

# Chapter Four: Derby – West Kimberley

## 4.1 Introduction

Derby – West Kimberley Statistical Local Area is located north of the Broome Statistical Local Area, as shown in Figure 4.1. The area has a rugged coastline, which is of significant cultural value to the Indigenous population. Derby is the largest urban settlement within the Derby – West Kimberley area, with smaller settlements including Fitzroy Crossing and Camballin. There are also 67 Indigenous settlements within the area, a number of which are located in the coastal area. Figure 4.2 illustrates the location of the coastal Indigenous settlements within Derby – West Kimberley.

Figure 4.1 Derby – West Kimberley

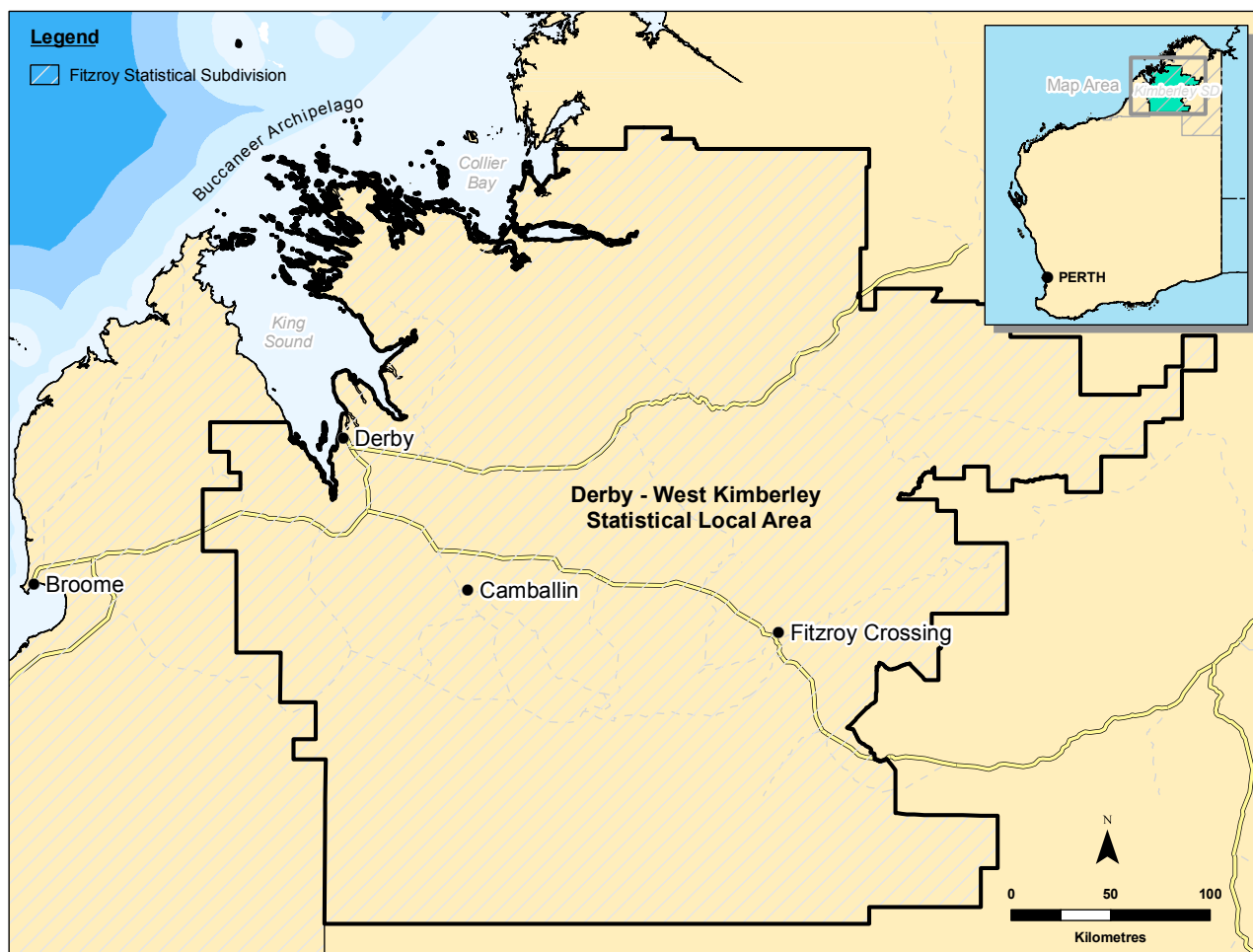
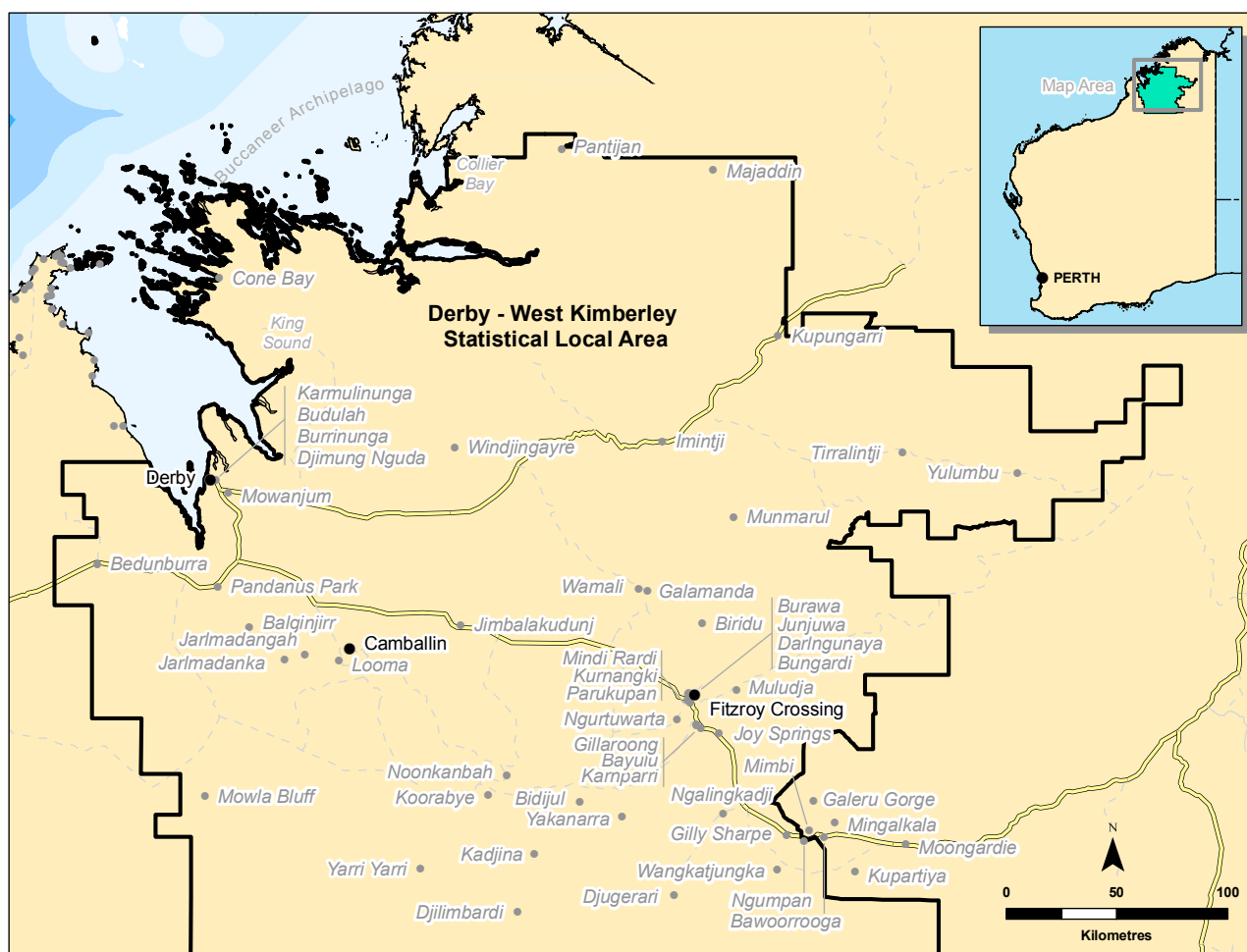


