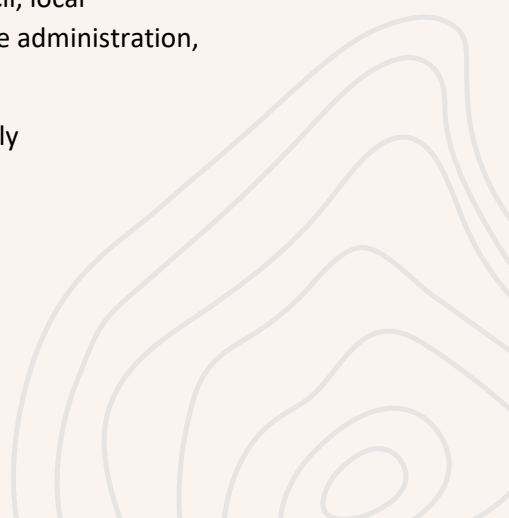
The Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program is the clearest recent example of Commonwealth funding that worked for a council in the Shire's position. Every local government received a formula-based allocation, so there was no competitive round to win or lose. Councils chose the projects. There was no co-contribution requirement, so access was not rationed by the size of the rate base. Administration was proportionate.

The Shire received \$6.56 million under the program and applied \$690,167 of it to concrete floodway construction - precisely the category of resilience work that reactive disaster recovery arrangements will not fund, and precisely the work that permanently removes a recurring repair liability from future Commonwealth disaster spending. The program ended on 30 June 2026 with no successor announced.

The Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding found that approximately 87% of Commonwealth disaster spending has been directed through recovery programs after the event rather than to reducing risk beforehand, and forecast the total economic cost of natural disasters rising from \$11.8 billion in 2023–24 to \$40.3 billion by 2049–50. Every floodway built to a resilient standard in the East Pilbara removes a recurring reactive repair obligation from that forecast.

OUR REQUESTS

The Shire of East Pilbara is seeking Federal MPs and Senators to:

- Back a sustained, multi-year State–Commonwealth investment program for the East Pilbara road network, in the order of \$200 million, to bring the network to a reasonable standard with the resilience to withstand future cyclones. Disaster recovery funding, now resolved for Zelia, restores a fraction of what is needed.
 - Reform Commonwealth funding for access roads serving remote Aboriginal communities: needs-based, multi-year, low-administration funding paid to the entity carrying the statutory road responsibility, set to deliver an appropriate renewal cycle. Federal funding currently sits under \$1 million a year against a 3,310 kilometre network, and 1,201 kilometres of that network exists primarily to provide community access.
 - Support a permanent, allocative successor to the Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program, retaining its design features: formula allocations to every council, local determination of projects, no co-contribution requirement, proportionate administration, and delivery timeframes that reflect remote construction seasons.
 - Ensure disaster recovery reform restores condition and resilience, not only pre-disaster function.
- 



MARBLE BAR ROAD

THE ISSUE

Marble Bar Road, State Route 138, is the road connecting the Shire's three towns - Newman, Nullagine and Marble Bar - and the inland alternative to Great Northern Highway. It is the only link for a number of remote communities in the East Pilbara for food, supplies and essential services.

It is a State-owned road, and the Shire says so plainly: the primary responsibility for completing it sits with the Western Australian Government, and the Shire's principal advocacy on this project is directed there. The Shire raises it federally for a narrower reason. Marble Bar Road is the corridor that the Commonwealth's investment in this region's local roads depends on, and it is the only redundancy that exists for a nationally significant freight route through the Pilbara Region.

Sealing has been promised since 1951. Around 40% of the route was sealed between 2002 and 2004. Main Roads WA is currently upgrading a further 92 kilometres to two-lane sealed standard, which leaves approximately 60 kilometres unsealed. The road crosses several rivers and floodplains, and closes for extended periods during the wet season. When it does, communities are isolated and food and provisions are sometimes flown in at significant cost.





