



## Karratha Visitor Servicing Review Findings and Discussion Paper



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## Executive Summary

The City of Karratha (the City) hired regional tourism development consultancy Tilma Group to review visitor information servicing in Karratha region, and provide recommendations to support the City's return on investment. The timing of the review is just prior to the development of a new Destination Management Plan for the City, also to be undertaken by Tilma.

This Paper presents Tilma's findings from desktop research and stakeholder consultations (Part 1) and provides a foundation for discussions with the Project Control Group on Tilma's proposed scenarios for the future of visitor information servicing (VIS) in Karratha region (Part 2).

### Key stats

- 21,996 users<sup>1</sup> of Karratha Tourism and Visitor Centre (KTVC) in 2024
- 17,248 visitors to KTVC in 2024
- 37% of leisure (non-business) visitors to Karratha visit KTVC
- 62% of WA travellers say they are likely to use a visitor centre<sup>2</sup>
- Users of regional WA visitor centres spend an additional \$150.19 on average<sup>3</sup>
- ROI on City's \$618,000 investment into KTVC is \$2.59 million<sup>4</sup> i.e. each \$1 invested returns : \$4.19 in activity in the local economy
- Cost to service KTVC users is \$28 per user

Elements of VIS in Karratha region are currently underutilised/underperforming (e.g. signage and social media), with resourcing focused on the visitor information centre, KTVC. Meanwhile, how visitors seek out visitor information is changing over time.

In response, the City requested Tilma present at least three VIS scenarios for consideration, based on low, medium, and higher human and financial investment.

1. Low Investment Scenario: Dispersed & Online Visitor Servicing (no visitor centre) – see page 43
2. Medium Investment Scenario: Omni-Channel Approach to Visitor Servicing<sup>5</sup> (optimise existing VIS assets) – see page 45
3. Higher Investment Scenario: Omni-Channel Approach with Experience Centre – see page 47

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<sup>1</sup> Users includes those who visit and those who call KTVC for information. The number of visitors who email KTVC for information is not tracked.

<sup>2</sup> Measuring the Value of Visitor Centres in WA, 2024, Tourism WA

<sup>3</sup> Measuring the Value of Visitor Centres in WA, 2024, Tourism WA

<sup>4</sup> This does not include those who call KTVC for information; only visitors to KTVC

<sup>5</sup> Omni-channel refers to using multiple channels to distribute visitor information in addition to a visitor centre, both across the region and online.



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## Abbreviations

AR	Augmented reality, an interactive experience that combines the real world and computer-generated 3D content, such as seeing extinct local animals in the landscape via a mobile phone.
<a href="#">ATDW</a>	Australian Tourism Data Warehouse
CBD	Central Business District
City	City of Karratha local government
DMP	Destination Management Plan
Eastern corridor	The region around Roebourne, Wickham, Point Samson, and Cossack.
FIFO	Fly-in, fly-out mine workers (No longer classified as tourism visitors by Tourism Research Australia as they attending at their normal place of work)
FY	Financial year
GSTC	Global Sustainable Tourism Council
KTVC	Karratha Tourism & Visitor Centre
MTB	Mountain bike
REAP	Red Earth Arts Precinct
UGC	User generated content: photos, videos, and text shared on social media by visitors.
VFR	Visiting Friends and Family (a type of visitor who is visiting local residents they know)
VIC	Visitor Information Centre
VIS	Visitor Information Servicing
VR	Virtual reality (a 3D world seen via VR goggles/headset)
WA	Western Australia



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Tilma Group acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the Karratha region.

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SUSTAINABILITY	Tilma seeks to align destination management recommendations with the <a href="#">Global Sustainable Tourism Council’s Destination Criteria</a> , and recommends its use by destination managers.
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## Introduction

The City of Karratha (City), which owns and manages the Karratha Tourism & Visitor Centre (KTVC), has engaged regional tourism development consultancy Tilma Group to provide recommendations on improving outcomes from the City's visitor information servicing (VIS) in the Karratha region. This includes providing recommendations on KTVC's management, including how to reduce cost of operations. The City would like to reduce KTVC's financial dependency and redirect funds into other areas of tourism development.

In 2019, the City took the management of KTVC in house from a contracted third party to improve cost effectiveness and ensure quality control. Since 2018, the City has undertaken desktop reviews of KTVC that have sought to improve the visitor experience at the centre and increase the service's financial sustainability. In 2022, the City resolved to undertake a full review of VIS in the region. The review is being undertaken just prior to the development of a Destination Management Plan, also by Tilma.

The purpose of this Findings and Discussion Paper is to present Tilma's findings and learnings from stakeholder consultation, a desktop review, benchmarking, and an in-region visit, and to present proposed VIS scenarios for discussion and feedback from key stakeholders in the City's internal project steering group.

See Section 10 in the Appendix for a summary of tourism in Karratha region.



# PART 1: Visitor servicing review and analysis

## 1. What is visitor information servicing?

Visitor information servicing (VIS) involves providing relevant tourist information to visitors throughout the different stages of their trip to support their visit.

The purpose of VIS is to provide information that entices and enables visitors to

- stay longer
- disperse across the region
- spend more
- choose to have tourism experiences (i.e. spend on more than just basics/essentials such as groceries and fuel)
- have a great experience so they will share positive word of mouth recommendations to others, including via online reviews.

As indicated in this diagram of an omni-channel approach to VIS,<sup>6</sup> modern and best practice VIS includes information provision via a number of channels, including

- Visitor Information Centres (VIC)
- Phone calls, texts, email, and live chat
- Online channels (e.g. websites, social media, digital ads)
- Printed materials (e.g. brochures, maps, guides)
- Kiosks, both electronic and staffed (see examples below)
- Signage (wayfinding and interpretive)



*An omnichannel approach to VIS*

<sup>6</sup> Based on a diagram in A National Perspective on Visitor Information Servicing

- Marketing to visitors once they've decided to come to the region or are in the region (as opposed to demand-driving marketing)
- Other methods of information distribution.

Examples of kiosks include the following.



*Pop up visitor information stall at an event (a visitor hotspot)*



*A mobile visitor information van*



*Other forms of mobile visitor information*

Electronic kiosks at visitor hotspots, like brochure racks, enable visitors to find information themselves.



*Freestanding outdoor electronic kiosk*



*Electronic kiosks at an indoor visitor hotspot*

Visitors need information at each stage of their trip: dreaming about a holiday, and planning, booking, experiencing, and sharing about their trip, such as with friends and family via their social media. Visitors consume different types of information on different topics at different stages of their journey. Visitor information servicing should meet the information needs of visitors at each of these stages.



*VIS touchpoints at different stages of the visitor journey<sup>7</sup>*

<sup>7</sup> A National Perspective on Visitor Information Servicing



Visitor information servicing is one of the interdependent aspects of destination management, which includes industry capacity building; product, event and experience development; and destination marketing.



Image: The pillars of sustainable regional tourism development.

Tilma's analysis is undertaken through a visitor lens. We put the visitor at the centre and identify the services they require and the best VIS approach to maximise benefits for Karratha region from visitors. The focus of our holistic approach is on providing visitors with the information they require where, when, and how they need it. This requires stepping into visitors' shoes at each point on their journey, ensuring the right information is accessible during each stage. A destination-wide approach to VIS is needed to meet visitor expectations and influence visitors to increase their length of stay and spend, and their advocacy for a destination. Section 2 below offers detail on the Karratha visitor markets and their information needs.

## 1.1 VIC users<sup>8</sup>

Visitor centre use is driven by situation, not by visitor type. Most visitors will stop at a VIC if they require information. 60% of travellers say they are likely to visit a VIC when on holiday in WA. (62% of WA residents say they are likely to visit a VIC when on a trip in WA, while 70% of east coast residents say they would.)

Demographically, VIC users and non-users are not hugely different, however compared to non-users, users (58% of travellers) are more likely to

- be 35-54 years
- be travelling with family (young or maturing)
- have higher income
- be on holiday (rather than be visiting family and friends [VFR])
- be visiting a location for the first time
- be staying overnight in location
- be staying in rented apartments or at a caravan site
- plan their trips independently, utilising travel websites including visitor centre and destination websites, and are more likely to contact operators directly for information or to book
- stay longer (+0.8 days)
- do more activities (+25%) (5+ activities)
- spend more (+30%)
- be greater advocates for a destination, with 66% saying their trip was better than expected (compared to 41% of non-users).

Triggers for visiting a VIC are

- visiting a new location and seeking general advice
- happen to drive past
- staying more than one night
- need help to book
- unable to access information otherwise
- need maps, directions and information on attractions, activities, and events.

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<sup>8</sup> Information in this section is from Measuring the Value of Visitor Centres in WA, 2024, Tourism WA

## 1.2 Critical success factors and trends for best practice visitor servicing

From analysing best practice visitor servicing across Australia, a number of common factors emerge that can be considered critical to visitor servicing success. Each of these are relevant for Karratha to maximise economic and social benefits from visitor servicing. For this reason, the following critical success factors have helped shape the scenarios contained in this Paper.

Critical VIS success factors		Example
<b>Applies a visitor lens</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Needs and preferences of visitors are central to the VIS model. Visitors expect immediacy of information and to be able to book directly, instantly and easily.</li> <li>Visitors like to connect with locals and feel that they are receiving inside knowledge and connection to local culture. They seek out local knowledge such as road closures, weather conditions, lesser-known things to experience (locals' secrets) and personalised itineraries that meet the travel party's needs.</li> <li>Information is available via multiple formats and channels. Around half of visitors say they prefer to use online sources of information.<sup>9</sup> Peer review sites (particularly Google reviews) are trusted sources of information.</li> <li>VIS involves the entire community as visitors engage with multiple touchpoints that influence their travel decisions and experience, from bakeries to petrol stations.</li> <li>AI is changing how travellers search for information and plan trips, such as by creating personalised itineraries.</li> </ul>	In Ballina, NSW, everyday hundreds of travellers pass through and spend time at a 24-hour highway service centre to buy fuel and eat, so DIY VIS is provided here: touchscreens to explore the destination's website, a wall map, and a printed destination guide. These provide information where visitors go, and meets the needs of the half of travellers who prefer to find information online.
<b>Located where visitors are</b>	Consistent quality visitor information is available online and offline where visitors need and expect it (based on visitor flows and hotspots/touchpoints), rather than expecting visitors to make a special trip to access information.	Yarra Ranges Tourism replaced its two VICs with digital infrastructure (destination website, social media channels and 30 grant-funded digital visitor servicing kiosks that connect visitors with the destination website) and brochure carousels. Reasons for this change included that the destination has multiple entry points so there were no centralised locations suitable for a VIC. Geolocated webpages enable visitors to find search results close to where they are. The kiosks collect data, such as where visitors are travelling to next, and mobile phone numbers for SMS remarketing. When the screens are not being used by visitors, they are

<sup>9</sup> Measuring the Value of Visitor Centres in WA, 2024



		used to show destination images and videos, the destinations' social media feed, operators' deals, community notifications from the Shire, and ads (as in a digital billboard) (a source of revenue). Demand from operators to host a kiosk is high. The cost of the kiosks is around \$50,000 per year, for electricity, wifi, maintenance, and replacement if vandalised.
<b>Delivers quality, objective information (recognised through accreditation)</b>	Often it is the quality customer service visitors receive at a VIC that results in word of mouth recommendations to visit the VIC (and the destination).	Cunnamulla VIC has an unwavering commitment to providing outstanding service. The VIC achieved Best of Queensland Experiences and received a TripAdvisor Travellers' Choice Award in 2024. These recognitions are for tourism businesses that consistently deliver high-quality experiences as revealed through visitors' reviews. Reviews also enable staff to identify how to enhance services and create memorable experiences for visitors.
<b>Delivers a WOW experience</b>	Visitors don't go to a destination to visit a VIC – they go for an experience. The VIC provides an experience that attracts target markets (reasons for visitors to visit the VIC) and increases dwell time.	Exmouth VIC is co-located with the Ningaloo Aquarium & Discovery Centre where visitors go for a deeper understanding, and experience, of the Ningaloo Reef.
<b>Valued by local businesses and residents</b>	VIS draws visitors to the destination, generates spend with local businesses, and meets the needs of the community.	Kununurra VIC supports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• local operators with bookings, and by proactively helping operators to become trade-ready (able to sell online with commission)</li> <li>• local producers with a local-focus policy for their retail outlet, by stocking local products and selling them with a very low profit margin.</li> </ul>
<b>Governed by effective leadership and management</b>	A governance structure is in place that enables efficient and effective VIS.	VICs have a range of management models that vary depending on the local tourism context – the more visitors to a region and the more operators in the region, the greater the opportunity for the VIC to be financially self-sufficient and managed by a local tourism organisation or chamber of commerce. Some are accredited (Level 1 or Level 2) while others are not. There are also varied levels of accountability and performance management.
<b>Financially sustainable</b>	VIS generates economic and social benefits and delivers sufficient commercial return.	The average additional spend of each regional WA VIC user is \$150.19 <sup>12</sup> (this does not include the additional spend of visitors who call or email a VIC for VIS).