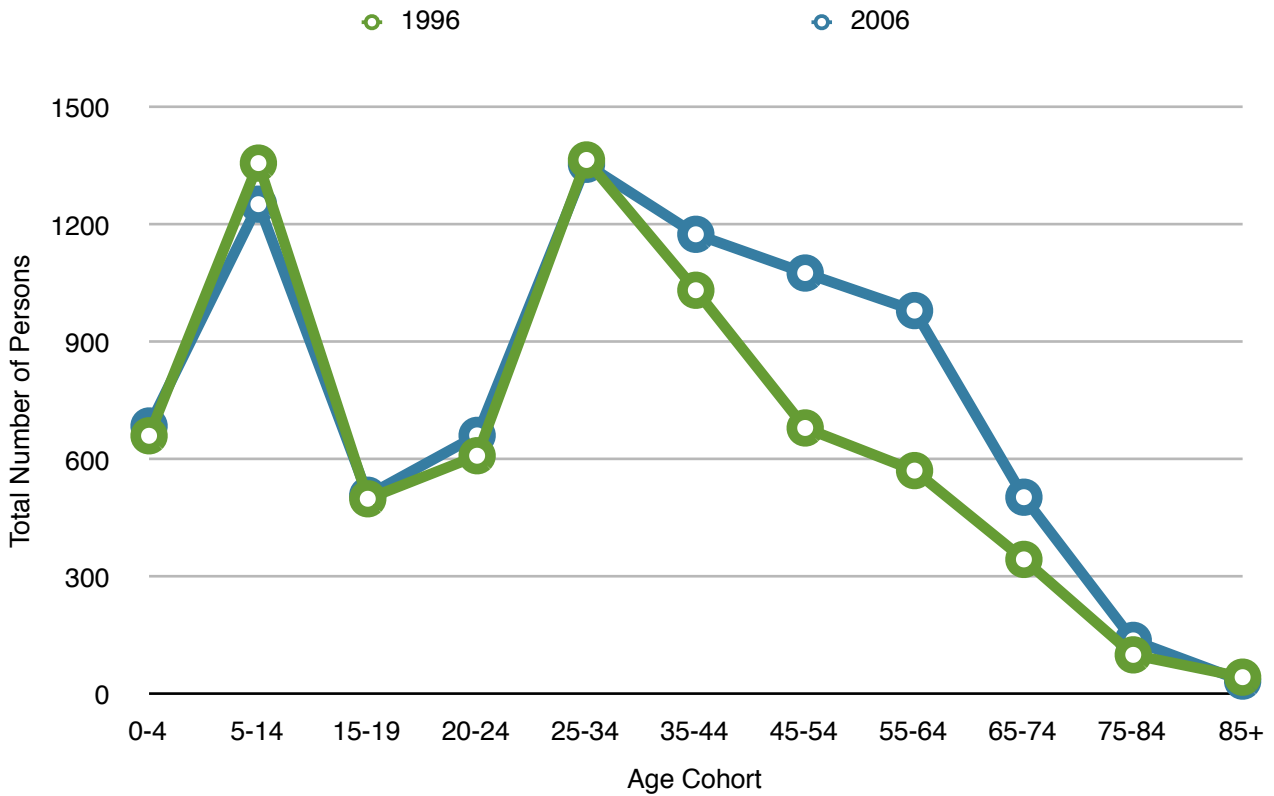
Figure 4.2 Indigenous Communities in Derby – West Kimberley