WHY THIS IS A FEDERAL INTEREST

- It is the only redundancy for a nationally significant freight corridor. Great Northern Highway is the primary sealed north–south route through the Pilbara. During Cyclone Zelia it was cut for an extended period, isolating communities across the Pilbara and the Kimberley. An unsealed alternative provides no redundancy, because it fails in the same conditions and takes far longer to reopen. A sealed Marble Bar Road, with the crossings treated, is the difference between a regional freight task that resumes in days and one that stops for weeks. That is a supply chain resilience question for the corridor serving Australia's largest export industry, not a local convenience.
- It is the spine the local network feeds into. The Shire's local roads, including those serving remote communities and pastoral operations, connect to Marble Bar Road. Commonwealth investment in those local roads does not produce reliable access if the road they feed into is closed for weeks each wet season. The two investments only work together.
- It removes a recurring liability rather than repairing one. Every wet season, the unsealed sections generate flood damage repair costs, and every extended closure generates emergency freight and air supply costs. The Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding found that approximately 87% of Commonwealth disaster spending goes to recovery after an event rather than to reducing risk beforehand. Sealing this road is the reverse of that pattern: a one-off investment that permanently removes a repeating reactive obligation.
- Access, safety and the visitor economy. Sealing would significantly improve road user safety and access for Aboriginal communities and for medical and other service agencies, while reducing annual maintenance and flood damage repair costs. Travel times between Newman, Nullagine and Marble Bar would improve, with benefits for freight efficiency and tourism. Visitors currently avoid the route because of the damage it does to vehicles and caravans, so two significant visitor destinations forgo the economic benefit of the traffic.

WHAT THE SHIRE IS DOING

The Shire has asked the Western Australian Government to commission a business case for sealing the remaining section, with the Shire working in partnership on it, and - subject to that business case - for Main Roads WA to complete the works. That would unlock the full benefit of the State and resource sector investment already made in the other sections of the route.

OUR REQUESTS

The Shire of East Pilbara asks federal Members and Senators to:

- Support the completion of a business case for sealing the remaining section of Marble Bar Road, and encourage the Western Australian Government to commission it.
- Support Commonwealth co-investment alongside the State to complete the sealing once that business case is settled, under a program appropriate to a strategic regional corridor.





NEWMAN YOUTH & COMMUNITY HUB

A PROJECT THE COMMONWEALTH HAS ALREADY SUPPORTED

The Shire records its appreciation for the Australian Government's \$15 million contribution to the Newman Youth and Community Hub - the largest single contribution to the project, and the reason it is being built.

The Hub is a \$33 million facility now under construction in Newman, with construction commencing in May 2026. It replaces the existing library and will provide a new community library, meeting rooms, a recording studio and a creche, alongside a connected outdoor precinct designed for play, exercise and sport, and a community garden. It is funded by the Australian Government (\$15 million), the Western Australian Government (\$7.5 million), Lotterywest (\$4.7 million) and the Shire of East Pilbara (\$6.3 million).

It is the one project in this paper where all three tiers of government and the Shire have invested together, and the Shire raises it partly to make that point: when the funding arrangements work, the East Pilbara delivers.

WHO IT SERVES

The Hub will serve the whole Newman community, with a particular focus on children, young people and families.

Children and young people will have a safe, welcoming place to learn, create, play, build confidence and form positive relationships.

Parents and families will benefit from opportunities for early learning, shared activities, community connection and access to support.

Residents of all ages will benefit from the community library and spaces for learning, creative activities and participation in community life. Local organisations and service providers will have opportunities to deliver programs and work together in one accessible location.



MORE THAN A BUILDING: A PLACE TO GROW

Modern libraries connect people with information, technology and one another. They support early literacy, study, lifelong learning and digital skills, helping people participate in education, employment and community life.

Within the Hub, the library, youth spaces, recording studio and community facilities create opportunities to connect generations, share knowledge and strengthen Newman's social fabric.

For young people who may have fewer opportunities outside school, access to positive activities, trusted support and opportunities to learn can make a lasting difference.