<sup>12</sup> Measuring the Value of Visitor Centres in WA, 2024, Tourism WA

	<p>It is very difficult for VICs to be financially self-sufficient, particularly in regions with low numbers of operators and visitors such as Karratha. In such cases, the financial sustainability of a VIC would refer to the return on the investment into it.</p> <p>A study of WA VICs undertaken in 2014 found 40% of VIC operations are funded by local governments,<sup>10</sup> and 48% are managed by local government (up from 26% in 2004).<sup>11</sup></p>	<p>With so many operators in the region, the Kununarra VIC has been able to be financially self-sufficient using booking commission and membership as key sources of revenue. They are proactive in helping operators set up online bookings to support this source of revenue and economic impact. Being membership based keeps the VIC focused on driving economic benefit to their members.</p>
<b>Monitors and measures performance</b>	<p>Data is gathered to demonstrate performance against key performance indicators. However, there are no set standard measures used by Australian or WA VICs.</p>	<p>For the Alice Springs VIC, the number of users of the VIC and the destination website, and the booking value they generate are key performance measures.</p>
<b>Collaboration across borders</b>	<p>Visitors do not see boundaries between regions.</p>	<p>The Matilda Way runs north-south through central (Outback) Queensland, from the NSW border to the Gulf of Carpentaria. VICs along the route engage the Way's long haul visitors with information on the attractions of their section of the Way. Each VIC has a large scale wall map of the Way highlighting local attractions.</p>

<sup>10</sup> The future of visitor centres in WA, 2014

<sup>11</sup> The Future Of Tourism Services In The City Of Karratha, 2018

## 2. Karratha visitor markets and their information needs

### 2.1 Overview of Karratha visitors

Understanding visitors to Karratha region is key to enhancing VIS delivery and providing relevant recommendations that deliver on what visitors are seeking.

#### Domestic overnight leisure visitors to Karratha region<sup>13</sup>

Domestic overnight visitors	Number of visitors	Length of stay in region	Spend per trip in region	Spend per night in region
Business visitors	150,000	6 nights <sup>14</sup>	\$856	\$141
Non-business visitors <sup>15</sup>	55,000 <sup>16</sup> (38,000 holiday visitors <sup>17</sup> 22,000 VFR visitors <sup>18</sup> )	2 nights <sup>19</sup>	\$384 <sup>20</sup>	\$159 <sup>21</sup>

Note: Tourism Research Australia is no longer counting fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) mine workers as visitors / tourists because they are travelling to attend their usual place of work.<sup>22</sup> Most of Karratha region's business visitors are FIFO workers. In the near future the City will have a better understanding of the annual number of non-FIFO business visitors.

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<sup>13</sup> 2022-2023 (2 years average) except where stated otherwise

<sup>14</sup> Decreased from 10 nights in 2020-2021 (2 years average), and 9 nights (average from 2015-2019)

<sup>15</sup> Leisure, VFR, Education, Other

<sup>16</sup> 63,000 in 2016-2019 (4 years average)

<sup>17</sup> 2016-2019 (4 years average)

<sup>18</sup> 2016-2019 (4 years average)

<sup>19</sup> Holiday visitors 2020-2021 (2 years average)

<sup>20</sup> Holiday visitors 2020-2021 (2 years average), down from \$560 in 2016-2019 (4 years average)

<sup>21</sup> Holiday visitors 2020-2021 (2 years average)

<sup>22</sup> Personal communication with Roy Morgan, on the future of Tourism Research Australia's visitor data, January 2025



## Domestic overnight holiday and VFR visitors to Australia's North West

Due to low visitation to Karratha, Tourism Research Australia is only able to provide detail on leisure visitors at the scale of the Australia's North West region (Pilbara and Kimberley combined), as follows.

Demographics <sup>23</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>63% reside in Western Australia<sup>24</sup></li> <li>58% female</li> <li>42% male</li> </ul>	
Age <sup>25</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13% aged 15-24</li> <li>16% aged 25-34</li> <li>17% aged 35-44</li> <li>15% aged 45-54</li> <li>7% aged 55-59</li> <li>9% aged 60-64</li> <li>12% aged 65-69</li> <li>12% aged 70 over</li> </ul>	<p>Ages of visitors to Australia's North West</p>
Accommodation type <sup>26</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>38% stay in caravan parks</li> <li>37% stay in hotels</li> <li>27% stay with local friends or family</li> <li>20% stay in non-commercial caravan parks</li> <li>18% stay in commercial caravan parks</li> <li>4% stay in other commercial accommodation</li> <li>2% stay in other private accommodation</li> </ul>	
Travel party <sup>27</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>40% couple</li> </ul>	

<sup>23</sup> 2022-2023 (2 years average)

<sup>24</sup> Victoria and NSW are likely the largest sources of intrastate visitation. From 2016-2019, on average 11.5% of visitors to ANW came from Victoria and 10% from NSW.

<sup>25</sup> 2020-2023 (4 years average)

<sup>26</sup> 2022-2023 (2 years average)

<sup>27</sup> 2021-2022 (2 years average)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 28% friends/relatives travelling together</li> <li>• 16% solo</li> <li>• 15% family group</li> </ul>
Transport used <sup>28</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 51% self-drive</li> <li>• 48% fly<sup>29</sup></li> </ul>
Interests on trip <sup>30</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 86% social activities</li> <li>• 71% outdoor / nature activities</li> <li>• 52% active outdoor / sports activities</li> <li>• 34% attractions / tourist activities</li> <li>• 25% arts / heritage activities</li> </ul>

## 2.2 Karratha region target markets

Following is a snapshot overview of current and opportunity target markets and their VIS needs. Tilma has compiled details on these visitor types from a variety of sources [here](#).

Information needs that are relevant to all these visitor types include

- Up to date information, such as current road conditions, what's on, where to see wildflowers, what's open.
- Tailored tourism information (personalised recommendations/advice/itinerary building), including places to stay, what to experience, and where to meet basic needs (fuel, food, repairs, logistics, medical services, etc), e.g. itineraries for families, and locations of dump points and water refill stations for caravanners.
- Printed maps for offline use.
- Locals' 'secrets'.
- Emergency information.

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<sup>28</sup> 2022-2023 (2 years average)

<sup>29</sup> This is not representative of leisure visitors to Karratha

<sup>30</sup> 2022-2023 (2 years average)

Visitor type	Characteristics	Information sought	Sources used
<b>Caravanners (overall)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growing market</li> <li>• Circumnavigating Australia or visiting Karijini National Park and/or The Kimberley</li> <li>• Travelling between Broome and Perth; some are looking for alternatives to Exmouth and Broome, or don't want to travel as far north as Broome</li> <li>• Often bypass Karratha region, heading inland from Port Hedland and Coral Bay to experience Karijini National Park</li> <li>• Experience Seekers: experienced travellers, adventurers, off the beaten track, self-challenging</li> <li>• Primarily residents of WA, and therefore have more awareness of the Pilbara and its attractions</li> <li>• Western Australians are the least likely to travel interstate (13% compared to national average of 33%).</li> <li>• High income</li> <li>• 65% of caravan owners are under age 55</li> <li>• Stay for very short or very long visits: 80% stay 1-3 nights or 15+ nights</li> <li>• 48% of roadtrippers travel for 3 to 7 nights</li> <li>• 1 in 4 roadtrippers spend more than 17 hours on the road</li> <li>• Interested in nature-based tourism</li> <li>• Over 80% of visitors are interested in Aboriginal tourism experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where to camp</li> <li>• Drive/road conditions</li> <li>• Park/road permits</li> <li>• Dump points, water refill</li> <li>• Things to see and do, places to eat</li> <li>• Itinerary suggestions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wikicamps</li> <li>• Facebook groups</li> <li>• Websites</li> <li>• Online reviews</li> <li>• Social media</li> <li>• Guides</li> <li>• Maps</li> <li>• Visitor centres</li> <li>• Locals</li> <li>• Word of mouth from other caravanners</li> </ul>
<b>Older couple caravanners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Today older caravanners are wealthier than the grey nomads of the past</li> <li>• Healthy and active</li> <li>• Have more freedom with their road trips, able to go on longer trips (32% travel more than 1,000km/17 hours), spend more, and more likely to embark on a road trip whenever they want to (60%)</li> <li>• Seek value for money</li> <li>• Growing number are online and using social media to connect</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As above</li> <li>• Where to access medical care / buy medication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As above</li> </ul>
<b>Family caravanners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families and younger couples (35-49)</li> <li>• Homeschooling children on extended trip</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As for Caravanners</li> <li>• Family friendly kids activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As above</li> </ul>

Visitor type	Characteristics	Information sought	Sources used
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational experiences for children</li> <li>• Trail maps</li> </ul>	
<b>Intraregional holidaymakers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High income</li> <li>• Have more awareness of the Pilbara and its attractions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Things to see and do, places to eat</li> <li>• Boat hire</li> <li>• Events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Websites</li> <li>• Online reviews</li> <li>• Social media including Facebook groups</li> <li>• Guides</li> <li>• Maps</li> <li>• Visitor centres</li> <li>• Locals, including family and friends</li> </ul>
<b>Locals' visiting friends and relatives (VFR)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 35% of non-business visitors to Karratha region</li> <li>• Many stay at the homes of their friends/family</li> <li>• Participate in commercial attractions, events and other experiences, largely with the family and friends they are visiting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key things to see and do</li> <li>• New events and experiences</li> <li>• Itinerary suggestions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Friends</li> <li>• Websites</li> <li>• Social media including locals' Facebook groups</li> <li>• Visitor guides</li> </ul>
<b>Cruise passengers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Luxury and ultra luxury small ship cruises</li> <li>• Australians have a high rate of taking cruises (1 in 17 Australians)</li> <li>• 85% of cruisers are repeat cruisers</li> <li>• Average age 47; Millennials (28-43) are an emerging market (1/3 are under 35)</li> <li>• Average passenger shore spend on domestic transit stops is \$197 per day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Day trips, half-day trips, guided tours</li> <li>• Education, inspiration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cruise ship</li> <li>• Travel agent</li> <li>• Visitor centre</li> <li>• Websites</li> <li>• Social media</li> </ul>
<b>Corporate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International or east coast of Australia residence</li> <li>• VIP visitors on a corporate trip or delegation</li> <li>• Conference delegates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided with experiences by locals e.g. the company they are visiting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Websites</li> <li>• Via the company representative they are liaising with</li> </ul>

Visitor type	Characteristics	Information sought	Sources used
<b>FIFO<sup>31</sup></b> (No longer considered tourism visitors).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reside in Perth, 25–44 years old, 88% male, in a relationship, and have children.</li> <li>• Want shorter periods away from family/want to spend quality time with family (as they are isolated/work alone all day for weeks on long shifts).</li> <li>• Regularly have week-long breaks from work.</li> <li>• FIFO workers are very price sensitive when selecting holiday destinations despite earning high wages.</li> <li>• Holiday to relax (drinking, shopping, dining and socialising near the pool), or for adventure (surfing, diving, partying, snorkelling, vibrancy, etc), to socialise/ spend quality time with family.</li> <li>• FIFO workers value stress-relief, cultural engagement, escape from their usual ‘gaze’ (what they look at all day long), relaxation, value for money, and social opportunities.</li> <li>• Prefer holidays in Bali as they are cheaper (flights, accommodation, food and drink), have short flight time (suits the short one-week break from work and flying with children), and to experience a different culture. When evaluated as a whole, a Bali holiday provides greater value in relation to both cost and experience than a holiday in the Pilbara.</li> <li>• Pain points of travel to the Pilbara include high cost, long distances between attractions (e.g. to visit a beach), and lack of nightlife/evening shopping.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gifts for family back home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not look for visitor information about Karratha region</li> </ul>

<sup>31</sup> [Fly in to work; fly out to Bali: An exploration of Australian fly-in-fly-out \(FIFO\) workers’ leisure travel](#), 2016

## 2.3 Other VIC users and their needs

KTVC serves other customers as well as visitors. These include local tourism operators, retail businesses and residents.

Other users	Needs from VIS	How KTVC supports these users
<b>Tourism operators</b> (e.g. tour guides, accommodation operators)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make visitors aware of their offering</li> <li>• Sales/bookings/visitation</li> <li>• Effective, user-friendly online booking platform that promotes local operators, sells their products, and positions them competitively compared with other nearby destinations</li> <li>• VIC staff confident in selling local product</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides operators' brochures, and Pilbara guide and Karratha map which include operators</li> <li>• Provides booking service</li> <li>• Provides personalised advice to visitors on what to see and do (which operators to visit)</li> </ul>
<b>Other businesses</b> (e.g. retail, grocery, mechanics)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make visitors aware of the services and offerings available</li> <li>• Sales/visitation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sells locally made products and art</li> <li>• Provides personalised advice to visitors on local businesses that meet their needs (e.g. where to find caravan mechanics)</li> </ul>
<b>Residents/locals,</b> including temporary locals i.e. FIFO workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge about places for recreation e.g. trail maps</li> <li>• Up to date information on road conditions</li> <li>• Permits e.g. to use roads</li> <li>• Events calendar</li> <li>• VIS to support hosting visiting friends and relatives (VFR)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides permits</li> <li>• Provides information for when residents are hosting VFR</li> <li>• Provides recreational information</li> <li>• Sells gifts</li> </ul>

## 2.4 Visitor journey mapping

The following table outlines the current VIS touchpoints available to Karratha's visitors at each stage of their travel journey.

Dreaming	Planning	Booking	Experiencing (in region)	Sharing
Current visitor touchpoints				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Destination websites: Tourism WA, Australia's North West, Destination Pilbara, Karratha is Calling</li> <li>• Other websites (e.g. cruise lines, special interests)</li> <li>• Social media (e.g. Instagram)</li> <li>• Word of mouth from family and friends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Search engines</li> <li>• Websites (e.g. itineraries)</li> <li>• Visitor guide</li> <li>• VIC phone/email</li> <li>• Online reviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online travel agents (e.g. Booking.com)</li> <li>• Operators' websites/phone</li> <li>• Karratha is Calling website</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VIC walk-in/phone</li> <li>• Locals</li> <li>• Other travellers</li> <li>• Visitor guide/map</li> <li>• Signage/way finding</li> <li>• Destination and operators' websites</li> <li>• Online reviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social media</li> <li>• Review sites</li> <li>• Word of mouth</li> </ul>

## 2.5 Visitor flows

The main routes followed by visitors in Karratha region and throughout the Pilbara are identified as follows.

