

2023

# WHEATBELT FUTURES FORUM

White Paper

Produced by Wynn Media Consulting



# INTRODUCTION

The Inaugural CBH Wheatbelt Futures Forum, organised by the Northam Chamber of Commerce and the Wheatbelt Business Network, provided attendees with a 12-month forecast from the main sources of economic growth and development in the Wheatbelt region for the coming financial year.

Attended by local business owners, investors and politicians, the forum was a further opportunity for networking and collaboration - a key tool for developing the Wheatbelt region moving forward.

If anything, the CBH Wheatbelt Futures Forum demonstrated the resilient nature of the region and those who live in it. Questions asked of our political leaders provided an opportunity for robust conversation - something we would like to see continue well past this event and into the future.

The event highlighted a vast number of opportunities for growth in the area and it is our hope that it has inspired you to continue to invest in yourself, your business and your community.

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This paper has been produced with the members of the Northam Chamber of Commerce and Wheatbelt Business Network in mind. We want it to be a reminder of the opportunities presenting themselves for the year ahead, but also as an advocacy tool that can see your own business continue to flourish.



# KEY TOPICS

With 10 keynote speakers, two discussion panels and a sold out attendance there was bound to be an abundance of productive conversation surround the future of the Wheatbelt region. We have identified five of the most common topics that were major points of discussion throughout the day.



## ***HOUSING***

As anticipated by many in attendance, a lack of established housing, rentals, development and affordability were common topics raised throughout the forum by keynote speakers, politicians and attendees.



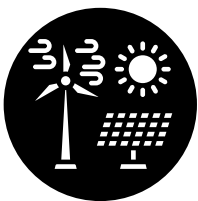
## ***EMPLOYMENT, SKILLS AND TRAINING***

Accessibility to employment, skills and training was highlighted at this year's forum. Concerns surrounding unemployment were raised and initiatives to combat this were promoted by keynote speakers.



## ***ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF THE AG INDUSTRY***

Arguably the Wheatbelt biggest economic driver, the agricultural industry was showcased in all of its glory. Outlooks were given for the season ahead and how the industry is giving back to their local communities.



## ***RENEWABLE ENERGY AND SUSTAINABILITY***

The Wheatbelt was touted as a potential future leader and major contributor to renewable energy and a range of sustainable initiatives. Attendees were given a sneak peak of some projects rolling out later this year.



## ***BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY COLLABORATION***

A common theme of continued business and community collaboration was championed by all in attendance. This 'super power' of the region was regarded as a key aspect to future development success.



# BEN MACNAMARA

## CBH Group

**CBH Group CEO Ben Macnamara provided attendees with an update on the cooperative's insights over the past season and what is forecast for not only the 12 months ahead, but decade ahead.**

In FY22 the CBH Group exported 16.7T of commodities with an annual grain export value of \$9 billion. It is forecast that in future harvests the cooperative will process between 28 and 30 million tonnes. It has been identified that the demand and price charged for Australian grain is greater in the first half of the year, meaning CBH aims to get grain out of the regional supply chain faster and earlier.

By 2033 CBH aims to be able to receive an average of 22mt crop and outturn 70 per cent in the first half shipping window, be able to market 50 per cent of the crop to international customers and hold 15 per cent market share in the fertiliser market.

Mr Macnamara identified that network investments made through the cooperative and State and Federal funding were pumping money into the Wheatbelt region. He said CBH have plans to invest \$4 billion throughout the next decade into network investments and were committed to continuing to target local goods and services from regional providers. Currently CBH are engaged with 1,800 suppliers of which 90 per cent are from WA and 39 per cent are regional businesses in grain growing communities.

Aims to create a more environmentally sustainable agricultural industry were highlighted with CBH's ISCC certification. A recent survey of co-operative members found that 80 per cent agreed that sustainability was important or critical to their business strategy. CBH identified that their customers were happy to pay extra for a sustainable product, and were able to see success in selling sustainable grain to the Japanese, Chinese, European and Mexican markets.

The CBH Group employ 1,200 staff year round with an additional 2,000 employees hired for harvest, many of these in our regional towns. Regional community investment is also an important part of the CBH business model with \$1.6 million invested back into 213 community organisations in 2022. These organisations included the areas of sport and recreation, the arts, health, safety and lifestyle. CBH are currently reviewing the way they give back to the community and will continue to measure this throughout their 10 Year Plan.