In 2006, Derby – West Kimberley had a population of 8352 persons (ABS, 2007). Between 2001 and 2006, the area’s population decreased by 787 persons (ABS, 2007). However, between 1996 and 2001, the population increased by 1890 persons, from 7,249 persons in 1996 to 9,139 persons in 2001 (ABS, 2007). The Western Australian Planning Commission (2005) forecasted that the 2006 population would be 9,700, which is considerably higher than the actual population in 2006 (of 8352 persons). It was also forecasted that the population would continue to grow at a reasonably steady rate from 2006 to 2021, with the 2021 total population predicted to be 15,100 persons (Western Australian Planning Commission, 2005). The Western Australian Planning Commission (2005) provided a few reasons to support this predicted population growth.

As the overall size of the Derby – West Kimberley increased during the decade from 1996, the average age of the population increased. Figure 4.3 shows that in 2006, there were more individuals aged between 35 and 74 years than in 1996. Figure 4.3 also shows a slight decrease in the number of persons aged 5-14 years from 1996 to 2006.

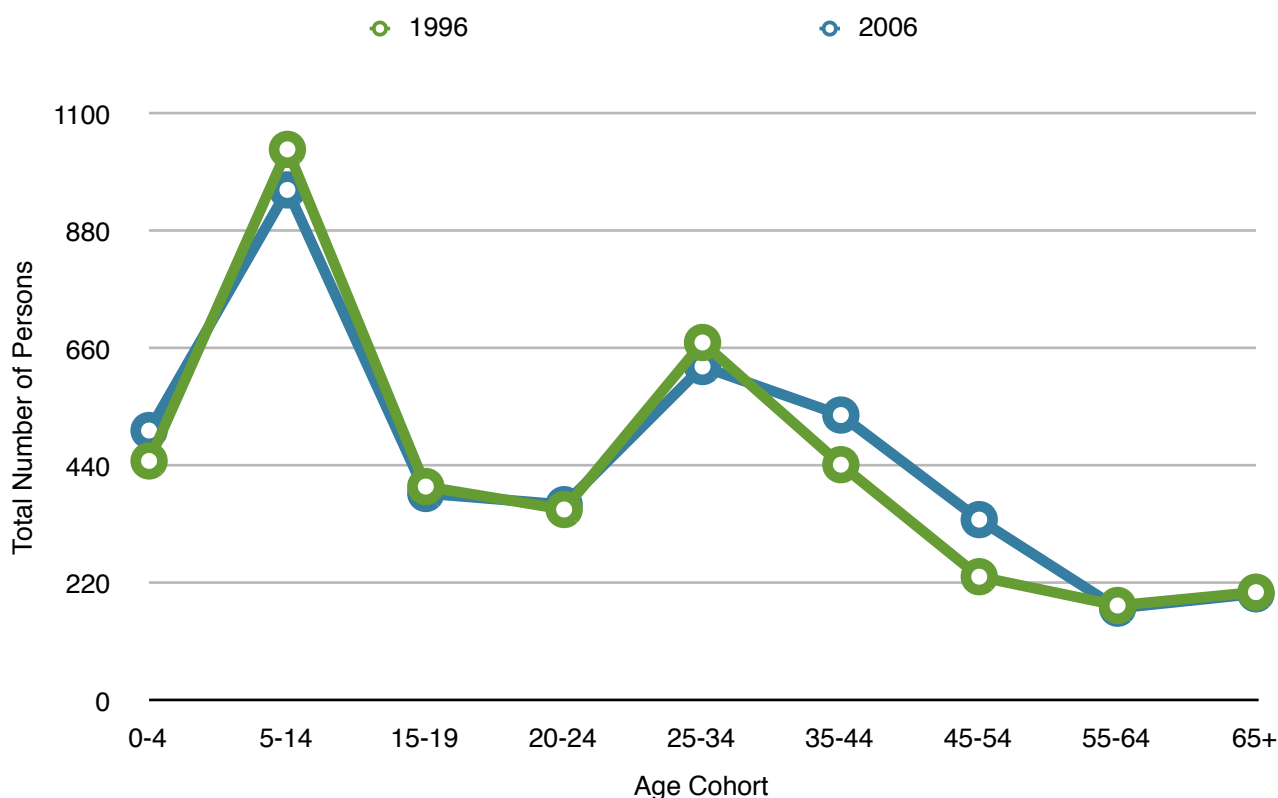
Figure 4.3 Ageing Trends in Derby – West Kimberley Between 1996 and 2006



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007

49% of Derby – West Kimberley’s population identified as Indigenous in 2006 (ABS, 2007). This is a slight decrease from 1996, when 55% of the population identified as Indigenous (ABS, 2007). Similar to the overall trends for the Derby – West Kimberley population, the Indigenous population was ageing (ABS, 2007). Figure 4.4 illustrates that between 1996 and 2006, there was an increase in the number of persons aged over 35.

**Figure 4.4 Ageing Trends of the Indigenous Population in Derby – West Kimberley Between 1996 and 2006**



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007

Population growth and change in Derby – West Kimberley has been driven by a rapid expansion in employment opportunities between 1996 and 2001. During this period, the largest growth in employment was in the following industries:

- Mining
- Agriculture, forestry and fishing
- Administrative and support services

Between 2001 and 2006, a slight contraction in the rate of jobs growth resulted in a small population decline. Between 1996 and 2001, population growth in the region was fuelled by expansion in the following industries:

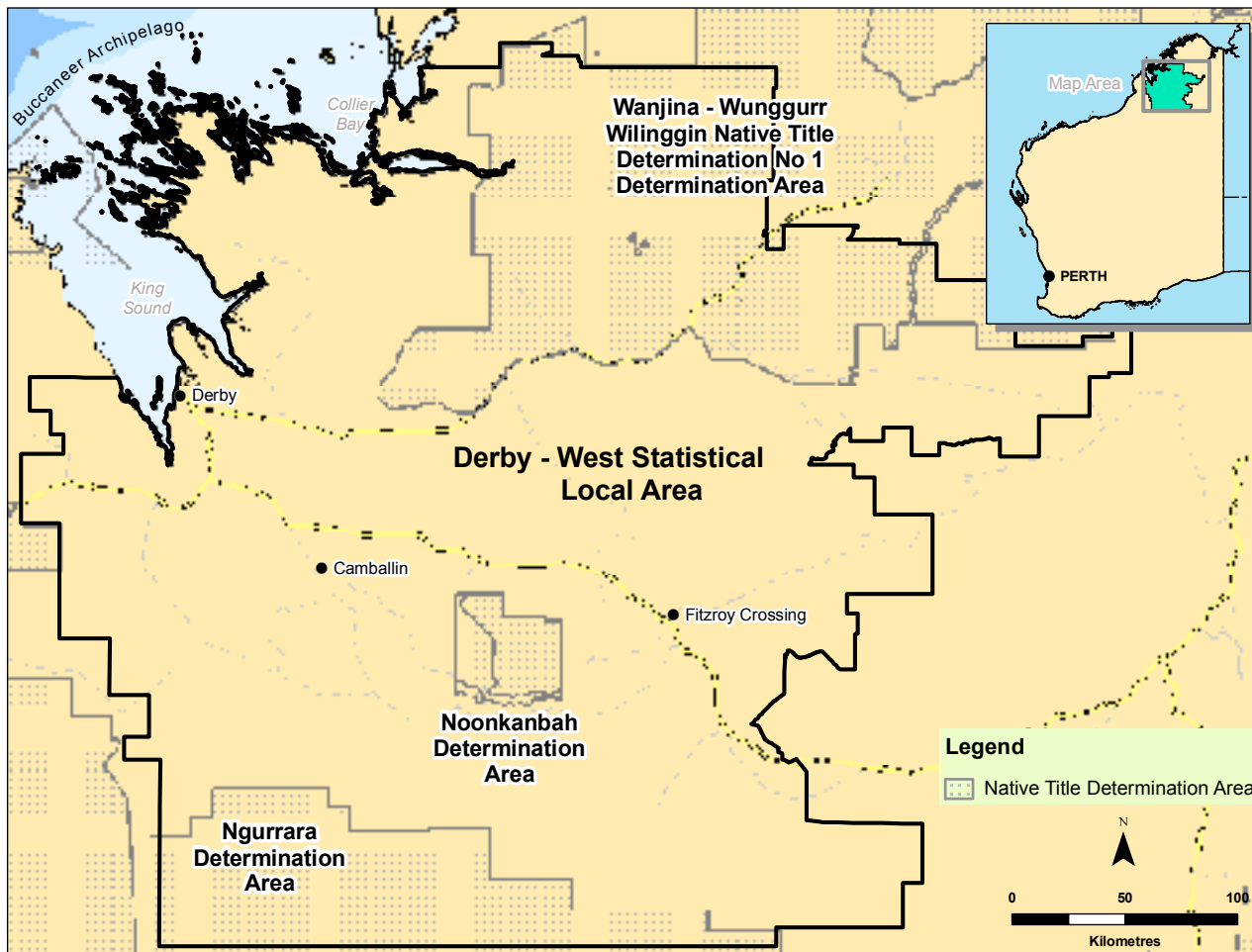
- Agriculture, forestry and fishing
- Mining
- Construction
- Education and training
- Administrative and support services

Between 2001 and 2006, despite mining and construction experiencing considerable growth, a decline in accommodation and food services, retail trade, agriculture, forestry and fishing and wholesale trade resulted in an overall contraction of the job market.

Interestingly, over the decade from 1996 to 2006, the unemployment rate steadily fell (ABS, 2007). In 1996, the unemployment rate was 4.9%, in 2001, it was 4.1% and by 2006, it was 3% (ABS, 2007).

The coastal and marine environment of the Derby – West Kimberley area is highly valued for commercial, recreational and cultural reasons by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Indeed, the main urban settlement in the area, Derby, is located in the coastal area, as shown in Figure 4.1. Figure 4.2 illustrates that there are numerous Indigenous communities located in the Derby – West Kimberley coastal area. Figure 4.5 illustrates the area over which Native Title has been determined. The following section outlines the nature of human activities within the coastal and marine areas of the Derby – West Kimberley.

**Figure 4.5 Native Title Determined Areas in Derby – West Kimberley**



## 4.2 Human Uses of the Coastal and Marine Environment

### 4.2.1 Introduction

Derby contains some of Western Australia’s most spectacular coastal destinations including the world famous Horizontal Falls. The marine environment is home to many protected marine species and much of the area is regarded as being in pristine condition. The Buccaneer Archipelago attracts Derby residents and visitors alike, with recreational fishing being a key activity.