Visitor route	VIS notes
Between Perth and Broome along the North West Coastal Highway (Highway 1) south of Karratha City.	There is no appealing visitor wayfinding signage to notify those driving along the highway of tourism offerings to the north (the Dampier Archipelago, Murujuga National Park, services in Karratha City and Dampier, etc). The pull over bays have limited signage or information and, in most cases, it is outdated.
Bypassing Karratha region by driving between Port Hedland, Karijini National Park and Coral Bay/Ningaloo.	There is a need to provide information on why it is worth visiting Karratha region at or before decision making / turning away points, such as at Port Hedland and Nanutarra Roadhouse, such as billboard signage and always on digital ads where there is internet reception.
All visitors drive through Roebourne on the North West Coastal Highway	In 2022 Roebourne lost its VIC and is now missing opportunities to educate and inspire visitors at this critical turn-off point to encourage longer stays in the region. The pull over bay on the northern side of Roebourne has a dump point and information bay but it is outdated and uninspiring resulting in missed opportunities.



where visitors can be inspired to turn off to the eastern corridor (Point Samson, Cossack, etc) and influenced to stay longer.




*Pull over bay on northern side of Roebourne*



*Information boards that are outdated would benefit from upgrades (and consistency across the region)*

City of Karratha entry roads: De Witt Rd (Karratha Rd) and Madigan Rd	De Witt (Karratha Rd) is currently the main route used by visitors between the highway and the City, and the KTVC sits on this road (and not on the highway). Madigan Road is close to the Manuwarra Red Dog Highway and will be a significant visitor entry point when this road is sealed in several years' time. Signage on the highway needs to be installed to support this.
Between Karratha and Dampier, and to nearby Hearson's Cove on the Burrup Peninsula.	There is opportunity for billboard signage showcasing the Dampier Archipelago, Hearson Cove, and Murujuga National Park and its rock art along this road.
Karratha Airport	On arrival at the airport there is no inspiring signage that welcomes visitors to Karratha and showcases its hero attractions. There is an opportunity to enhance the welcome and excitement for visitors arriving by plane, at the airport, and on the road into the city.

	 <p><i>The one road into and out of the airport has opportunity for flags on the flag poles (left) and billboard signage (right).</i></p>
FIFO workers are bussed from the airport to their worksites	No signage along their routes to work to promote tourism experiences.
Roads to nature-based free campsites (e.g. Cleaverville and 40 Mile)	Wayfinding to these popular destinations could be enhanced with brown and white tourism signage. Then billboard signage and information at the campsites to inspire visitors to stay and explore the region.
Manuwarra Red Dog Highway between Karijini National Park and Karratha region	Sealing the Manuwarra Red Dog Highway will change visitor flows into and through Karratha region.

## 2.6 Visitor hotspots

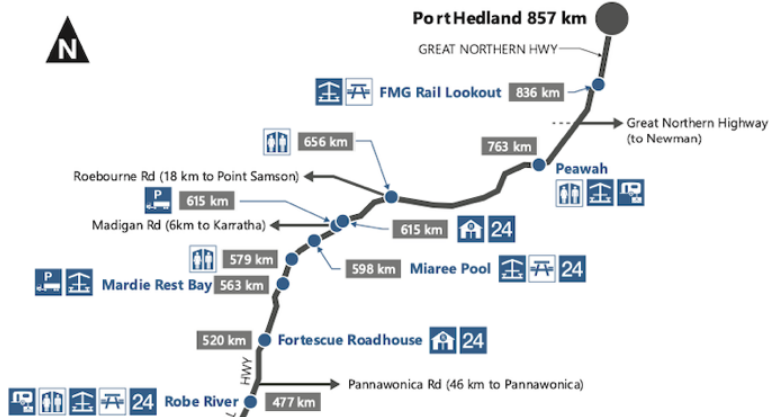

### In-region visitor hotspots

These locations across the region are likely to be frequented by visitors based on travel patterns.

Hotspot	VIS notes
Karratha Airport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attractive modern airport with opportunity to educate and inspire all visitors types and locals</li> <li>• No VIS on-site, such as destination video, brochures, displays, touchscreen linked to destination website, promotion of destination website, VIS staff.</li> <li>• Airport advertising is too expensive for tourism businesses, and is focused on mining and industry.</li> </ul> <div data-bbox="453 560 1081 969" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="1119 560 1743 969" data-label="Image"> </div> <p><i>The baggage collection airport at the Karratha airport has no current destination signage or information.</i></p>
Karratha Tourism Visitor Centre (KTVC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 37% of non-business visitors go to KTVC (2023)</li> <li>• On the main road into Karratha</li> <li>• Limited signage at all main entry points to direct visitors to the KTVC</li> <li>• Easy to access and convenient parking, including RV and caravan parking</li> <li>• No dump point or water refill</li> <li>• Billboard signage in car park is dated and damaged</li> </ul>

	<div data-bbox="453 199 913 678" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="926 199 1381 678" data-label="Image"> </div> <p data-bbox="453 683 1194 711"><i>Entrance to the KTVC (left), billboard signage in car park (right)</i></p>
<p>Roebourne, including dump point, petrol station and information bays</p>	<p>All drive visitors go through Roebourne which has a number of arts experiences and is the turning point for those wanting to explore the eastern corridor. There is no VIC in Roebourne and the information bays have outdated, unappealing signage.</p>
<p>Cleaverville, Gnoorea (40 Mile), Miaree Pool, and Fortescue River free campsites</p>	<p>No VIS other than billboards that are outdated, unreadable, and unattractive. Though Miaree Pool and Fortescue River camping is not tracked, there were 5,765 site bookings in 2024 for Cleaverville and Gnoorea combined. These locations present an opportunity to educate and inspire visitors to explore the Karratha region.</p> <div data-bbox="453 984 1089 1336" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="1102 984 1732 1336" data-label="Image"> </div> <p data-bbox="453 1341 1125 1369"><i>Outdated signage at 40 mile (left) and Miaree Pool (right)</i></p>



<p>Rest stops, information bays, and public toilets</p> <p>On Highway 1, the rest stops in Karratha region include (from north to south)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peawah</li> <li>• Roebourne</li> <li>• Karratha</li> <li>• Miaree Pool</li> <li>• Unnamed</li> <li>• Mardie</li> <li>• Fortescue Roadhouse</li> <li>• Robe River</li> </ul> <p>Additional rest stops are across the Shire, such as in Wickham.</p>	<p>With a large drive market, rest stops, pullover bays, and public toilets are important assets and opportunities to educate and inspire visitors to slow down and explore the Karratha region. Many of these types of visitor hotspots in Karratha region have outdated and uninspiring signage, and are missed opportunities.</p>  <p><i>Karratha region rest stops on Highway 1<sup>32</sup></i></p>  <p><i>Wickham rest stop is a good example of providing quality VIS as well as sense of place, telling the destination's story.</i></p>
<p>Dump point at the BP on way to Dampier, and water refill in CBD (Popular access points for these two services)</p>	<p>The main leisure market is travelling in caravans and RVs so access to facilities such as dump points and potable water is important. These provide an opportunity for VIS, particularly as visitors spend some time at them waiting to dump and refill.</p>

<sup>32</sup> Source; Driving in Western Australia A guide to safe stopping places

	 <p><i>Potable water refill station in City of Karratha.</i></p>
Shell at intersection of Madigan Road and Northwest Coastal Highway	<p>This is a main junction point and a busy petrol station. It has no VIS to support travellers.</p>  <p><i>Shell petrol station on a main entry point to Karratha.</i></p>
Cossack Heritage Town	<p>Cossack is a popular tourism attraction though visitor numbers are not tracked. Recently the state rescinded funding for the organisation that was managing the Cossack assets, so there are no longer staff on site to provide VIS. VIS could be provided by, for example, a weather protected brochure/guide holder, which would need to be refilled periodically.</p>
Point Samson Tavern	<p>This is a popular place for people to visit for meals due to its location and reputation. It attracts locals and visitors including inter-regional summer visitors.</p>

### Out of region visitor hotspots

The following hotspots provide opportunities for VIS distribution about Karratha region's attractions to pull nearby visitors into Karratha region.

Hotspot	Notes
Port Hedland	Where visitors turn off to bypass Karratha region to head to Karijini National Park on the sealed road, or their destination north from Karijini.
Whim Creek	A popular campsite between Karratha and Port Hedland just outside of Karratha region.
Karijini National Park	The park received approximately 340,000 visitors in 2019. <sup>33</sup>
Nanutarra Roadhouse, North West Coastal Highway, close to the turn off to Karijini National Park	280km south of Karratha is a key turn-off location, to drive north to Karratha, or turn off to Karijini. The Nanutarra Roadhouse provides travellers with fuel, a restaurant, a convenience store, camping and accommodation, and VIS (maps, visitor guides, and answer questions e.g. road conditions and distance to the next fuel station). The number of visitors who use the roadhouse is unknown.
Onslow	Gateway to the Mackerel Islands, Onslow is south of Karratha region, and north of the Nanutarra turnoff. The Shire of Ashburton received 365,000 visitors in 2019. <sup>34</sup>
Ningaloo / Exmouth / Coral Bay	The Shire of Exmouth received almost 200,000 visitors in 2019. <sup>35</sup> Ningaloo Reef is one of the world's longest near-shore reefs, and has UNESCO status. This region is close to where visitors turn off to bypass Karratha region on their way to or from Karijini (inland at Nanutarra).
Broome	The Shire of Broome received 335,000 visitors in 2019. <sup>36</sup> It is a visitation hotspot, including for travellers who drive across from Queensland and the Northern Territory.

<sup>33</sup> Tourism Investment Opportunities for Pilbara National Parks, n.d. (2020?)

<sup>34</sup> Tourism Research Australia, Local Government Area Profile 2019 for the Shire

<sup>35</sup> Tourism Research Australia, Local Government Area Profile 2019 for the Shire

<sup>36</sup> Tourism Research Australia, Local Government Area Profile 2019 for the Shire



### 3. Current VIS situation in Karratha

There are gaps in the current model of delivering VIS in Karratha region in terms of utilising all VIS channels, maximising outcomes from VIS, and achieving the critical success factors for VICs.

#### 3.1 Karratha visitor servicing model

The current management model of VIS in Karratha region consists of the City playing the lead role, with the following overview of who is doing what under each channel as follows. There are gaps in overall management such as ensuring consistent VIS quality across the Karratha region, and oversight management of all wayfinding and interpretive signage across the region.

VIS Channel	City's role	Role of others	Unmanaged
<b>Visitor centres and phone</b>	City funds City's KTVC (Karratha region's only VIC) and City's VIC team runs it, and answers phone calls to KTVC.		
<b>Websites including review sites</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council had the destination website (Karratha is Calling) developed it but cannot easily keep it up to date.</li> <li>• City has Google listings for some owned tourism assets.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A third party owns and manages the City's destination website.</li> <li>• Operator websites</li> <li>• Some operators and local businesses have listings on Google and other review websites.</li> </ul>	Ensuring all operators in the region have online listings (e.g. Google, ATDW)
<b>Social media</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City's Communications team runs KTVC's Facebook account (with minimal effort).</li> <li>• Messenger the KTVC Facebook page is not available.</li> </ul>	Some operators and local businesses have social media accounts.	Aside from Facebook, no other types of social media relevant to target markets is used.
<b>Electronic kiosk</b>			No electronic kiosks in the region.
<b>Email and live chat</b>	City's VIC team respond to emailed requests for information.		The destination website does not include live chat.