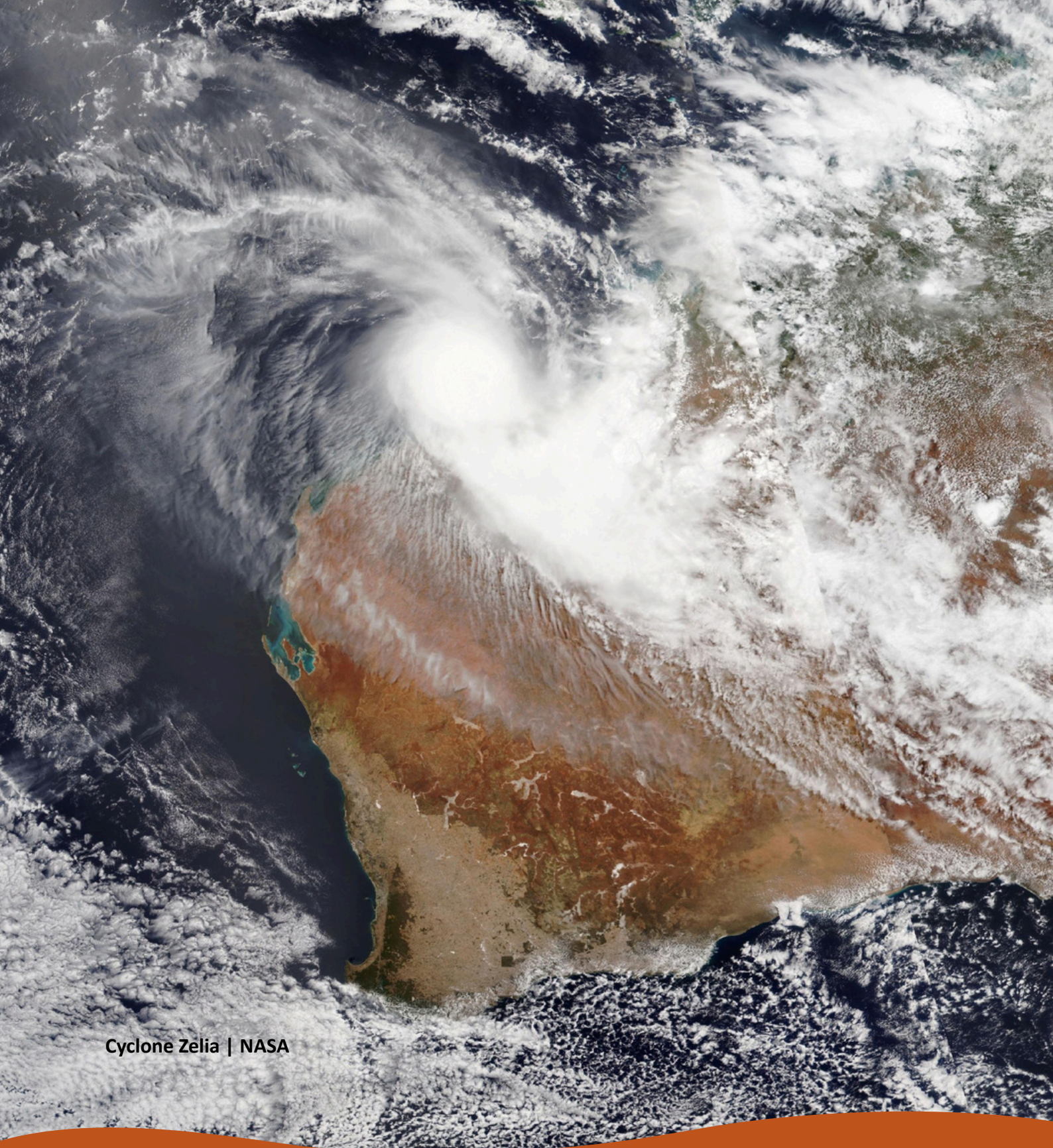
Bringing these facilities and services together creates a stronger foundation for children, young people and families to thrive.

The Australian Government's capital investment has helped make the Hub possible. The next step is to support the services and programs that will turn that investment into lasting community benefit.



OUR REQUESTS

1. An ongoing Commonwealth contribution of approx. \$100,000 per year towards additional youth and family support, mentoring, literacy, digital skills and training programs delivered through the Hub.
2. Support to identify suitable Commonwealth grants and service provider partnerships, working with the Shire, State Government and local organisations to develop locally designed programs and plan delivery from opening.



Cyclone Zelia | NASA

EVACUATION CENTRE

SHELTER IN CYCLONE COUNTRY

Newman Recreation Centre is more than the town's main sport and recreation facility. It is the designated emergency evacuation centre for the East Pilbara - where people are brought to shelter when a severe cyclone affects the region. In a part of Australia that has faced repeated Category 5-scale systems in recent years, a safe, reliable, fit-for-purpose evacuation centre is a frontline community safety asset, not a discretionary one.

It serves far more than Newman's own residents. When severe weather cuts off the remote communities scattered across the Shire - the same communities left isolated by the road failures described earlier in this paper - their residents are moved into Newman to shelter. The road network and the evacuation centre are two halves of the same regional resilience question.

That makes the centre's reliability critical. The current building dates from 1988, is shared with Newman Senior High School and is owned by the Department of Education. In December 2023 it was closed for around two weeks after structural concerns left it temporarily unsafe, with some areas remaining isolated from public use into 2024. A region's primary cyclone shelter being taken offline by its own structural condition, in cyclone country, is precisely the kind of vulnerability the Shire is determined to design out.