**Take away:** CBH creates a raft of local employment opportunities throughout the harvest season, especially bringing youth to our towns. Opportunities also exist for businesses to benefit from CBH community grants and compete for tenders.

# KATHY HOARE

## Department of Training & Workforce Development

Department of Training & Workforce Development, Director of State Workforce Planning Kathy Hoare used her platform to update attendees of the labour market and promote great training opportunities available for regional jobseekers.

Within the Wheatbelt there is currently a strong labour force with unemployment sitting at 3.2 per cent inline with State averages. The agricultural industry remains the biggest employing industry in the region with more than 7,600 workers followed by health care and social assistance with more than 2,900 workers.

Strong workforce participation rates by those in the 60 years and older age bracket are creating increasing challenges for youth and the general working age population finding suitable employment. The trend of staying in the workforce for longer is currently affecting the flow in and out of employment.

Unemployment challenges also exist for those who hold Certificate 1 or 2 qualifications, traditionally long-term unemployed youth, migrants and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Within this demographic there is an unemployment rate of 19.5 per cent. Ms Hoare identified that as a nation we are pushing for migration but we have a considerable number of people in that group who are currently not employed due to a lack of jobs suiting their qualifications.

The Northam Wheatbelt Regional Coordination Committee is doing considerable work in the skills and training space by identifying the challenges of the region and skills in demand that can drive training and workforce development. Established in 2022 the Committee has already rolled out a Year 9 Career Taster Program, a 'Try a Trade' program for school students in Moora, Merredin and Northam and worked with Central Regional TAFE to adopt new modes of delivery for regional and remote learners.

Heading into the next 12 months the Regional Coordination Committee is prioritising expanding access to education pathways, career development and other employment and training support services for young people in the Wheatbelt. They are endeavouring to increase the level of engagement between TAFE and industry to address the current needs within the Wheatbelt and provide under represented job seekers with support.

**Take away:** The Department of Training & Workforce Development has a detailed understanding of the current employment needs of the region and is taking proactive steps to address these needs. Businesses and employers are encouraged to contact the Department to find solutions to their own employment woes.

# STUART NAHAJSKI

## DevelopmentWA

**In what was expected to be one of the hottest topics of the day DevelopmentWA Director Stuart Nahajski provided attendees with an update on the current state housing market as well as addressing local Wheatbelt concerns.**

When compared to their city counterparts the town of Northam stacked up as affordable for buyers and renters entering the market over the past 12 months, with the median Perth housing price sitting at \$545,000 compared to \$280,000 in Northam. The comparison with rentals was also drastic with the average Northam rental being advertised at \$300 per week compared to \$550 per week in Perth. Mr Nahajski acknowledged the major shortage of rental availability within the Wheatbelt which had seen an increase in local rental prices.

Concerns raised by attendees surrounding the topic included the rise in short stay accommodation listings that limited rental availability. Business owners cited their concerns that they were unable to house potential employees and see the region grow if there was a limited supply in rental availability. Mr Nahajski acknowledged the challenge citing a recent case study of Busselton where there were 700 short stay houses available compared to just 6 properties for rent. He said that as a communicator to government, DevelopmentWA would give updates to funding bodies on pressure points within the Wheatbelt.

The Avon Industrial Park, the passion project of the late Paul Tomlinson, was touted as one of the Wheatbelt's recent great successes in the development industry, with 21 industrial lots sold in the last 12 months. It is understood that the last 60 hectares available within the precinct is attracting the attention of a minerals processing company looking to bring 40 jobs immediately to the region.

The housing outlook was not all bleak with WA Government initiatives highlighted as stimulating the under pressure construction sector. A recent \$40 million commitment to delivering worker accommodation in regional WA was highlighted as a success, and optimism was shown regarding the record number of homes currently under construction in the state. Mr Nahajski estimated that 1,200 were completing construction each month in WA.

**Take away:** While not where all want it to be, the local housing and industrial development market is showing signs of progression. Continued political pressure for funding opportunities and industry stimulus is needed. DevelopmentWA has assured they will continue to advocate for the Wheatbelt region.

# ASHLEY HERBERT

## Agrarian Management

Agrarian Management Farm Management Consultant Ashley Herbert provided attendees with an update on the state of the local agricultural market and gave a positive outlook for the year ahead.