<b>Apps</b>		Pilbara Tourism Association manages a Pilbara region app (Warlu Way), but it is dependent on funding to keep it up to date.	
<b>Kiosks</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Operators provide collateral for distribution (e.g. brochures)</li> <li>Operators distribute collateral (e.g. Karratha map, if they request it)</li> </ul>	No kiosks in the region.
<b>Front line staff and ambassadors</b>	City is not engaging operators and others in providing consistent, quality VIS to visitors.	WA Tourism Industry Council provides training and capability building programs.	
<b>Signage</b>	No City team has oversight of City-owned VIS signage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A range of organisations address VIS signage (e.g. add new signage) (e.g. Main Roads WA, Pilbara Tourism Association)</li> <li>No one has oversight of all tourism signage, and some signage is not being updated / maintained.</li> </ul>	

Beyond Karratha region, but influencing VIS within it, are others with roles in providing VIS:

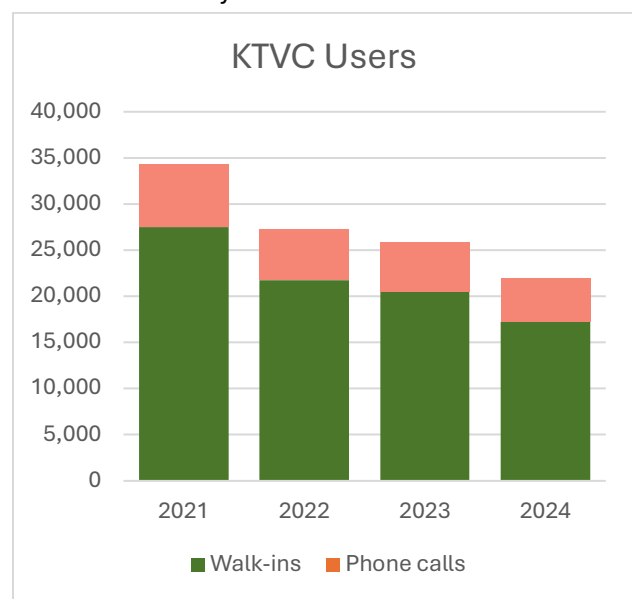
Stakeholder	VIS roles
Pilbara Tourism Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project-based, grant-funded, limited-time VIS roles</li> <li>Developed and printed Warlu Way guide (now out of print)</li> <li>Developed and later updated Warlu Way app</li> <li>Provide Destination Pilbara destination website</li> <li>Provide Warlu Way signage (but don't have funding to maintain it)</li> </ul>
Australia's North West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide Australia's North West destination website with up to date online listings via ATDW</li> <li>Provide an industry newsletter to members to notify them of VIS training opportunities</li> </ul>
Tourism WA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide Western Australia destination website with up to date online listings (information) via ATDW</li> </ul>

### 3.2 Current KTVC use

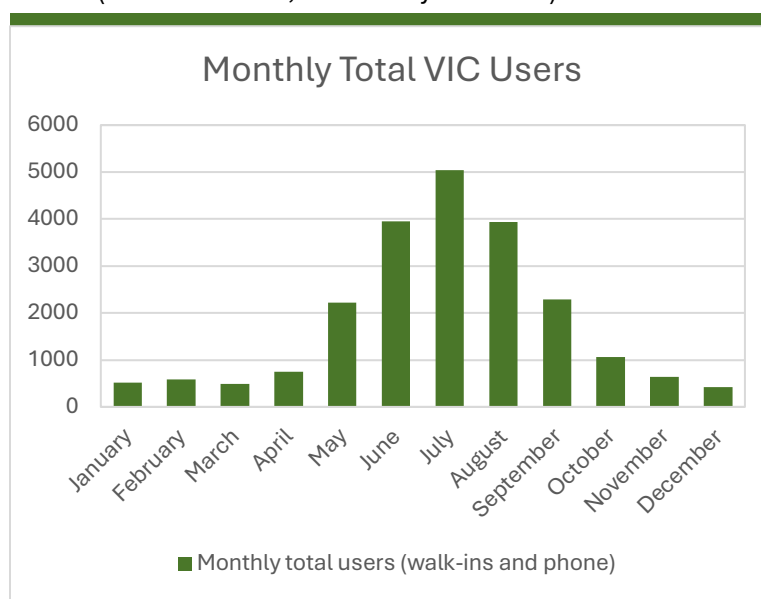
37% of non-business visitors to Karratha region visit the KTVC (2023). This is significantly higher than the national average of 6% of intrastate overnight visitors and 9% of interstate overnight visitors,<sup>37</sup> but significantly less than the average for WA, where 60% of travellers say they are likely to visit a visitor centre when on a trip in WA (62% of WA residents and 70% of east coast residents).

The following chart (KTVC Users) reveals the number of visitors the KTVC has provided with visitor information in recent years.<sup>38</sup> 2021 received higher than average visitation due to tourism impacts related to COVID. Decreasing visitation for WA regions since 2021 is a typical pattern.<sup>39</sup> 2023 likely had higher visitation than 2024 due to the solar eclipse attracting visitors to Exmouth.

The chart Monthly Total VIC Users below reveals the seasonality of the use of the KTVC (and visitation to Karratha region) based on 2024 use of KTVC. Seasonality of visitation to Karratha is due to climatic conditions (months of heat, rain and cyclone risk).



*KTVC users in recent years*



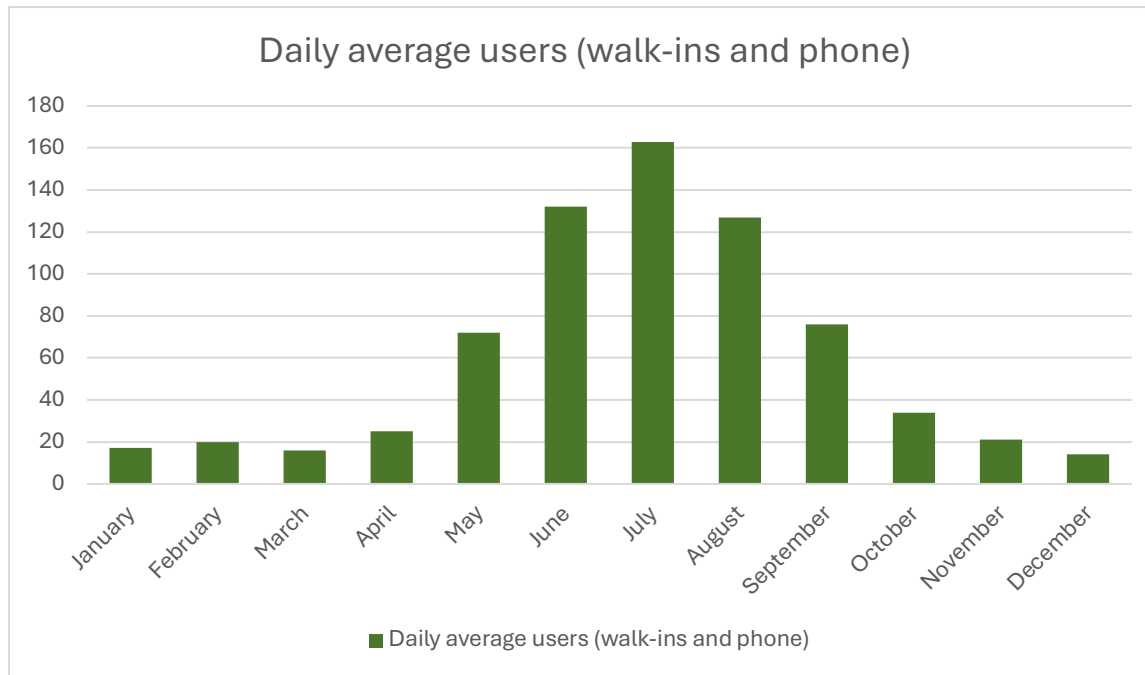
*Monthly total VIC users (walk-ins and phone)*

<sup>37</sup> A National Perspective On Visitor Information Servicing

<sup>38</sup> Emailed and direct message requests for information from visitors to KTVC are not tracked.

<sup>39</sup> Tourism Research Australia, Local Government Area Profiles for several nearby remote WA shires

The following chart reveals the average daily users each month of 2024, though it doesn't take into account days the VIC was closed. It highlights a consideration of the role of KTVc and its staff in the low visitation months.



*Average daily KTVc users (walk-ins and phone)*

### 4.3 Measuring KTVC's success

Currently, the City's annual measures for VIS in its Corporate Plan<sup>40</sup> are as follows.

Measure	Annual target	Measure	Actual
Number of visitors visiting KTVC	10,200	Recorded by KTVC staff and door counter	17,248 (2024)
Visitor spend	\$220 million	None established	\$222 million <sup>41</sup>
Percentage of visitors who stay overnight	55%	None established	Unknown <sup>42</sup>

However, in the City's annual Operational Plan<sup>43</sup>, the measures are as follows.

Measure	Annual Target	Measure	Actual
Number of visitors visiting KTVC	22,000	Recorded by KTVC staff and door counter	17,248 (2024)
Value of tour bookings made by KTVC	\$50,000	Sales	\$39,967
Performance vs importance in the annual community survey	Minimise gap between these two to 0	City's annual community survey	7.4 (2023/24) <sup>44</sup>

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council's (GSTC) [Destination Criteria](#) recommend setting quantifiable cultural and environmental targets<sup>45</sup> as well as a range of socio-economic targets. It also recommends surveying visitors to monitor visitor satisfaction.

<sup>40</sup> City of Karratha Corporate Business Plan 2020-2025

<sup>41</sup> Tourism Research Australia 2022 - 2023 (2 years average) for visitation to Karratha Local Government Area (LGA)

<sup>42</sup> Tourism Research Australia is unable to provide accurate statistics on daytrip visitors to Karratha, but indicate that 100% of visitors stay overnight

<sup>43</sup> City of Karratha Operational Plan 2024-25

<sup>44</sup> This indicates that KTVC's performance exceeds the community's perception of its importance

<sup>45</sup> Such as reduction targets for emissions, landfill, and energy and water use

## 4.4 Financial self-sufficiency of KTVC

A number of state VIC reviews undertaken across Australia<sup>46</sup> have identified that it is very challenging for VICs to establish financial sustainability. Most VICs fail to achieve financial self-sufficiency, and this struggle only becomes more challenging over time as costs increase, and consumer behaviour changes, such as increased use of online booking platforms.

The benefit of a visitor centre to its community and local visitor economy – particularly for a destination with a large drive market – can be significant but it won't be reflected in its ability to be financially self-sufficient. A VIC should not be expected to make a profit, but to be part of the hard and soft infrastructure that contributes to the overall economic contribution generated by tourism.<sup>47</sup>

Local governments are a major stakeholder in the financial sustainability of VICs. The 2024 review of Western Australian VICs<sup>48</sup> found that almost two-thirds (63%) of funding for visitor centres is provided by local governments. Around 90% of WA visitor centres receive funding from a Shire, and around 40% are 100% funded by a Shire.

To supplement the valuable financial support from a Shire, a range of other revenue sources are sought by VICs, including

- Membership fees from local operators
- Visitor servicing income
  - Commissions from bookings
  - Production of a visitor guide (advertising fees)
- Non visitor servicing income
  - Managing an attraction, café or shop
  - Holding events
  - Merchandise and other retail sales
  - Meeting room hire
  - Grants
  - Corporate sponsorship and donations

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<sup>46</sup> See <https://tilmagroup.sharepoint.com/:f/g/EtB5Vbdf3U9Lgn-mK3LLyW8Bzfnh3ssdGhHeFcCgwe1ong?e=cDjueR>

<sup>47</sup> The future of visitor centres in WA, 2014

<sup>48</sup> Measuring the Value of Visitor Centres in WA, 2024, Tourism WA

The 2024 survey of WA VIC visitors<sup>49</sup> revealed that the average additional spend in the destination per visitor to a regional WA VIC is \$150.19. This does not include those who call or email a VIC. Additionally, 1 in 4 VIC users make a booking, and 1 in 8 extend their stay.

With around 17,248 visitors to KTVC in 2024 (out of 21,996 total KTVC users including those who phone for VIS), the ROI on the City's \$618,000 investment into the VIC is estimated to be \$2.59 million, making the ROI on the City's investment into VIS approximately \$1: \$4.19. The cost per KTVC user is approximately \$28.

Following is a summary of KTVC's budget for the past two financial years (FY).

	FY 2023-24	FY 2022-23
<b>Numbers of KTVC users</b>	21,996 (2024) (15% lower than 2023)	25,885 (2023) (higher than usual due to solar eclipse in Exmouth)
<b>Revenue</b>	\$49,602 (12% lower than 22-23) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Merchandise sales \$43,461 (cost of merchandise was \$54,645) = (-\$5,239)</li> <li>Commissions \$6,141</li> <li>Sale of potable water \$0</li> </ul>	\$56,282 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Merchandise \$45,666 (cost of merchandise was \$40,535) = \$5,313</li> <li>Booking commission \$5,376</li> <li>Sale of potable water \$5,240</li> </ul>
<b>Expenses</b>	\$667,590 (30% higher than 22-23) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Salaries/staffing costs \$382,821</li> <li>Activity Based Distribution \$96,691</li> <li>Operations \$45,024 + Maintenance/parks \$21,814 = \$66,838</li> <li>Depreciation \$66,282</li> <li>Merchandise \$54,693</li> <li>Donations \$267</li> </ul>	\$515,475 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Operations, donations and depreciation were higher compared to 2023-24</li> </ul>
<b>Cost to the City</b>	(\$618,000)  The net cost to the City was 35% (\$158,807) higher than the previous year, due to Activity Based Distribution (\$96,691) and the addition of a casual staffer, payment of long service	(\$459,193)

<sup>49</sup> Measuring the Value of Visitor Centres in WA, 2024, Tourism WA



	leave and the overlap of the previous and current VIC supervisors (\$61,000).	
<b>Cost per VIC user</b>	\$28.09 <sup>50</sup>	\$17.74 <sup>51</sup>

**A key question is, in what other ways could the City spend \$618,000 to boost the local visitor economy by over \$2.59 million?**

This could be explored during the development of the City's Destination Management Plan (soon to begin development by Tilma Group).

## 4.5 Gaps analysis

Based on the above findings and analysis, below is a summary of current VIS in Karratha, highlighting what is being achieved as well as gaps in visitor servicing in the region.