The Shire welcomes the Western Australian Government's \$3.5 million repair works in 2025 to the centre's east and west walls, which address the most pressing structural risks. Two concerns remain. The first is capacity: even repaired, an ageing shared-use building was never purpose-designed to shelter a regional population, including evacuees from remote communities, to the standard a modern emergency centre should meet. The second is long-term certainty: that a critical safety building was allowed to deteriorate to the point of emergency wall replacement is itself a reminder of why the Shire is working towards a purpose-built facility it can own, maintain and guarantee will be ready when the community needs it.

A FACILITY THE EAST PILBARA CAN RELY ON

This is an emerging priority, and one the Shire raises deliberately early. The Shire is completing a business plan and progressing early designs for a new, fit-for-purpose evacuation and recreation centre - one that would also relieve Newman's acute shortage of indoor court space as the town grows and summers lengthen.





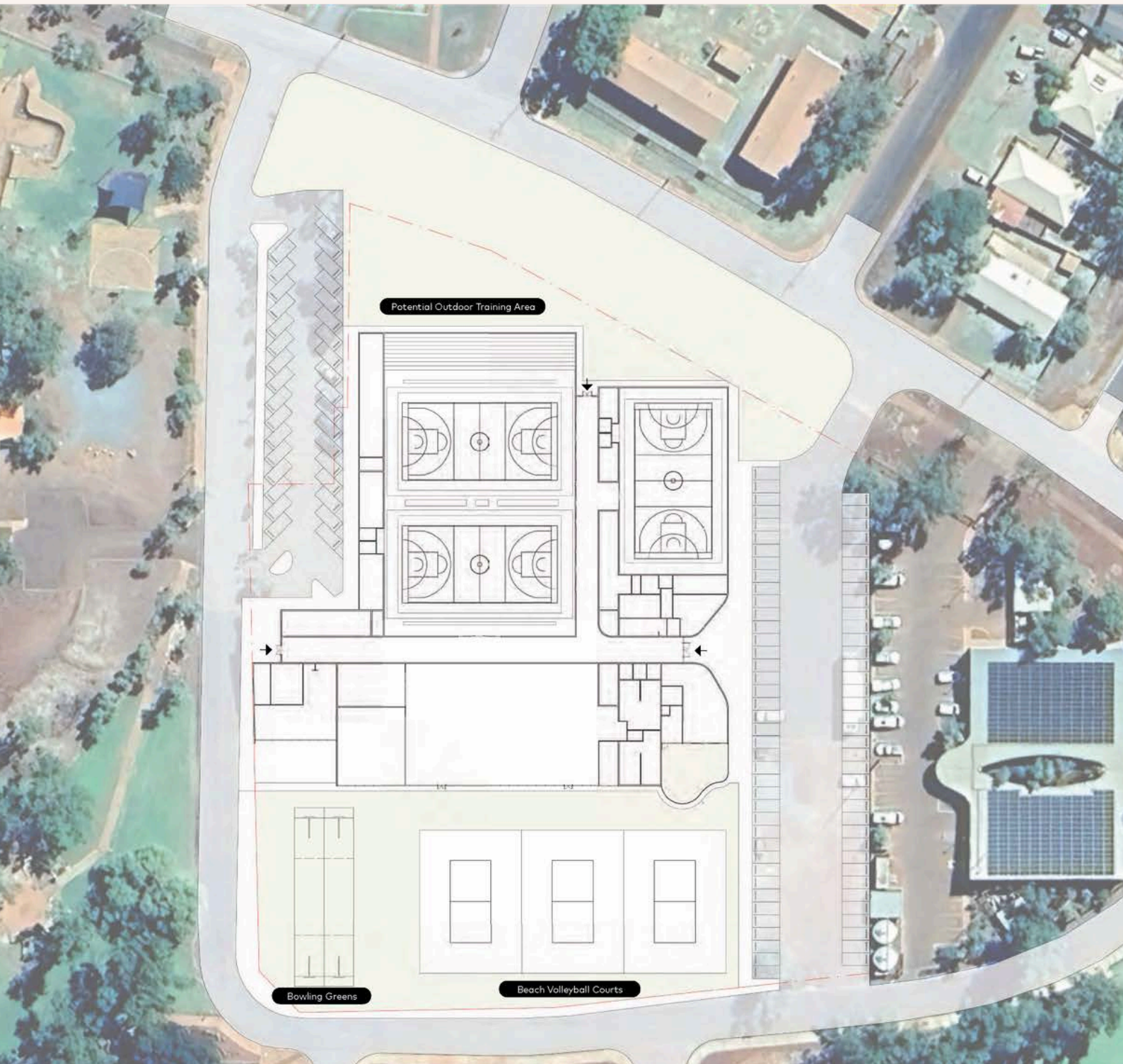
Cyclone Zelia | ABC News



Cyclone Zelia | ABC News

OUR REQUESTS

The Shire of East Pilbara is not seeking a funding commitment at this stage. We ask members to be aware of the need, and to support the Shire as it builds the case for an emergency evacuation centre the East Pilbara can rely on. We will return to members with a costed proposal once the business plan is complete.