The 'average' Wheatbelt farm business that engages with Agrarian Management's services has an annual turnover for between \$2.5-3 million, an asset value of \$12-18 million and \$2-3 million worth of plant and equipment.

Wheatbelt famers were shown to contribute a majority of the State's supply with 24 per cent of growers in the region contributing 58-75 per cent of the crop. When it comes to sheep, our region's farmers contribute 93.8 per cent of the State's sheep flock, highlighting the economic importance of the industry.

In the last harvest season Mr Herbert observed that the majority of farmers were in a sound financial position with lower long term debt and increasing asset and equity values. He put emphasis on excellent returns throughout the last 3 harvest seasons. It was predicted that this will continue with a positive cash flow from carryover grain sales, positive rainfall and wool prices holding.

Challenges from climate change were sited as areas farmers needed to focus on in order to adapt and continue steady incomes. Mr Herbert suggested that as the Wheatbelt expected dryer and hotter conditions, that farmers would need to continue to develop strategies to grow grain with less rainfall, especially if climate change developed as expected.

Employment and training avenues for those entering the agricultural industry were also raised during the forum. Mr Herbert highlighted conversations he had previously had with young people who were interested in driving headers on local farms but had no qualifications or prior experience. He challenged the audience and decision makers to help create solutions that would address a lack of recognised pathways that could support people in agricultural training and short courses.

**Take away:** Agrarian Management provide a range of services for those in the agricultural industry to help alleviate the number of jobs they need to manage in-house. Once upon a time farmers would do every part of business themselves but with the rise of burnout and mental health concerns, farmers are encouraged to engage with services like Agrarian Management to relieve some of that pressure.

# STEVEN GAULD

## Infinite Green Energy

Sustainability and green energy were hot topics of discussions with Infinite Green Energy CEO Stephen Gauld sharing the future plans of the company within Northam - plans that could place the region as a leader in the field.

The current 11MW Solar photovoltaic (PV) at the Northam Solar Farm site is set to expand to a further 7.7MW of solar and 12MW of wind under Infinite Green Energy, with a target initial production capacity of 4 tonnes of hydrogen a day. Infinite Green Energy acquired the Northam Solar Farm site in early February 2023 and has plans of using initial hydrogen output to power Fuel Cell Electric Vehicle (FCEV) truck fleets in partnership with Avon Waste. The hydrogen powered rubbish trucks are planned to roll out in Northam before the end of 2023.

The Infinite Green Energy takeover has caught the attention of South Korean construction and engineering company Samsung, securing them as a key project equity partner for the Northam project. The partnership marks both companies first attempt of producing the carbon-free fuel in the country.

The investment is supporting local modular home builder business Evoke Living who will be contracted for local construction.

**Take away:** Considerable investment has been put into the Northam Solar Farm showing a high level of confidence for the region. This project has the capacity to place the Wheatbelt in the spotlight for success in the carbon-free space, something that is still very new in our state. The success of this project could lead to further investment in this space and opportunities for local jobs and tenders.



# TOM HAYES

## Regional Men's Health

Regional Men's Health Community Educator Tom Hayes used his platform to highlight the great work being done throughout the Wheatbelt to help address stigma surrounding the mental health challenges experienced by regional men.

Regional Men's Health provide education sessions and advocacy support concerning men's wellbeing and health by starting conversations with blokes about their physical, mental and spiritual experiences - with 30,000 men in the Wheatbelt this is something that takes staff far and wide.

The organisation uses a frank approach, going where men are, focusing on humour, empathy and connection.

Mr Hayes identified that many common stressors came up for regional men including a tendency to define personal worth by business success, financial pressure, social isolation and uncertainty surrounding climate variability. He also cited challenges surrounding access to support services.

Situational distress was cited as a key principle of mental health and well-being. Mr Hayes explained that mental health and mental illness were two different things, and that problems tend to arise when we experience situations distress over a prolonged period of time. He said that mental illnesses can either develop from a genetic predisposition or being in a lengthy state of situational distress.

**Take away:** Regional Men's Health are always looking for invitations to already existing gatherings of men to bring their message of health awareness and advocacy. Their staff are able to facilitate conversations with your staff surrounding all areas of health and even refer them on to other services if needed. This is a valuable investment into the overall wellbeing of your business.