Much of the coastal area of Derby – West Kimberley is Aboriginal Reserve, defined so through the provisions of the *Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act 1972* (WA). There are a number of small Aboriginal settlements along the coast, some of which are occupied year round and others that are only occupied for parts of the year. Indigenous residents, and visitors to the area frequently participate in fishing, hunting and collecting with much of the caught or gathered product used to supplement diets. There are numerous sacred and significant sights along the Derby – West Kimberley coast, including Aboriginal rock art estimated to be thousands of years old.

The following section provides a brief summary of the key human activities at popular activity locations along the Derby – West Kimberley coast.

### **4.2.2 Activities Around Derby**

Being located on the coast, many residents of Derby participate in recreational activities within the coastal and marine environment. Recreational fishing and boating, coastal bush walking and marine and coastal wildlife observation are popular activities. Recreational fishing is particularly popular from the Derby wharf, in King Sound, at Point Torment and further north in the waters of the Buccaneer Archipelago. Collecting mud crabs from near the Derby wharf and nearby mangrove area is also a popular recreational activity.

Commercial uses of the coast within and around Derby include use of the Derby Port for lead and zinc concentrate exports to the United States, Korea, India and Europe. The Port is operated by the Shire of Derby – West Kimberley under an agreement with the Department of Planning and Infrastructure. A conveyer belt on the wharf transports the export product to a barge, which then travels to ships waiting 20 nautical miles offshore. This process is to allow for large tidal fluctuations in the Derby Port. Approximately 420,000 tonnes of cargo are exported through Derby Port annually. Cruise ships also dock at the Port from time to time, particularly during the dry months from May to September.

There are two public boat ramps in Derby. These are situated adjacent to the wharf. One ramp is a dual lane ramp with a finger jetty. This ramp is well designed to cater to the tidal fluctuations. The other ramp is a basic concrete construction leading into the mangroves. Both ramps share a car park, and are popularly used by recreational fishers and boaters.

### **4.2.3 Activities Around Talbot Bay and Collier Bay**

Collier and Talbot Bays, located north of Derby, are popular destinations for recreational fishers and tourists. Tourists are drawn to the area by its pristine natural beauty and attractions including the famed Horizontal Falls (at Talbot Bay). Most tourists access the area by boat, with trips lasting from a single day to multiple weeks. Others visit the area via scenic flights. Nearby attractions include the waterfalls and tropical coastal rainforest at Cone Bay, Hells Gate, Walcott Inlet, Doubtful Bay and Kings Cascades.

Tourists visiting this area participate in recreational fishing including catching mud crabs, visiting Aboriginal rock art sites, coastal bush walks, snorkelling in near shore lagoons at low tide, and observing native flora and fauna including marine mammals. Visitors also camp in informal camps along the beaches and have been observed to light campfires along the beach.

Commercial pearl fisheries operated in Talbot and Collier Bays and a number of other remote locations around the Derby – West Kimberley coast. This is a high value industry in the area and provides considerable employment opportunities to residents of this area and also Broome.

Little is known about the precise nature and location of Indigenous peoples' activities in the area. It is known that the area contains a number of sacred and significant sites, and these are visited from time to time by the Traditional Owners.

### **4.2.4 Activities Around the Buccaneer Archipelago**

The Buccaneer Archipelago, shown in Figure 4.1, consists of up to 1000 islands. The islands are diverse, with some sparsely vegetated and others with sections of rainforest or fringed with mangroves. There has been little development on the islands outside of concentrated development in a few locations specifically to support the mining and pearling industries.

Infrastructure to support mining operations on Cockatoo and Koolan islands was developed in the early 1950s. Mining for Iron Ore commenced on Koolan Island in the early 1950s and continued until 1992. Infrastructure was developed on the Island to support a population of 950 people. Following the closure of the mine much of the infrastructure associated with the mine has been removed and efforts undertaken to restore the natural vegetation. In 2007, mining operations recommenced on Koolan Island, with the mine expected to reach its targeted Iron Ore production rate in 2010. Mining on Cockatoo Island commenced in the early 1950s and continues today. Mining operations were originally established by BHP which operated on Cockatoo Island until the mid 1980s, after which it closed down its operations and removed a large amount of the infrastructure built to support the mine and workers settlement. In the late 1990s HWE Mining and Portman Mining Limited reopened the mine.

The islands have provided shelter and anchorages for pearlers for many decades. Commercial pearling activities have been mostly concentrated in Cygnet Bay, Cascade Bay, Cone Bay and Strickland Bay. On some islands, there are the graves of pearl divers who lost their lives in the area (the 12 metre tide often creates ‘whirlpools’ which have caused the drowning deaths of numerous commercial divers). Commercial pearling continues to be an important commercial activity in the Archipelago, with cultured pearl farms established in the aforementioned bays.