KEEP IN TOUCH

Your advocacy on behalf of the Shire of East Pilbara could make a critical difference to the wellbeing of our communities.

To find out more or to set up a meeting, please contact:

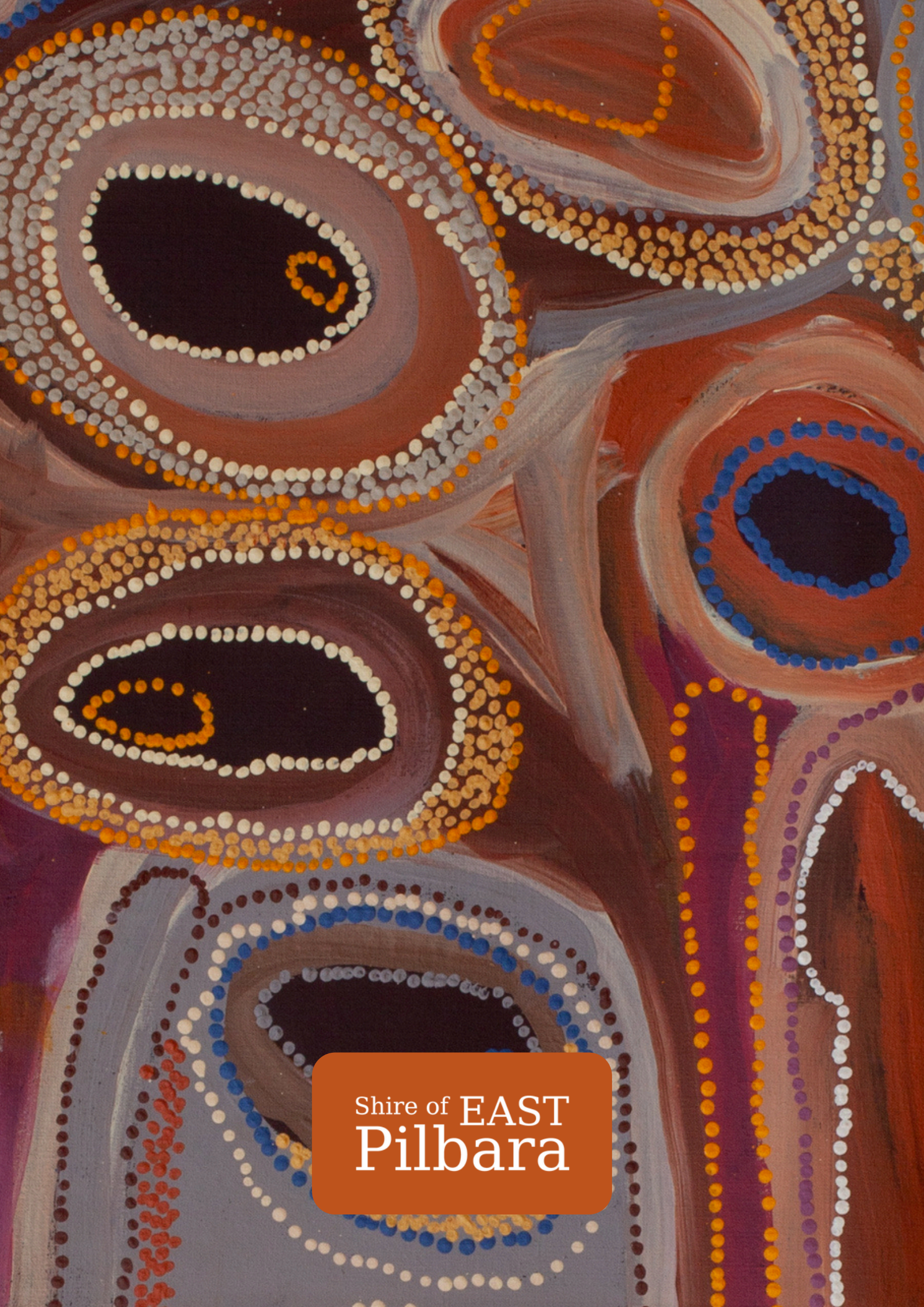
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Shire of EAST
Pilbara