Currently achieving	Gaps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The accredited KTVC is on the main road into Karratha from Highway 1. It has caravan parking, is open 7 days a week during peak visitation times, and is beside a walking trail/lookout attraction.</li> <li>KTVC is used by 37% of non-business visitors (17,248 visitors to KTVC in 2024, and 21,996 users<sup>52</sup> of KTVC), and is accessible for people with a disability.</li> <li>KTVC is staffed by 2 part time staff and 2-3 casuals (shared with other City teams) (\$382,821 in staffing costs; \$618,000 in total costs).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reliable data / data collection on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Karratha region leisure visitors</li> <li>KTVC users (including satisfaction with VIS to determine service and experience strengths and gaps)</li> <li>online VIS users (website and social media or emailed requests for VIS)</li> <li>non-VIC-users.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Business and 61% of non-business visitors don't currently use the VIC.</li> <li>Effective, comprehensive, frequent/always on, up to date digital VIS, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Destination website that the City, not a third party, owns; with comprehensive, up to date information, such as logistics information, a calendar of events, itineraries/travel plans (e.g. for families), and personalised itinerary planning (and a booking platform with Karratha-region-only product). (50% of travellers prefer online sources of information about a destination.)<sup>55</sup></li> <li>Social media accounts used effectively (i.e. managed by VIS staff).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<sup>50</sup> Based on 2024 visitation

<sup>51</sup> Based on 2023 visitation

<sup>52</sup> Those who visit or phone the VIC for information.

<sup>55</sup> Measuring the Value of Visitor Centres in WA, 2024, Tourism WA

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KTVC provides face to face personalised advice, phone and email advice, brochures, maps, road permits, guides to other en route destinations, and up to date info e.g. road conditions, what's open.</li> <li>• KTVC supports local tour operators by providing information on their offerings to visitors and taking bookings for them.</li> <li>• KTVC offers a space for local artists and businesses to sell locally made products.</li> <li>• Average additional spend per regional WA VIC visitor<sup>53</sup> is \$150.19. This indicates the ROI on the City's \$618,000 investment into KTVC is around \$2.59 million, an ROI of approximately \$1 : \$4.19.</li> <li>• The cost per KTVC user<sup>54</sup> is approximately \$28.09.</li> <li>• City's Communications team provides basic VIS via social media.</li> <li>• Karratha has a destination website.</li> <li>• KTVC provides destination info packs to conference delegates.</li> <li>• Other Pilbara LGAs also run VICs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Third party listings (e.g. Google Business Profiles and ATDW listings for local tourism operators, businesses and City-managed tourism assets e.g. key playgrounds).</li> <li>– Digital ads to in-region visitors (search and social media ads).</li> <li>• Broad distribution of the Karratha region maps through key visitor hotspots in and out of the region.</li> <li>• VIS at visitor hotspots within and beyond Karratha region.</li> <li>• Critical signage needs to be added or updated across the region to provide helpful wayfinding, and interpretation that provides visitors with a greater depth of understanding, and inspires them to explore further and stay longer.</li> <li>• Coordinated tourism signage management (several organisations play a role in developing tourism signage for Karratha region; no one has oversight of all signage – e.g. maintenance, replacement).</li> <li>• Pilbara visitor guide to support visitation to Karratha region by visitors to Karijini National Park and visitors passing through Port Hedland and Coral Coast.</li> <li>• Use of text messages / social media messaging / website live chat as a VIS channel.</li> <li>• A VIC in Roebourne, a key decision point for dispersing into the eastern corridor.</li> <li>• 24/7 VIS at the KTVC when the VIC is closed (e.g. internet access and QR codes to link to destination website; and Karratha map).</li> <li>• Internet access so visitors can access online sources of information.</li> <li>• Drawcard attraction, and drawcard children's activities and attraction, at KTVC.</li> <li>• Collaboration with other Pilbara VICs and the VICs at the broader region's key attractions: Ningaloo Reef, Karijini National Park, and Broome.</li> <li>• VIS for cruise passengers (cruise ships aren't engaging with VIC staff when planning shore experiences for passengers).</li> <li>• VIS for corporate VIPs and FIFO workers.</li> <li>• Operators and local businesses engaged to deliver consistent quality information and quality customer service.</li> <li>• Help for operators to become trade ready (sell with commission) so their product can be sold through the VIC, travel agents and online travel agents (e.g. Booking.com, Viator).</li> <li>• Leveraging regional, state and national tourism industry and training opportunities.</li> <li>• Bundling and packaging of offerings, including of non-tourism businesses (e.g. retail trail brochure)<sup>56</sup> and personalised (24/7) itinerary development.</li> </ul>
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<sup>53</sup> This does not include those who call or email a VIC for VIS

<sup>54</sup> Those who visit or phone the VIC for information.

<sup>56</sup> An example is Toowoomba's popular [Preloved Boutiques, Collectables, Antiques & Op Shop Trail brochure](#) which is online and distributed in all shops listed in the brochure, and at the VIC

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VFR are under-leveraged. Engaging locals to source tourism information (at the VIC and online) to support planning for when family and friends visit, and engaging locals with the VIC (e.g. by adding an art exhibition room and hosting regular exhibition opening evenings).</li> <li>• Trail maps (biking, hiking, kayaking, boating).</li> <li>• Encouraging user-generated content (e.g. with a regional hashtag or competition).</li> </ul>
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## PART 2: The future of VIS for Karratha

The following is based on the findings and analysis of Part 1 of this Paper and is for discussion and feedback from the City’s Project Steering Group.

### 4. Proposed vision for visitor servicing in Karratha region

The Karratha region community welcomes and inspires visitors at all stages of their travel journey, by curating and sharing our region’s hidden wonders, and connecting visitors with our region’s people and places. We support a sustainable visitor economy and create passionate advocacy for our region.

### 5. Proposed purposes of visitor servicing in Karratha region

In determining the best visitor servicing model for Karratha, it is important to understand the purpose and outcomes sought from

VIS. Suggested desired outcomes of visitor information servicing<sup>57</sup> for City of Karratha include:

- a) Draw visitors who are in the broader Pilbara region into Karratha region.
- b) Increase yield from visitors through increases in expenditure and/or average length of stay.
- c) Disperse visitors across the Karratha region.
- d) Increase the spend of visitors with local businesses (tourism operators, artists, retailers, etc), to support the growth of local tourism industry.
- e) Support liveability.<sup>58</sup>
- f) Generate a sustainable return on investment (ROI) to the City through increased spend in Karratha, visitor dispersal, brand awareness, and value for local businesses and residents.

These desired outcomes will be used to form the measures of success as outlined on page 50 of this Paper.

### The value of visitors staying one more night

If the VIC staff have the goal of encouraging every VIC visitor to stay one more night in the Karratha region, which would support many of the points above, this would equate to an estimated additional \$3.49 million injected into the local visitor economy (based on 21,996 VIC users/year<sup>59</sup> and an average spend of \$159/night for holiday visitors to Karratha<sup>60</sup>).

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<sup>57</sup> Outcomes for destination marketing, product/experience development, and industry capacity building would be different – e.g. to attract or enable more visitors to Karratha region.

<sup>58</sup> Supporting the City's vision to be Australia's most liveable regional City

<sup>59</sup> 2024 VIC users (visiting the VIC, or phoning for information)

<sup>60</sup> 2020-2021 (2 years average)

## 6. Visitor servicing scenarios for consideration

The City has requested three scenarios for lower, medium, and higher involvement in providing VIS. The following three scenarios differ by low, medium, and higher investment of human and financial resourcing and have factored in the findings and analysis from Part 1 of this Paper.

Scenario 1: Lower involvement Model: Dispersed & Online Visitor Servicing	Scenario 2: Medium involvement (Recommended) Model: Omni-Channel Approach with refurbished Welcome Centre	Scenario 3: Higher involvement Model: Omni-Channel Approach with two Welcome Centres
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remove bricks and mortar (KTVC)</li> <li>Email and live chat using AI as first response, and phone</li> <li>Mobile / pop-up visitor centre</li> <li>Modern &amp; effective digital presence (destination website, app, ATDW and Google Business Profile listings, and social media)</li> <li>Improve and optimise key signage and information bays</li> <li>Information at visitor hotspots (e-kiosk or brochure rack),<sup>61</sup> including at Karratha airport</li> <li>Out-of-Shire VIS such as billboards and presence in VICs (Broome and Coral Coast)</li> <li>Upskill operators to play a VIS role (ambassadors)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refurbished KTVC as Welcome Centre with a focus on improving financial sustainability</li> <li>Mobile / pop-up visitor centre to be used at hot spots</li> <li>Modern &amp; effective digital presence (destination website, app, ATDW and Google Business Profile listings, and social media) – taken in house as a role of the VIS team</li> <li>Improve and optimise key signage and information bays</li> <li>Information at visitor hotspots (e-kiosk or brochure rack),<sup>62</sup> including at Karratha airport</li> <li>Out-of-Shire VIS such as billboards and presence in VICs (Broome and Coral Coast)</li> <li>Upskill operators to play a VIS role (ambassadors)</li> <li>Improved collaboration of the Pilbara VICs</li> <li>Measure, use, and report visitor data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refurbished KTVC as Welcome Centre, with the addition of an attraction (e.g. aboriginal art exhibition and workshop space)</li> <li>VIC/Welcome Centre in Roebourne</li> <li>Modern &amp; effective digital presence (destination website, app, ATDW and Google Business Profile listings, and social media) – taken in house as a role of the VIS team</li> <li>Improve and optimise key signage and information bays</li> <li>Information at visitor hotspots (e-kiosk or brochure rack),<sup>63</sup> including at Karratha airport</li> <li>Out-of-Shire VIS such as billboards and presence in VICs (Broome and Coral Coast)</li> <li>Improved collaboration of the Pilbara VICs</li> <li>Upskill operators to play a VIS role (ambassadors) and to manage their ATDW and Google Business Profiles</li> <li>Measure, use, and report visitor data</li> </ul>

<sup>61</sup> E-kiosks may be more expensive to set up and maintain when needed, but they don't require regular refills of printed materials, and information can be updated instantly. E-kiosks can also raise revenue, such as via ad revenue, and provide emergency information, such as for road closures.

<sup>62</sup> E-kiosks may be more expensive to set up and maintain when needed, but they don't require regular refills of printed materials, and information can be updated instantly. E-kiosks can also raise revenue, such as via ad revenue, and provide emergency information, such as for road closures.

<sup>63</sup> E-kiosks may be more expensive to set up and maintain when needed, but they don't require regular refills of printed materials, and information can be updated instantly. E-kiosks can also raise revenue, such as via ad revenue, and provide emergency information, such as for road closures.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide VIS to cruise, FIFO and corporate VIP visitors</li> <li>• Training and familiarisation tours for operators</li> <li>• Resident engagement campaign to build local pride and advocates</li> </ul>
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## Improved financial sustainability

Following are suggestions to reduce the cost per visitor to KTVIC, raise its revenue, and reduce its costs.

Increase ROI / reduce cost per visitor	Revenue opportunities	Cost savings opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attract more visitors to the VIC e.g. by adding an attraction (to reduce the cost per visitor (depending on the cost of the attraction))</li> <li>• Attract more visitors into Karratha region from neighbouring regions<sup>64</sup> (this will also increase VIC visitation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help more operators become trade ready so there is more product to book (to increase commissions)</li> <li>• Increase retail sales of high profit items</li> <li>• Add a destination video wall and sell advertising to operators</li> <li>• Sell coffees/teas using an automated coffee machine (VIS benefit: encourage visitors to linger and learn more)</li> <li>• Provide MTB<sup>65</sup> hire for the trails behind the VIC</li> <li>• Sell MTB/bike basics</li> <li>• Add an EV charger (a benefit is charger users will likely spend 20 minutes in the VIC or on the trail)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add solar panels to eliminate the VIC's electricity bill (\$5,700/year)</li> </ul>

<sup>64</sup> This is more of a function of destination marketing than visitor information servicing.

<sup>65</sup> MTB = mountain bike; eMTB = electric mountain bike

## 7. Co-location of the KTVC

The City has reviewed a number of scenarios for co-locating KTVC with an existing building within Karratha City's Central Business District (CBD) as a strategy to attract more visitors into the VIC. The following potential co-location scenarios were reviewed:

Co-location scenario	Pros of the location	Cons of the location	Overall finding
Current location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Located on the main entry road to Karratha City from Highway 1.</li> <li>Has parking and caravan parking.</li> <li>At the trailhead of a trail attraction.</li> <li>Has room to expand VIS or provide an attraction within the existing footprint.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>After 2028 when the Manuwarra Red Dog Highway is sealed, more visitors will arrive in Karratha City via Madigan Road. However, others will still arrive from the south and the north.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suitable to remain a VIC</li> </ul>
Walgu Apartments (art creation and exhibition space) Currently in master planning stage. Planned to be constructed on Sharpe Avenue and Dampier Highway opposite Red Earth Arts Precinct (REAP).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Close to downtown to encourage visitor spend at local businesses.</li> <li>After 2028 when the Manuwarra Red Dog Highway is sealed, more visitors will arrive in Karratha City via Madigan Road.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For five months of the year, KTVC serves 70-170 visitors per day. The Walgu Apartments master plan reveals there isn't sufficient space for a VIC that includes staff, staff-supported bookings, and information distribution as well as the retail that supports the VIC's financial viability.</li> <li>Limited parking, and no caravan/RV parking.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suitable for VIS such as a brochure rack or digital kiosk but insufficient room for a VIC that includes staff, staff-supported bookings, and information distribution as well as the retail that supports the VIC's financial viability.</li> </ul>
REAP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Close to downtown to encourage visitor spend at local businesses.</li> <li>After 2028 when the Manuwarra Red Dog Highway is sealed, more visitors will arrive in Karratha City via Madigan Road.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Insufficient space for a VIC that includes staff, staff-supported bookings, and information distribution as well as the retail that supports the VIC's financial viability.</li> <li>Limited parking and no caravan/RV parking.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suitable for VIS such as a brochure rack or digital kiosk but insufficient room for a VIC.</li> </ul>



The Quarter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mixed use precinct downtown including offices, retail stores, cafes, restaurants, and residences.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No caravan/RV parking and limited street parking in the vicinity.</li> <li>The building has ‘corporate’ and clinical feel, rather an inviting tourism experience.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suitable for a brochure rack or digital kiosk but insufficient room for a VIC.</li> </ul>
Airport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13% of holidaymakers arrive by air to Karratha (around 30,000/year average from 2017-2019).<sup>66</sup></li> <li>62% of VFR arrive by air (around 11,000/year average from 2017-2019).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most leisure visitors aren’t flying in, and most FIFO workers aren’t interested in tourism experiences in Karratha region.</li> <li>10 minutes from Highway 1 resulting in fewer impulsive stops by visitors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suitable for a brochure rack or digital kiosk.</li> </ul>

KTVC’s current location is well positioned to capture traffic after it turns off the Northwest Coastal Highway (Highway 1) towards the city centre. The location is easy to access off the highway, has good parking, is accessible for people with disability, is connected to the CBD via an approximately 600m-long footpath, and is co-located with the visitor attractions of a lookout and trails. Tilma recommends not to move KTVC, as there is no suitable co-location scenario, and the current location provides growth and development opportunities.

