

Chapter Three: Exmouth

3.1 Introduction

The Exmouth area first experienced major industrial development and population expansion following the construction of the United States of America's Naval Communications Station (called Harold E. Holt) in 1964. Since this time commercial fishing activities and, more recently, tourism have developed into robust and economically significant industries in the region. Much of the population within the Exmouth Statistical Local area (hereafter referred to as Exmouth) is located within the Exmouth township. Figure 3.1 shows the location of Exmouth and the boundaries of the Exmouth Statistical Local area.

The Exmouth township was identified as a 'gateway' town in the Western Australian Planning Commission's (2004) *Ningaloo Coast Regional Strategy Carnarvon to Exmouth*. The close proximity of Exmouth to the Ningaloo Reef, and its strategic position as a 'gateway' town for the Ningaloo Marine Park have resulted in many research projects being undertaken in the area. The Exmouth area is a priority research location for the CSIRO's Wealth from Oceans Flagship. Through this flagship considerable financial investment directed towards identifying the human uses of the area's marine and coastal environment. A team of researchers from Murdoch University are leading this study, which has been underway since 2006. A team from Curtin University of Technology are also undertaking a study on the socio-economic impact (and value) of tourism in the Exmouth region, and researchers from The University of Western Australia are conducting a study to measure the socio-economic values of human uses of the Ningaloo Reef in the Exmouth region. These studies are also funded through the Wealth from Oceans Flagship and commenced in 2006.

Given the existing focus of these well funded and established projects in the Exmouth area, this study did not review human use activities in Exmouth.

The following demographic information is provided by way of context so as to enable readers to construct a complete picture of the demographic changes occurring within the coastal areas of the Rangelands region.

Exmouth has a growing population, increasing from 3,908 persons in 1996 to 4,220 persons in 2006 (ABS, 2007). Overall, the population increased by 8 %, or had an annual growth rate of 0.8 % (ABS, 2007). The growth rate in Exmouth was lower than the Western Australian average of 15.1%, or 1.5% per year (ABS, 2007).

Population trends between 1996 and 2006 indicate that Exmouth has an ageing population. In 1996 the median age in Exmouth was 44 and by 2006 this increased to 50 (ABS, 2007). Figure 3.2 illustrates the change in Exmouth's age structure between 1996 and 2006. Importantly though, despite having an overall ageing trend, a considerable proportion of the Exmouth population was aged between 25 and 44 years (ABS, 2007). The temporary and semi-skilled work available in the area's tourism sector was a factor in attracting and retaining a younger population.