# NAOMI EVANS

nbn Local

**Nbn Local Head of Regional Community Affairs WA Naomi Evans provided attendees with an update on upcoming nbn projects in the local area and a snapshot of infrastructure already available.**

Within the Wheatbelt there are 85,000 premises ready to connect to the nbn with 46 per cent of those currently connected - of this 63 per cent used fixed line services, 24 per cent used fixed wireless and 13 per cent access satellite services.

Over the next 12 months a number of upgrades will be made to the nbn program and infrastructure to change the way we use the technology. Caps will be lifted on internet speed limits and there will be two new high speed tiers introduced. These changes will reduce congestion and improve customer experience. Fixed line user fibres will be deepening into the community and businesses will have access to the same services offered in the metropolitan area.

**Take away:** Often confused with mobile internet connection, nbn is a wholesaler that supplies internet connection to your home or business and is not a service provider. If you are looking to improve your level of internet connection contact the nbn team who can help answer your infrastructure questions.

# KRISTEN COGGAN

Regional Tech Hub

**As a relatively new government initiative, Regional Tech Hub Community and Engagement Officer Kristen Coggan explained how the service could help locals have access to independent, free connectivity advice and support.**

Established 3 years ago, Regional Tech Hub works with individuals, communities, organisations and small businesses to find the best technologies available locally. They have regional based teams available to help explain connectivity options and the best way to access them. Regional Tech Hub is not associated with retail service providers but can help resolve problems with your phone or internet provider to rectify connection issues.

Ms Coggan sited barriers to better connectivity as misinformation and disinformation, terminology, lack of support, lack of transparency, scammers and consumer fatigue.

**Take away:** Dealing with internet and telecommunication service providers can be a headache - but Regional Tech Hub does the work for you. They are available to compare services that will work for you and liaise with your service provider to fix any issues.

# DR IAN MARTINUS

Cyber Security Cooperative  
Research Centre

Cyber Security Cooperative Research Centre Manager of Commercialisation & IP Dr Ian Martinus highlighted the importance of cyber security awareness even on a small business scale when he addressed audiences at the CBH Wheatbelt Futures Forum.

Cyber attacks cost the WA economy around \$150 million a year - \$7,000 for each attack of a small business, which is shown to impact around 12 per cent of Australian small businesses. Although not often a key priority of small businesses in the Wheatbelt, Dr Martinus urged attendees to consider taking actions to protect their business from potential attacks on their online information and infrastructure.

Working for the Cyber Security Cooperative Research Centre, in his role Dr Martinus helps build effective collaborations between industry, government and researchers, creating real-world solutions for pressing cyber-related problems. Advocacy is also a key outcome for the Centre, wanting to help educate and protect all from potential threats.

When reporting a cyber attack for yourself or your business [www.cyber.gov.au](http://www.cyber.gov.au) is the suggested avenue. The website also has a range of tips on how to better protect yourself including how to create strong passwords, how to identify scams and identity theft.

**Take away:** The idea that cyber security threats only impacting big corporations and governments is outdated. Australian small businesses are being targeted because of their high productivity, making them vulnerable targets to those wanting to access our information. It is vital for all of us to become better educated on what we can do to protect our businesses.

# WARREN PEARCE

## Association of Mining and Exploration Companies

The Wheatbelt could become one of the world's most important regions for critical minerals which are required for new clean energy technologies and decarbonisation. That is the prediction from Association of Mining and Exploration Companies (AMEC) CEO Warren Pearce.

Under a \$100 million Federal Government grant given to the AMEC in 2017 southern parts of the Wheatbelt were identified as potential mining hotspots. What came of this was the Julimar Project by Chalice Mining between Toodyay and Chittering. In their first exploratory dig on private farmland the group discovered high grade platinum copper nickel deposits, which has now lead to an estimate of 560Mt of mineral resources in the area. This mining project is expected to be up and running in the second half of this decade.

If this all goes as planned the Wheatbelt is predicted to produce up to 65 per cent of Western Australia's renewable energy and is positioned to play an important role in a transition to clean energy.

Within a typical mining cycle it can take 4-5 years for exploration, 1-2 years for discovery, 3-5 years for feasibility studies, and around 3 years to develop the mine before mining begins.

Although looking positive, Mr Pearce said there were some challenges associated with potential mining in the Wheatbelt region including the large portions of freehold land needing to be accessed for exploration by companies. Other challenges included competition with other industries for employees and trying to attract people to live in the region without putting further pressure on the property markets in these small towns.

Mr Pearce encouraged attendees that potential mining companies interested in the Wheatbelt region were motivated to give back to the community through local tenders, local employment and working alongside traditional landowners and Indigenous groups.