Co-location without close consideration can cause more harm than good:

“If the success factors are not in place, co-location can result in poor performance. In Wagga Wagga, a six-month trial of moving visitor centre services to the Civic Centre and Art Gallery building failed to deliver the expected range of efficiencies and was unpopular with locals and visitors due to space constraints and a less accessible location.

The former Clare Valley VIC in SA was closed after its relocation with the local library performed poorly. The rationale for the move was to streamline Council services with a shared space and staff resources. Limited accessibility due to lack of parking and VIC services reduced to a computer and brochure racks meant the VIC failed to thrive in that location. The VIC has since returned to the former site and is flourishing.”<sup>67</sup>

Coupled with the need to consider the visitor journey, and stages such as pre trip planning where online visitor servicing plays a critical role in achieving the objectives of visitor servicing, there are more important VIS elements for City of Karratha to consider other than re-locating the KTVC, as outlined in the three VIS model scenarios.

<sup>66</sup> Karratha Airport Origin Data presentation

<sup>67</sup> A National Perspective On Visitor Information Servicing

## 8. Measures of success and targets

To develop VIS targets, it is essential to identify the desired outcomes of VIS. Tilma recommends setting targets, measuring a baseline, and annually measuring the following desired outcomes.

VIC-specific measures are not relevant to Scenario 1, and alternative measures will be provided if the City chooses Scenario 1.

Desired VIS outcome	Measure	Means of measurement
Draw visitors who are in the broader Pilbara region into Karratha region.	Increase in visitation to Karratha region.	Tourism Research Australia data <sup>68</sup> and/or purchased visitor data
Increase yield from visitors through growth in spend and/or average length of stay.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Average visitor spend.</li> <li>Average visitor length of stay.</li> </ul>	Tourism Research Australia data and/or purchased visitor data
Disperse visitors across the Karratha region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of bookings with operators outside of Karratha City, and bookings of City's campsites.</li> <li>Number of personalised itineraries created.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>VIC's booking website and/or destination website</li> <li>VIC staff or website (AI-generated itineraries).</li> </ul>
Increase the spend of visitors with local businesses.	Average visitor spend.	Tourism Research Australia data and/or purchased visitor data
	Total value of sales of locally produced retail and art via the VIC (Scenarios 2 & 3).	VIC
	Total value of bookings made at the VIC (number of bookings, and total value) (Scenarios 2 & 3), and/or made via the destination website.	VIC's booking website and/or destination website
Liveability	Numbers of locals using the destination website, and VIC (Scenarios 2 & 3).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Website analytics</li> <li>VIC</li> </ul>
Generate a sustainable return on investment (ROI) to the City through increased spend in Karratha, visitor dispersal, brand awareness, and value for local businesses and residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ROI of City investment into VIS in terms of economic impact of visitors in Karratha region.</li> <li>Complete and accurate online listings of Karratha region attractions and tourism-related businesses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of VIC visitors x \$150.19 increase in average spend of a regional WA VIC visitor / City investment into VIS.</li> </ul>

<sup>68</sup> Once FIFO visitation is excluded from Tourism Research Australia's data for Karratha region, data is likely to be unusable. For example, for [domestic overnight leisure visitors to Karratha region](#) in 2021-2022 (2 years average) and 2022-2023 (2 years average) Tourism Research Australia's data is too sparse to be publishable due to low visitation (under 24,000 annual leisure visitors).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• VIC staff familiarity with the region’s tourism product, and ability to share local stories and inspire visitors (Scenarios 2 &amp; 3).</li><li>• Retail sales made at the VIC (Scenarios 2 &amp; 3).</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Numbers of ATDW listings and Google Business Profiles for tourism-related businesses.</li></ul>
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## APPENDIX: Background to the Recommended Scenarios

### 9. Methodology

To develop a Visitor Information Servicing Review Report for the City, Tilma has undertaken the following

- Consultation with a broad range of VIS stakeholders within and beyond Karratha region.
- Extensive desktop review related to VIS in, and visitors to, Karratha region, and best practice VIS in WA, in other states, and nationally.
- Development of an audit of KTVC, tourism flows and hotspots across Karratha region, and VIS in Karratha region.

All information in this paper is sourced from this research, a summary of which is located [here](#).

#### 11.1 Consultations

Tilma consulted the following diverse VIS stakeholders.

City representatives	Relevant organisations representatives	Tourism operators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Two City Councillors</li><li>• City Growth, Manager</li><li>• KTVC, Manager and staff</li><li>• Community Planning, Manager</li><li>• Karratha Airport, Manager</li><li>• Marketing &amp; Communications, Manager</li><li>• Economic Development Project Officer</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Australia's North West, Destination Development Manager and CEO</li><li>• Pilbara Tourism Association, Chair</li><li>• Regional Development Australia Pilbara, CEO</li><li>• Pilbara Development Commission</li><li>• Tourism Western Australia, Tourism Experience Development Manager</li><li>• Onslow Visitor Centre, Manager</li><li>• Newman Visitor Centre, Manager</li><li>• Pilbara Ports Authority, Corporate Affairs</li><li>• Town of Port Hedland, Principal Economic Development</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation, Manager, Conzinc Bay Project; Business Development Manager; Rangers Manager; Ranger</li><li>• Ngarluma and Yindjibarndi Foundation Ltd (NYFL), Executive Officer</li><li>• Samson Tavern, Manager</li><li>• Point Samson Resort, Manager</li><li>• Ngurrangga Tours, Owner/Manager</li><li>• Lethal Adventures, Owner/Manager</li><li>• Seafarers Centre, Manager and Tour Guide</li><li>• Grateful Remnants, Owner/Manager</li><li>• North West Shelf Natural Gas Project Visitor Centre, Corporate Affairs Manager</li></ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lo's Cafe and Dining, Owner/Manager</li> <li>Soak, Owners/Managers</li> <li>Wrapped Creations, Owner/Manager</li> </ul>
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## 11.2 Key documents reviewed

In addition to developing an audit of Karratha region's VIS and tourism product and experiences, Tilma reviewed [a broad range of relevant documents](#), including the following key documents.

### VIS Specific

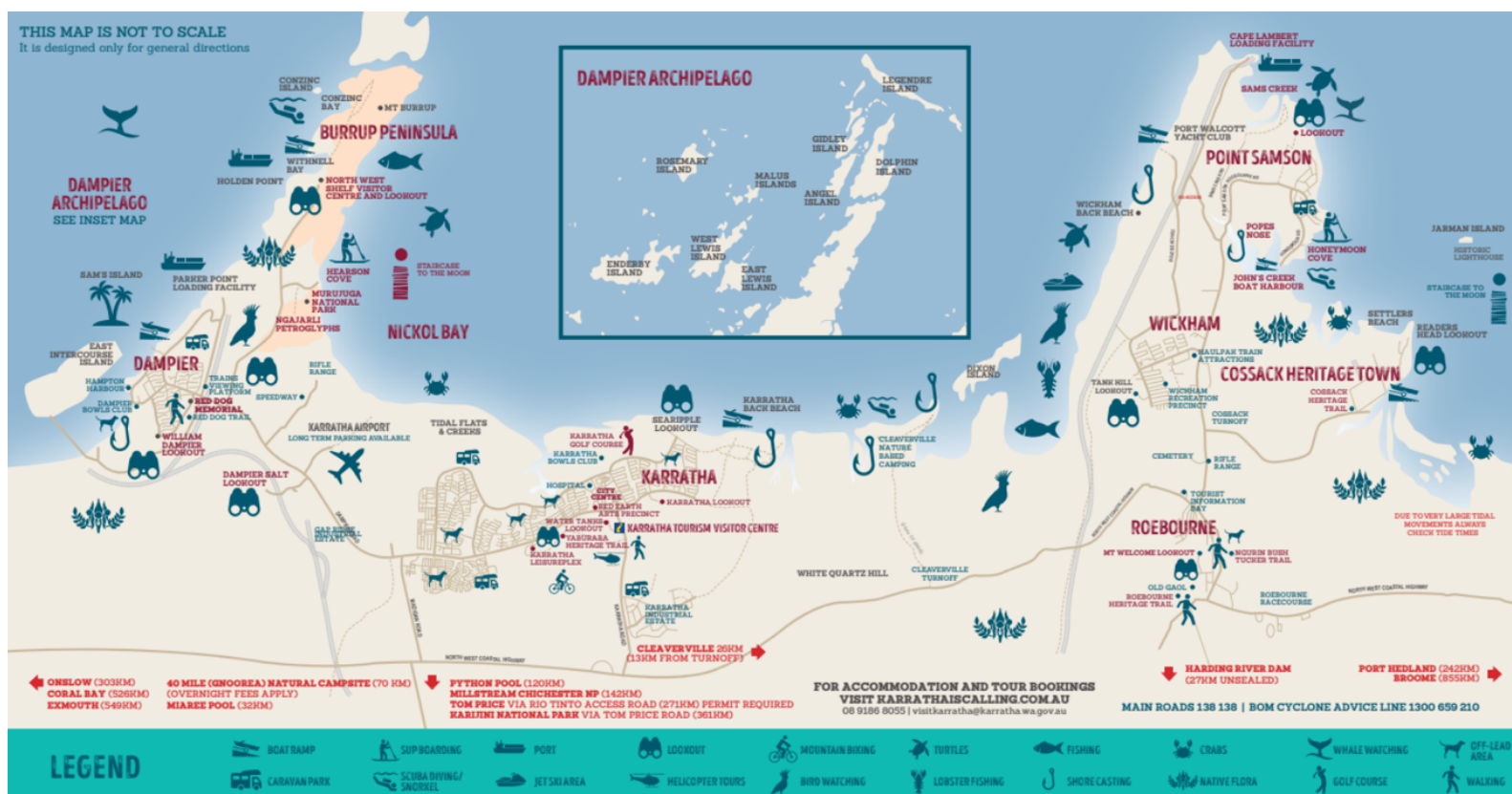
National/international	WA and Karratha	Other states
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A National Perspective on Visitor Information Servicing</li> <li>Measuring the Emotional and Social Value of the Tourist Information Centre, European Tourism Futures Institute, 2022</li> <li>A Quick Snapshot of Australia's Accredited VICs</li> <li>Economic Impact Analysis of the i-SITE Network, i-SITE New Zealand, 2015</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measuring the Value of Visitor Centres in WA, Tourism WA, 2024</li> <li>The Influence of Western Australian Visitor Centres on Tourist Behaviour, Tourism Research Australia, 2015</li> <li>Value of Visitor Centres, Tourism Council WA, 2015</li> <li>Visitor Centre Accreditation Requirements</li> <li>The Future of Visitor Centres in WA, Tourism WA, 2013</li> <li>KTVC Review 2022</li> <li>The Future of Tourism Services in the City of Karratha, 2018</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Victorian Accredited Visitor Information Servicing Guidelines, 2018</li> <li>Victorian Accredited Visitor Information Servicing Survey, 2021</li> <li>Murray Region Visitor Servicing Transformation Project, 2019</li> <li>Rethink! Reimagining Visitor Servicing, 2018</li> <li>White Paper: The Future of Visitor Servicing, Visit Victoria, 2019</li> <li>Visitor Servicing Toolkit, Victoria Tourism Industry Council</li> <li>A Way Forward for Queensland VICs, Tourism &amp; Events Queensland</li> </ul>

## Other

- Visitor statistics provided by Tourism Research Australia, Tourism WA, Spendmapp, Karratha Airport, Ailevon Pacific Aviation Consulting, and KTVC
- Tourism signage audits and strategies
- Tourism development opportunities and future projects
- Regional destination management plans (Tourism WA, Australia's North West, Pilbara Tourism Association) , tourism strategies (trails and cycling) and economic development strategies
- A review of recent activities by Pilbara Tourism Association (PTA)
- A review of recent City and PTA marketing strategies, activities, and collateral, including digital forms
- City strategic plans, including for tourism, community, City operations, infrastructure
- Future development master plans and business cases (e.g. for Conzinc Bay Project, Walgu Apartments, Dampier, Dampier marina, etc)

## 10. Karratha region's tourism context

The Karratha region lies along the Western Australian coast in the Pilbara region between Exmouth and Port Hedland, and between the tourism destinations of the Coral Coast to the south (Exmouth, Shark Bay), Karijini National Park (inland in the Shire of Ashburton), and Broome to the north in the Kimberley region. Many visitors to the Pilbara travelling north from Perth to Broome via Highway 1, or circumnavigating Australia, bypass Karratha region by heading inland to experience Karijini National Park, which welcomes twice as many visitors as Karratha does.