Figure 3.1 Exmouth Statistical Local Area

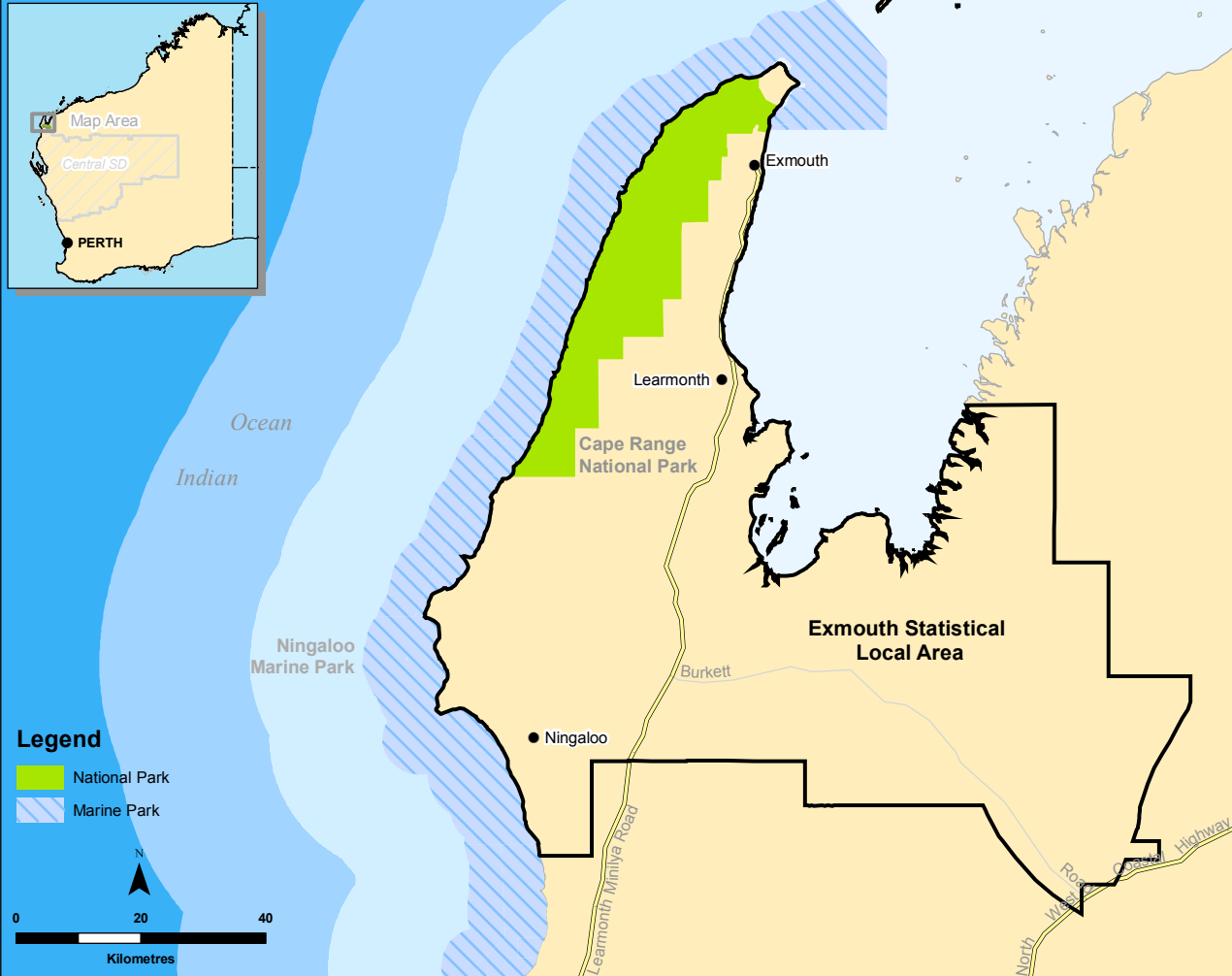
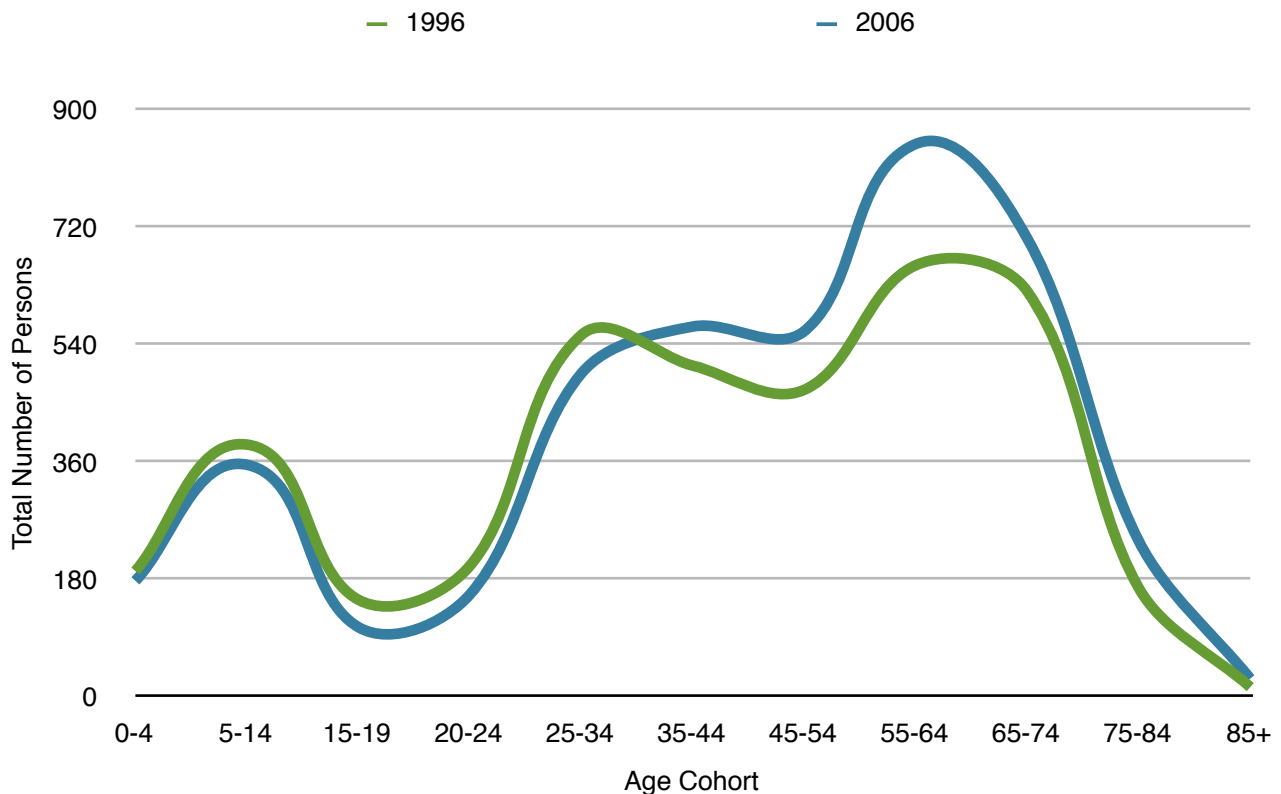