The Archipelago is a popular destination for tourists who visit the area. The pristine environment and opportunity to participate in recreational fishing and wildlife observation are major attractions. Residents of Derby also regularly travel to the Archipelago to participate in recreational fishing, wildlife observation or to observe the scenery.

The area has a large number of Indigenous art sites and other culturally significant sites. Evidence suggests that Indigenous people have occupied the area for many thousands of years. Small rafts constructed from mangrove logs were traditionally used to access the islands. Indigenous people now often use small dinghies to access significant and sacred sites and to undertake traditional hunting and gathering activities and land management activities on the islands.

## **4.3 Development and Change in Derby – West Kimberley**

### **4.3.1 Introduction**

Much of the Derby – West Kimberley coastal area is relatively isolated. The expansion of expedition cruise and fly-in-fly-out tourism operations has provided increased access for visitors to the area. In particular, the coastal areas around Talbot Bay and the Buccaneer Archipelago have experienced an increase in the number of visitors, both those who visit as part of an organised tourism activity and independent travellers. Little development has been associated with this increase in visitation, but, it is probable that there will be a shift in the current arrangements which provide visitors with free access to Aboriginal Reserve lands and significant and sacred sites. There may also be a small amount of infrastructure development to protect some Indigenous sites from the impacts of tourism. Infrastructure development may include fencing and educational signage.

The town of Derby is expected to have a growing population over the next two decades (Western Australian Planning Commission, 2005). This increase in population will result in increased investment in new housing and the establishment of new businesses. It is also anticipated that Indigenous people will have an increasingly active role in the management of land, and that Indigenous owned and operated cottage industries will be developed and/or expanded.

### **4.3.2 Users’ and Managers’ Key Concerns Regarding the Use of the Marine and Coastal Environment**

#### ***4.3.2.1 Concern Regarding Damage from Tourists to Significant and Sacred Indigenous Sites***

Over the last decade there has been an increase in the number of tourists visiting coastal locations along the Derby – West Kimberley Coast. There are two broad groups of coastal tourists who visit the region, and both of these have experienced growth (Scherrer et al., 2008). The first group consists of visitors on expedition cruise vessels and visitors who reach the area by light aircraft or helicopters. The second group are independent travellers who usually visit by personal water craft (Scherrer et al., 2008). Research by the Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism found that while the environmental impact of tourism in the region was minimal, sacred and significant Indigenous sites were at risk of sustaining damage (Scherrer et al., 2008). This concern was echoed by interview participants who noted that there was little coordinated effort to protect Indigenous sites.

In recognition of the potential for tourist activities to cause damage to Indigenous sites, Scherrer et al. (2008 pviii) recommended ‘the appointment of an adequately equipped body to oversee and drive [a] regional planning and development process, including the development of a coastal planning strategy’. Interview participants generally agreed that a coastal planning strategy could address some of the potential issues facing the Derby – West Kimberley coast, but suggested that there was no need to establish a new planning body. Interview participants suggested that the Kimberley Development Commission was well placed to undertake planning on a regional scale. Some participants suggested that establishing a local coastal planning

strategy would be more effective than a regional strategy for addressing issues of potential damage to significant and sacred Indigenous sites. The Shire of Derby – West Kimberley was identified as being best placed to undertake such an activity.

#### **4.3.2.2 Concern Regarding the Damage from On-Going and Proposed Mining Activities**

Some interview participants were concerned that mining activities on Cockatoo Island and Koolan Island threatened the ‘pristine’ appeal of the area. The Dampier Archipelago is widely advertised, and recognised, as being a wilderness area.

#### **4.3.2.3 Concern Regarding the Damage Caused by Feral Cows, Pigs, Donkeys and Cats**

Along the Derby – West Kimberley coast there are reportedly a large number of feral cows, pigs donkeys and cats. These animals are all introduced to Australia and can cause considerable damage to the native fauna of the area. Feral pigs tend to congregate around the larger river systems in the Kimberley whilst donkeys and cats are widespread. Pigs and donkeys are known to cause severe damage to vegetation and fencing which, in turn, contributes to more degradation by domesticated stock breaking through damaged fencing. Feral cats and foxes pose a threat to native wildlife and birds and are notoriously difficult to control. Reports also suggest that feral animals pose a threat to Indigenous art sites and other significant sites. There is little evidence quantifying how many feral animals live in the Derby – West Kimberley coastal area, but, it is understood that numbers are increasing.