**Take away:** The Julimar Project by Chalice Mining had a positive start and has the potential to become a major economic driver for the region if successful. A number of employment, tender and grant opportunities become possible when major companies invest into local communities. Local businesses and home owners are encouraged to give continued feedback on projects coming to the region.



# SALLY DAWKINS

Department of Foreign Affairs  
and Trade

For many of the Wheatbelt's agricultural business owners Australia's Free Trade Agreements allow opportunities to sell to markets that were once difficult to access. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) WA State Office Director Sally Dawkins explained to audiences how these agreements might be relevant to our local businesses.

Under the currently in force India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) 85 per cent of Australian goods exported to India became tariff free as of 29 December last year. This is eliminated or reduced tariffs for wine, nuts, cotton, oats, barely, wool and sheep meat.

The UK Free Trade Agreement signed and passed in Australian Parliament in late November 2022 is still waiting to be signed by the UK Parliament but has the capacity to see more than 99 per cent of Australian goods exports by value to the UK being able to enter without tariffs. This will enhance mobility pathways for workers and young people who wish to work in the UK.

The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework that is currently under negotiation seeks to complement and build on existing regional architecture and support the global rules-based trading system. It has the potential to bring together some of the largest and most dynamic regional economies to address digital trade, supply chains, clean energy, take and anti-corruption. As of September 2022 Australia joined 13 other IPEF members from across the region to launch negotiations.

**Take away:** Local Wheatbelt businesses have the ability to dream big and expand their customer base to international markets with help from DFAT. By being aware of market opportunities, locals are able to set up businesses that span much further than their own region. If you are wanting more information on reaching international markets contact DFAT directly. The Free Trade Agreement Portal is a great tool to explore existing opportunities [www.ftaportal.dfat.gov.au](http://www.ftaportal.dfat.gov.au)

# **PANEL ONE**

## **Government opinions and solutions**

The first panel for the 2023 CBH Wheatbelt Futures Forum was facilitated by the day's MC Regional Chambers of Commerce and Industry of WA CEO Kitty Prodonovich. The session included thoughtful questions from audience members and robust conversations between panelists.

The panel was made up of:

- Member for the Central Wheatbelt Mia Davies
- Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Premier Jessica Shaw
- Member for the Agricultural Region Darren West
- Federal Member for Durack Melissa Price
- Member for the Agricultural Region Steve Martin
- Small Business Development Corporation CEO David Eaton
- Chamber of Commerce and Industry of WA (CCIWA) Senior Economist Sam Collins
- Wheatbelt Development Commission Acting CEO Susan Hall

Questions and conversations had throughout the hour long panel included:

- Small business fatigue
- Housing and labour force challenges
- Federal Government migration agreements
- Land development challenges
- Health and education employment shortages
- Live export
- Collaboration post-COVID19

# HOUSING SHORTAGES

## Government opinions and solutions

It would come as no surprise that the most highly discussed topic at the CBH Wheatbelt Futures Forum was regarding housing and development throughout the region. Raised by business owners, politicians and all in between - the message was the same; the supply of housing in the region is low, but demand is high. Throughout the day's panels development times, material shortages and pricing were raised time and time again. Many were seeking solutions to the issue at hand.

Here is what your politicians had to say:

**Member for the Central Wheatbelt Mia Davies** - Ms Davies said that the State Government had the power to pull levers to help alleviate pressures. She said that in a lot of instances local governments were the ones having to invest in housing investments while being stretched on budgeting. Ms Davies said that she had seen collaborative partnerships help address concerns. including the My Home program in Fremantle that were developing affordable housing outcomes. She said the Wheatbelt as a region was great at collaborating but needed State Government funding to continue to deliver these outcomes.

**Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Premier Jessica Shaw** - Ms Shaw said that post-COVID19 the State Government invested in building and that unfortunately now we are facing shortages of materials. She said the State Government had a headways program underway to try and reduce the costs of developing properties. Ms Shaw said they were looking at ways to reform land supply issues and were talking to industry about how the State Government could take pressure off the construction industry. She said the State Government were reviewing their own projects to release tradespeople and materials to help the housing sector continue to move along and address the shortages.

**Member for the Agricultural Region Darren West** - Mr West said labour shortages could be overcome through immigration. He acknowledged that the process of developing land in Northam cost more than what you could sell it for, limiting the number of private sector investors. Mr West said the State Government would continue to advocate for land development in the region by supporting DevelopmentWA.