Figure 3.2 Ageing Trends in Exmouth Between 1996 and 2006



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007

Like Carnarvon, Exmouth is located within the Central Statistical Division, which is the smallest spatial unit for which migration data, identifying migrant's origin and destinations, was available. This data revealed that nearly 50% of those leaving the region relocated to Perth and more than 30% moved to other regions within Western Australia (ABS, 2007). Of those that moved into the region, over 50% came from other regional areas across Australia, with 40% of this group coming from Western Australia (ABS, 2007). As was the case for Carnarvon, the employment and lifestyle opportunities available in Exmouth were the most influential determinants of population migration trends.

Between 1996 and 2006, there was a slight shift in the employment structure of the area, with new employment opportunities in sectors including mining, manufacturing and construction attracting new residents to the area. Declining employment opportunities in the information, media and telecommunications industry and the public administration and safety sectors may have influenced rates of outmigration and, perhaps more significantly, influenced reduced rates of immigration particularly of younger skilled workers.

In 2006 the largest industries in terms of employment in Exmouth were (ABS, 2007):

- Construction
- Retail trade
- Manufacturing
- Food and administration services
- Public administration and safety

The construction and manufacturing industries experienced considerable growth between 1996 and 2006 as a result of the growth of the tourism sector and subsequent increase in demand for accommodation and improved infrastructure. The retail trade sector similarly experienced growth due to the increased demand for services from tourists and new residents.

The industries that made the most significant contribution to the economic base of Exmouth (in 2006) were (ABS, 2007):

- Agriculture, forestry and fisheries
- Mining
- Electricity, gas, water and waste services
- Construction
- Accommodation and food services
- Public administration and safety

The growth of the tourism industry in the area has underpinned the growth in the importance of the construction and accommodation and food services industries. Expansions within the mining industry have similarly underpinned the importance of the mining industry to the area's economic base.

The population of Exmouth is expected to increase as core industries including tourism, mining and construction continue to expand. The Western Australia Planning Commission (2005) forecasted that between 2004 and 2031 the population of Exmouth would increase by 5.6% (or by 0.2% per annum). This growth rate is lower than the growth rate experienced between 1996 and 2006, and suggests that the economic expansion of Exmouth's industries will slow.

As mentioned, the expansion of the tourism industry has been a major driver of the growth in the region over the last decade. Significantly, a large proportion of the tourism activities within the Exmouth Region are based on, or associated with, the resources of the marine and coastal environment. The locality's close proximity to the Ningaloo Reef is a key reason for the focus on marine and coastal tourism. Despite this importance of the marine and coastal environment to the tourism industry, it also needs to be recognised that the marine and coastal environment considerably influences population and labour attraction and retention in the region. The lifestyle opportunities afforded to residents due to the close proximity of the Ningaloo Reef, and other associated marine and coastal assets, is recognised as being a major factor in attracting new residents, labour and investment into the area.

The marine and coastal environment in the Exmouth region underpins the tourism industry, which is a significant contributor to employment and wellbeing in the area. The marine and coastal environment is (also) popularly used for recreational activities and is of cultural significance to traditional Indigenous owners.