Tourism map of Karratha region<sup>69</sup>

Karratha has world-class coastlines, beaches, nature and wildlife (marine and land-based), and world-class Aboriginal culture and heritage.

The primary tourism season is between late April and the end of October due to summers that are hot (with 100 days per year over 35C) and humid with heavy summer rains and cyclones impacting unsealed roads. This means climate change is a risk to visitation to Karratha region.<sup>70</sup> The cooler seasons offer beautiful sunny days and mild nights.

<sup>69</sup> KTVIC

<sup>70</sup> Significant reductions in visitation to the Pilbara already occur when summer heat starts earlier or lasts longer as caravanners tend to head south (or stay south) when there are several days above 35°C in the region, according to Pilbara VIC staff.

Key tourism themes in Karratha region are:

Theme	Examples
Adventure	4WDing, sea kayaking, mountain bike riding, snorkelling, fishing
Heritage & Culture	Ancient rock art, traditional and contemporary Aboriginal culture, pearling history
Nature	Immersive marine and desert biodiversity and ecosystems, pristine coastlines, National Parks, setting for adventure activities
Industry	Salt, iron ore, and gas mining

The major towns of the region include Karratha in the centre of the region (the major population centre of the Pilbara region), Dampier in the west, and Roebourne, Wickham, Point Samson, and Cossack in the east (the eastern corridor). Until 2022, a visitor centre was hosted in Roebourne.

There is limited accommodation (and quality accommodation), tours, experiences, and access for visitors to hero experiences such as Dampier Archipelago. These are due to significant barriers related to remoteness and competition for staff and housing with the resources industry. Additionally, cost for visitors are high due to the region's remoteness, so most travellers through the region are high-yield travellers. Most non-business (leisure, VFR, education, and other) travellers to the region are caravanners and RVers.

Three near-term major projects are likely to influence the number of visitors travelling into Karratha:

- An upgrade to the Dampier Wharf that is currently underway will enable shore visits by small cruise ships.
- The potential announcement of UNESCO World Heritage status for the Burrup Peninsula in mid-2025.
- The sealing of the Manuwarra Red Dog Highway between Karijini National Park and the City of Karratha, which may be completed by 2029.

A further expected future development of a Murujuga Living Knowledge Centre and tourism precinct in the Murujuga National Park at the end of the Burrup Peninsula will also support increased tourism.

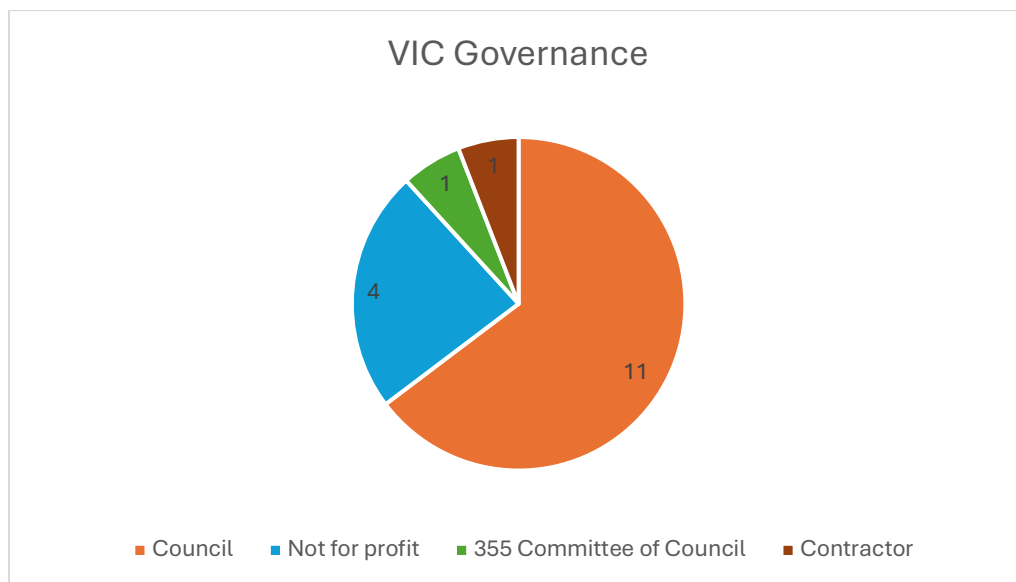


## 11. Benchmarking

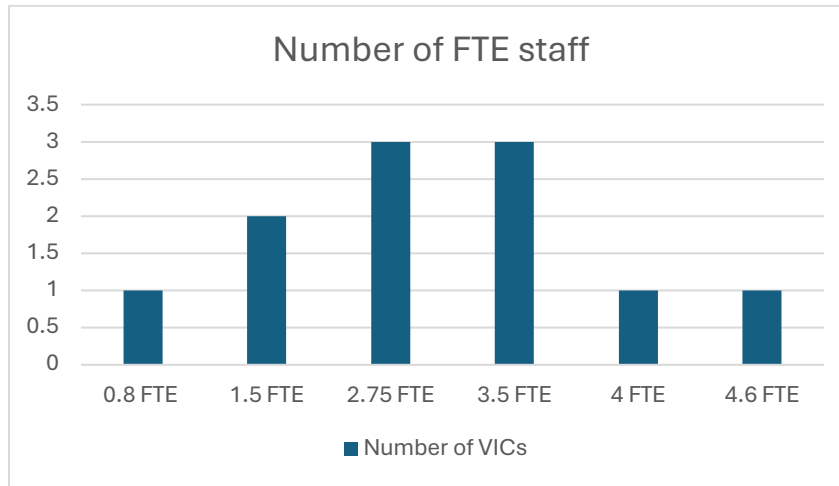
Tilma undertook [benchmarking](#) of 10 VICs in the Pilbara, WA, and other states, seeking to compare KTVc with VICs in regions of a similar remoteness and similar population. All but one were accredited VICs. Incomplete benchmarking information was sourced for a further 15 VICs.

It is very difficult to benchmark VICs and identify best practice as the tourism context for each is so different.

Of the VICs where information on governance was available, 65% were managed (and funded) by the Shire:



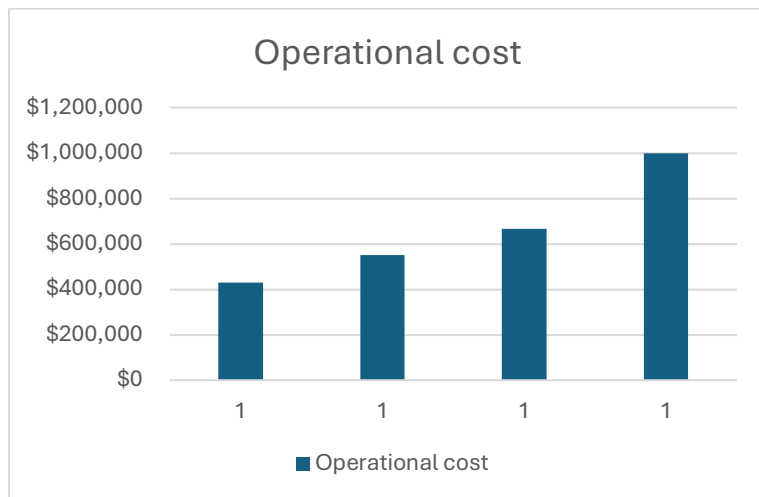
For the VICs that provided information on staffing levels and numbers of volunteers, the range was approximately as follows for paid staff.



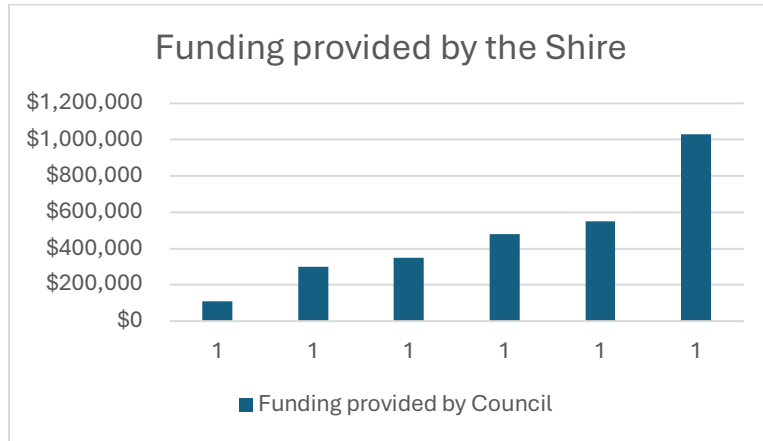
However, the numbers of staff ranged from 2 to 21 staff.

Numbers of volunteers ranged from none up to 12. In some cases, the volunteers supported a co-located attraction e.g. walking tours or a museum.

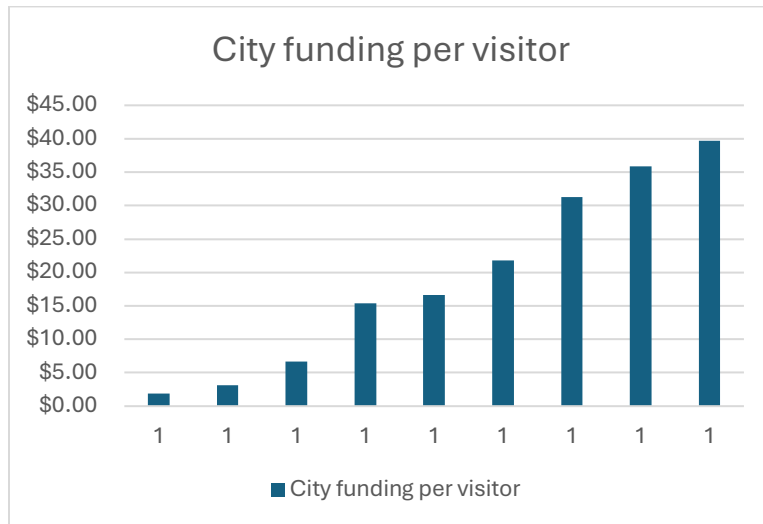
Only a few VICs shared their total operational costs, which ranged from \$430,000 to \$1 million.



Similarly, only a few VICs shared how much funding was provided by the Shire, ranging from \$109,000 to \$1,031,000, averaging around \$420,000/year:

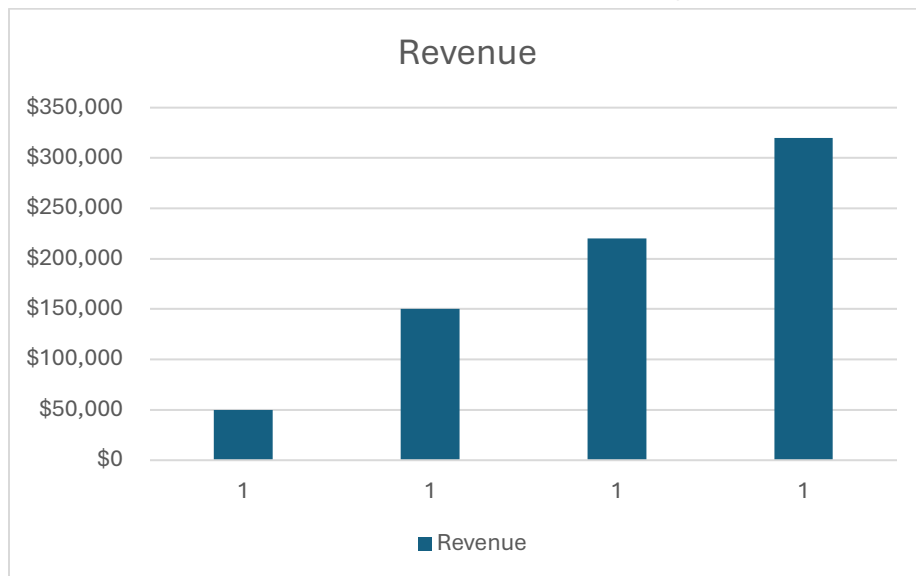


Shire funding per visitor<sup>71</sup> averaged around \$19/visitor but varied from \$1.90 to \$39.67:



<sup>71</sup> This does not include those who call or email the VIC for information

Only a few VICs shared their annual revenue, which ranged from \$49,600 to \$320,000:



## 12. Case studies of how VICs attract and engage visitors

Following are a range of ways visitor centres across Australia are attracting and engaging visitors.