**Take away:** All panelists acknowledged the present issue of housing shortages, lack of land development and material supplies. While suggestions of solutions were offered it will be a matter of time before we see these solutions lead to on the ground change. Local organisations like the Avon Community Development Foundation are an example of a community group making a difference to the housing industry locally.

# LIVE TRADE EXPORT

## Government opinions and solutions

Identified as a big area of concern, especially for those working in the agricultural industry, the future of the live trade export was presented to politicians of all sides at the CBH Wheatbelt Futures Forum. Raised by Shire of Wyalkatchem President Quinton Davies, it was questioned why sustainable businesses that provide for whole towns and international markets were at risk of being shut down. Cr Davies expressed considerable concern for what industries could be shut down next as a result of banning live export in Western Australia.

Here is what your panelists had to say:

**Federal Member for Durack Melissa Price** - Ms Price made it clear that it was impossible to talk about the issue without being political. She said she shared the fear of what industries may collapse or be at risk next. Ms Price said that as part of the Liberal Party she was fighting tooth and nail to advocate for those on the ground. "As much as I don't want to, we are having to look at compensation and what that will look like for businesses," she remarked.

**Member for the Agricultural Region Darren West** - Mr West said the McGowan Government was supportive of the live trade industry and had been able to buy some time from the Federal Government. He said that WA now exports 7 per cent of what it once did and that he believed there was no point banning it when it looked like the industry was fading out anyway. Mr West said he would keep advocating for more time and better outcomes, and that there could be life after live export if there were investments made into better chilling facilities and processing industries.

**Member for the Central Wheatbelt Mia Davies** - Ms Davies said she disagreed with Mr West in that the industry could have a future following a live export ban. She said she did not believe there was capacity to ramp up domestic processing and that a ban should not take place. Ms Davies said she had been in contact with many farmers who had been reporting mental stress of not knowing what to do with the sheep they currently have on farm - and expected this stress to rise. "I think the Premier could be using his voice to lend more than just his support," she told audiences.

**Take away:** The future of the live export industry in WA is unknown. It was presented as a major issue of concern for those living in the Wheatbelt that was not being reflected by the Federal Government who are looking to shut down the industry. Locals are encouraged to continue to contact their local politicians and advocacy groups to have their say.



# DESIGNATED AREA MIGRATION AGREEMENT

## Government opinions and solutions

A topic that was not familiar with many attendees of the Forum soon turned into a hot topic of discussion with many now in support of - Designated Area Migration Agreements (DAMA). RDA Wheatbelt Director of Regional Development Mandy Walker brought up the topic questioning the steep price of \$70,000 for a case study. Ms Walker questioned if the price could be offset by becoming a state government issue. She said it seemed counterintuitive having different organisations paying for case studies on the same topic.

Designated Area Migration Agreements work on an agreement-based framework, providing flexibility for regions to respond to their unique economic and labour market conditions. They are made between the Australian Government and a Designated Area Representative, usually regional bodies such as Chambers of Commerce, Regional Development Australia offices, or Shire Councils.

DAMAs are considered helpful for regional areas as it provides the area the opportunity to identify skills and trades that are understaffed and needing international workers. They allow for skills that may not usually be covered by national migration agreements. For example, if the Wheatbelt is experiencing a lack of disability support workers and childcare workers in the region they can outline this in their own DAMA to attract overseas workers.

The Goldfields, Kimberley and South-West regions currently have DAMA agreements in place and the Mid-West and Great Southern regions are looking into the initiatives.

**All politicians agreed that there needed to be a coherent voice to Government regarding the issue.**

**Take away:** The CBH Wheatbelt Futures Forum provided all in attendance a good understanding of what a DAMA is and how it could benefit the region. Many in attendance acknowledged that they had never previously heard of a DAMA but were now in support for one in the Wheatbelt. A great idea that needs a local champion. If you are interested in continuing the conversation surrounding a DAMA in the Wheatbelt get in touch with RDA Wheatbelt, the Northam Chamber of Commerce or the Wheatbelt Business Network.

# AVON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

## Government opinions and solutions

Avon Community Development Foundation (ACDF) chairman Phil Eaton used the CBH Wheatbelt Futures Forum political panel to his advantage, questioning why the group were experiencing considerable roadblocks from the Department of Communities trying to build additional housing in Northam.