### **4.3.3 What is Being Done?**

Derby – West Kimberley is a remote area, and subsequently there has been little investment from State Government agencies in developing infrastructure to support coastal and marine recreational and commercial activities. There has also been limited investment in research and monitoring of the condition of the coastal and marine environment. The Shire of Derby – West Kimberley is arguably the most active ‘management’ agency in the area. The Shire has developed, and maintains, infrastructure including roads, boat ramps and parking areas around Derby to support recreational and commercial activities in the coastal and marine environment.

The Indigenous residents of the Aboriginal Reserve lands are also taking an increasingly active role in addressing issues of land and resource management. The following section presents a summary of the initiatives either planned or underway that specifically address users’ and managers’ key concerns regarding the marine and coastal environment.

#### **4.3.3.1 Concern Regarding Damage from Tourists to Significant and Sacred Indigenous Sites**

Much of the coastal land along the Derby – West Kimberley Coast, north of King Sound, is Aboriginal Reserve land. To enter this land visitors must first obtain a permit. For Aboriginal Reserve land that is administered by the Department of Indigenous Affairs, visitor passes can be obtained, free of charge, from the Department. However, in recent years much of the land previously administered by the Department of Indigenous Affairs has been transferred to Aboriginal Land Councils. This has caused confusion for visitors as to whom they should apply for a permit and when they need to apply for a permit. Reportedly, many people who visit Aboriginal Reserve lands do not have permits.

Some Indigenous residents of the area, and representatives from the Land Council argue that because visitors are not obtaining permits to visit the area, local residents do not know how many people are visiting and where they are going. This makes it hard for local residents to effectively manage their environment and undertake actions to protect sites vulnerable to damage from tourist activities.

Tourist operators argue that they take precautions to leave little impact on the environment when they take visitors ashore, ensuring that visitors do not take ‘souvenirs’ from Aboriginal rock art sites or from other areas visited.

Many who do visit the area do not actually go ashore and therefore do not actually enter Aboriginal Reserve Land. Some Indigenous residents and Land Council representatives argue that boats that anchor offshore or that travel along the coast should also have to apply for a permit.

Currently, some tourist operators are in dialogue with Aboriginal community representatives and the Land Council to identify a strategy that will ensure that Indigenous sites are protected from possible damage from tourism. One idea being discussed is a fee for tourist operators to enter the region (including the offshore and coastal waters). This fee would be paid to the Land Council and a portion (about 40%) would be given to the Indigenous residents of the area to undertake site management works at vulnerable sites. Most tourist operators agreed that providing local Indigenous residents with resources to undertake protection works at vulnerable sites would help ensure the unique appeal of the area (as an untouched wilderness) and thereby deliver value to the tourism industry. There were, however, a number of concerns about the plan related to:

- How the approximately 60% 'management fee' would be used, and why only 40% went directly to Aboriginal communities.
- The proposed costs would increase trip costs for visitors by approximately 40 to 60%. This would, in many cases, result in tourist operations being non-viable in the region.
- How the scheme would be administered to ensure that all visitors paid. Some felt that only the established operators would have to pay, which would negatively impact their competitiveness.

There was also a very strong suggestion from tourist operators and other residents of the region that any fee scheme should be restricted to those who access Aboriginal land, and should not extend to those who simply pass through the area on private or commercial vessels.

Tourist operators suggested that while generally they were willing to support such a proposal, they would like further detail(s) regarding:

- What areas were considered vulnerable
- Would tourist operators have a role in identifying priority locations and management strategies
- Who was going to be involved, and who would manage the scheme
- Who would ensure that the management outcomes were being achieved

Currently, informal discussions between the Land Council and tourist operators are ongoing.

## **4.4 Conclusion**

Derby – West Kimberley is a remote area home to a number of small Indigenous communities. The area's population is expected to grow over the next two decades, with economic development expected to be centred on expansions in the mining industry. Marine and coastal based tourism has been a growth industry in the region over the last decade. It provides employment opportunities to many residents and is expected to continue to be an important industry in both social and economic terms. For this reason alone, the management of Derby – West Kimberley's marine and coastal environment is an important issue for many residents and businesses.

In Derby – West Kimberley, users' and managers' had a number of concerns about the use and management of the marine and coastal environment. Most notable was the concern about access arrangements for visitors to Aboriginal Reserves. Also of concern were the limited provisions for the maintenance of culturally significant and historically important sites. Chapter Six provides further discussion on these concerns and outlines possible approaches for addressing them.