The ACDF have already established a 15-house accommodation precinct, Mortlock Gardens, which provides vital housing for workers both in the public and private sector - relieving regional housing market pressures. The success of the precinct was so great that the ACDF have plans to develop land they already own next door, but are currently under caveats without State Government explanation.

Here is what your politicians had to say:

**Member for the Agricultural Region Darren West** - Mr West seemed very familiar with the group and their development plans. He said he had been working to establish some explanation for some time and didn't have 'an easy answer'. "I don't have the outcome you want," Mr West said with no further elaboration.

**Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Premier Jessica Shaw** - Ms Shaw, as a local member in the metropolitan area was not familiar with the ACDF but said she would bring the issue to the current State Minister for Community Services Sabine Winton for clarification and advocacy.

**Member for the Central Wheatbelt Mia Davies** - Ms Davies, who turned the sod on the original Mortlock Gardens project back in 2014, praised the ACDF for their initiative in addressing the housing shortage issue. She said that she hoped that the Department of Communities would come to the table as the group was not even asking for funds.

**Take away:** Phil Eaton used the CBH Wheatbelt Future Forum to his advantage by addressing the politicians who have the power to address his concerns and help lift the caveat. The ACDF has already provided the town of Northam with much needed housing and in the current climate could help house many more. We will be watching this space.

# PANEL TWO

## Government department supports

The closing panel for the 2023 CBH Wheatbelt Futures Forum was facilitated by Department of Science Innovation and Resources Regional Manager for AusIndustry Sharni Foulkes. Ms Faulkes led an informative session with panelists from a range of Federal Government Departments on supports available to local businesses.

See what your panelists had to share with audience:

**Department of Home Affairs Assistant Director of Cyber and Infrastructure Security**

**Outreach in WA Steve Lanyi:** Mr Lanyi explained the importance of cyber security being the responsibility of business owners and not just the Government. He said the introduction of the Cyber and Infrastructure Security Outreach in WA Act, introduced in 2018 provides protection for our critical assets and those who own them. Mr Lanyi also spoke of the advantages of DAMAs. He said Australia's immigration system had been struggling to compete with other countries who can process visas in a few weeks compared to 12 months in Australia. Mr Lanyi said by introducing a DAMA regions have more say in the jobs that are necessary locally.

**Office of Defence Industry Support (ODIS) Defence Industry Advisor Daniel Moss:**

Mr Moss said cyber security was becoming a must have area of importance for small businesses in regional areas, especially those looking to enter the defense supply chain. He said that ODIS had the capacity to help businesses access grant funding to uplift their cyber capacity.

**Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) Regional Commissioner Rhian Richards:**

Ms Richards spoke of audiences about the important role directors play within a business. She said that it was vital for the directors to know exactly what was going on in all levels of their business. Ms Richards said there were many small businesses that were selling themselves short by underselling and underpricing their product and getting to the point where they had to decide whether the business could continue. ASIC and its partners provide mental health support to small businesses who may be experiencing financial pressures and facing insolvency.

**Department of Home Affairs Business, Industry and Outreach Officer Shaun Burress:**

Mr Burress addressed questions from the audience regarding advertising for overseas workers. He said that if businesses were interested in obtaining workers the State Government Skills Migration Register was a great tool to find someone suited to their occupational needs.

**Take away:** Federal Government Departments although often located in capital cities and Canberra, have resources and supports available for regional businesses - all you need to do is reach out.

# NEXT STEPS

Do you want to continue the discussions had at the inaugural CBH Wheatbelt Futures Forum? There are so many ways that you can continue to invest in the growth of your own business and the entire Wheatbelt region region. We encourage you to take some of the steps listed below as a way of securing our future.



## **No. 01 – Join your local CCI**

Whether you live in Northam, Merredin or further afield we encourage you to consider membership to you local Chamber of Commerce and Business Network.



## **No. 02 – Contact your local politicians**

No matter what side of politics they are aligned with, our local, state and federal leaders must know what matters to you and your business in order to advocate for your needs. Get in touch with your local office to raise concerns, bring attention to your successes or just ask how they can serve you.



## **No. 03 – Collaborate with other businesses**

No one knows your community better than other locals. Use some of the connections made at the 2023 Wheatbelt Futures Forum to create new initiatives, learn something new or build support networks. We can't wait to see what you come up with together.