Visitor centre	What the VIC does	Learnings for Karratha
Albany, WA	<p>The VIC provides a five-minute interactive virtual reality experience for \$2 to showcase a few of the best local attractions from a different perspective. The immersive 360° VR video takes users flying off the edge of The Gap, soaring above a wind farm and stunning coastline, and swimming underwater with orcas.</p> <p>The VIC exclusively sells a discount <a href="#">Great Southern Flexi Pass</a> where purchasers receive 1/4 off the price of a choice of attractions. (Discounts will draw in travellers that don't normally go to a VIC.)<sup>72</sup></p> <p>In partnership with Children's University Western Australia, the VIC provides learning activities as a Learning Destination. Activity participants earn 'hours' in a passport for each activity they complete, such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Public Art Trail activity sheet and trail brochure (to explore the local art trail)</li> <li>• Exploring Amazing Albany activity sheet</li> <li>• Downloadable worksheets</li> <li>• An <a href="#">Anytime Orienteering map</a> to explore the city - the goal is to visit each check point and match the location with a corresponding photo.</li> </ul> <p>The VIC provides public showers for a \$5 fee.</p> <p>The VIC uses a <a href="#">simple form</a> to populate their website with operator listings</p>	<p>Provide a way for visitors to access local attractions that are difficult to access due to lack of tourism operators, such as the Dampier Archipelago (islands and underwater wildlife), mining (behind the gate), and rock art (beyond the Nganjarli/Deep Gorge boardwalk), and with insights from a virtual guide (e.g. a miner or a Traditional Owner).</p> <p>Activate the VIC with children's activities.</p> <p>Make it easy and automated for local operators to get listed on the destination website.</p>

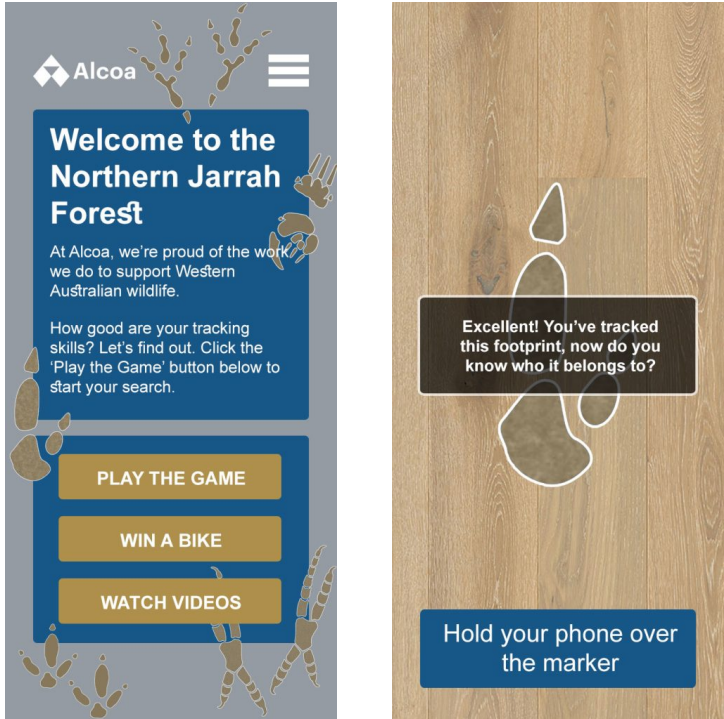
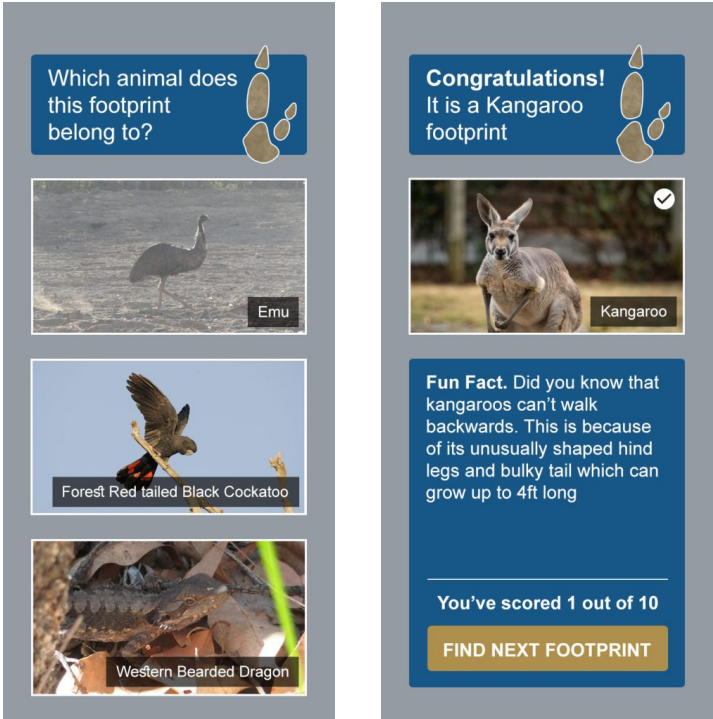
<sup>72</sup> Measuring the Value of Visitor Centres in WA, 2024. 28% of survey respondents said deals, offers, or discounts would entice them to visit a VIC.

Visitor centre	What the VIC does	Learnings for Karratha
Julia Creek, QLD	<p>The VIC features a viewing area and twice-daily feedings for the local endangered nocturnal dunnart (a mouse-like nocturnal marsupial). Visitors see the feisty animals in action and audio explains the background of the threatened species and local efforts to save it from extinction: a nature refuge and a captive breeding program.<sup>73</sup></p> <p>For a \$5 fee, the VIC provides an immersive virtual reality mustering experience for visitors, from the back of a dirt bike, inside a chopper, sitting on the rails of a cattle yard, and watching cattle being loaded.</p> <p>The VIC hosts weekly campfire dinners at a caravan park, engaging visitors with stories about local Outback life.</p>	<p>Engage visitors in a unique attraction aligned with the region's strength of nature.</p> <p>Enable visitors to talk with locals and learn local stories, such as by hosting an artist in residence, or host to Elders read or tell local traditional children's stories.</p>
Dwellingup, WA	<p>The VIC engages visitors in the local aluminium mine's post-mining revegetation via a VR video that shows visitors what happens during the bush regeneration, and an interactive <a href="#">AR mobile app information gathering game</a> and prize. Native fauna footprints and scat decals are placed around the visitor centre and act as AR markers (see images below). Visitors download the app, find decals, and hover their device's camera over the image which brings up multiple choice questions and answers. If the user gets enough questions right, they receive a free gift from the VIC and can enter a prize draw to win a mountain bike.</p>	<p>Leverage VR and AR to engage visitors in the region's strength of nature.</p>



*Endangered animal display*


<sup>73</sup> Source: [www.abc.net.au/news/2015-12-31/endangered-julia-creek-dunnarts-conservation/7060602](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-12-31/endangered-julia-creek-dunnarts-conservation/7060602)

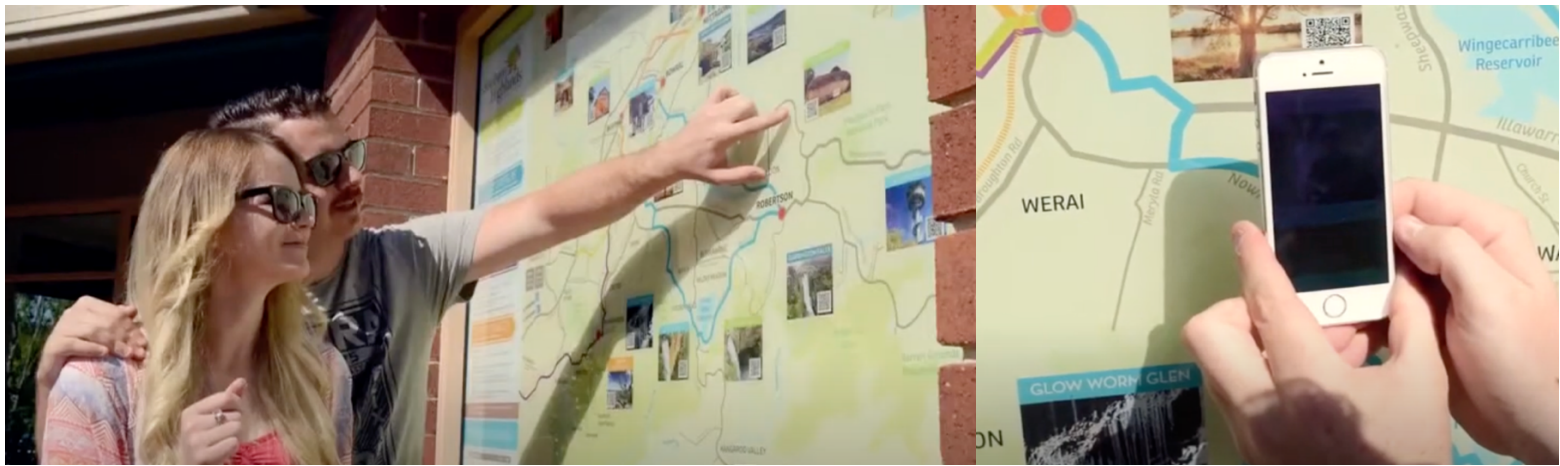
Visitor centre	What the VIC does	Learnings for Karratha
		
Quilpie, QLD	<p>The VIC is co-located with a local history museum, a local military history museum, a local railway history museum, and the Shire Gallery.</p> <p>The Gallery hosts an exhibition each month, and each exhibition has an official opening which visitors and locals are invited to attend.</p> <p>The VIC hosts a highly-rated night show: a big screen outdoor film on Quilpie's history, including local dinosaurs, the traditional lives of the Maranganji, opal mining, and early pastoral settlements. The \$30 ticket includes drinks and nibbles.</p> <p>The VIC provides a Driver Reviver free cuppa (a reason to visit the VIC).</p>	<p>Provide an attraction that engages visitors with local art, such as a local art gallery activated by a rotating artist in residence each day.</p>



Visitor centre	What the VIC does	Learnings for Karratha
Noosa, QLD	At 7pm each night, when the shopping street that the VIC is on is busy, visitors gather around on the street in front of the VIC to watch a powerful <a href="#">Welcome to Country film</a> by the Kabi Kabi - a virtual opportunity to gather at the camp fire and share time and local knowledge with the traditional custodians. The film provides insights into the region's traditional culture, language, dance, and stories. The film is projected onto a unique paint on one of the VIC's windows which allows the imagery in the film to 'float', creating a gentle holographic feel.	Enable visitors to the VIC to learn about Karratha region's Traditional Owners, their cultures, stories, and knowledge.
Kununurra, WA	The VIC delivers the region's destination marketing, such as digital ads and attending caravan expos, promoting the VIC as a conduit to the region's operators.	Undertake destination marketing, particularly to visitors in-region in and around the Pilbara.
Ballina, NSW	<p>The coffee lounge at the BP Ballina Travel Centre on the M1 Pacific Motorway (the east coast's key coastal highway) includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two interactive touchscreens for exploring the region (see images below).</li> <li>• A screen playing a destination video.</li> <li>• A regional map alongside destination imagery.</li> <li>• The destination's map and guide.</li> </ul> <p>Hundreds of travellers pass through the 24-hour highway service centre every day which includes fuel, a café, takeaway food, a playground, and truckers' amenities (showers, washing machines, lounge, and kitchen); the perfect opportunity to showcase the beauty of the region and encourage visitors to stop, explore, and return.</p>	Provide engaging VIS at non-VIC tourism hotspots.

Visitor centre	What the VIC does	Learnings for Karratha
	 <p data-bbox="373 735 1176 768"><i>Electronic kiosks and brochure distribution at Ballina fuel stop.</i></p>	

Visitor centre	What the VIC does	Learnings for Karratha
Southern Highlands, NSW	<p>The VIC's fun <a href="#">toilets</a>, painted in the region's brand colours, provide lots of information on local attractions, from 5 interpretive signs along the pathway to the toilets (with QR codes to further, up to date information online), a poster checklist about the VIC (fill your water bottles, recharge your phone, grab a \$2 coffee, buy local wine and produce, etc), did you know facts about the region as colourful stickers (even on the ceiling!), a selfie mirror over the urinal (!), and an audio program on repeat.</p>  <p><i>Information on upcoming events</i></p> <p>The VIC provides comfy seating where visitors can relax with a coffee in front of a video wall of destination videos.</p> <p>The VIC hires e-bikes.</p> <p>The VIC provides a digital what's on events calendar.</p> <p>Outside the VIC is a large scale map with images and QR codes for more information (see image below).</p>	<p>Leverage the VIC's toilets to provide destination inspiration.</p> <p>Enable visitors to find information at the VIC even when it is closed.</p>

Visitor centre	What the VIC does	Learnings for Karratha
	 <p><i>Map on the external wall of the VIC with QR codes to up to date further information.</i></p>	
Bendigo, VIC	<p>The Bendigo Tourism Ambassador Pass e-card is available for use by adult residents when attending participating attractions with an out-of-town visitor. It's free for locals to register for the discount card which enables residents to enjoy free entry (with the purchase of an adult or family ticket) or a discount at many local attractions, restaurants and shops.</p>	<p>Engage residents to learn more about local attractions, and enable them take their VFR visitors to more attractions. Rather than provide a discount, operators could provide a value-add, such as an extended experience.</p>
Bonye Biar Bush University, Bunya Mountains, QLD	<p>This Aboriginal 'bush university' (learning place set in the forest) hosts a <a href="#">Genestreams sculpture</a> that engages visitors with the local flora and fauna and ecosystems through Aboriginal and representational art. The sculpture provides insights into the significant mountain's ecological connectivity, geology, and deep time history. The sculpture is linked to related participatory activities: AR, the ability for visitors to contribute images to the AR version of the sculpture, nature journaling with worksheets, and citizen science activities. The sculpture is part of a national trail of similar sculptures (9 are about to be delivered in WA, and others are in development).</p>	<p>Provide an interactive attraction that engages visitors in deeper learning and engagement with the region's hero experiences: nature and Aboriginal culture, at the VIC and beyond.</p>
Injune, QLD	<p>The VR experience offered at the VIC which near Carnarvon National Park enables those who are unable to travel to Carnarvon or who would have difficulty walking its trails to experience</p>	<p>Provide a VR experience for a small fee that enables visitors to experience spectacular parts of</p>

Visitor centre	What the VIC does	Learnings for Karratha
	the park's spectacular beauty. The experience features footage of two of the park's key attractions – the Moss Gardens and the Art Gallery Walk (a wall of Aboriginal rock art). The experience also entertains children, as the VIC has two headsets which can be used simultaneously. This provides an attraction for children which draws visitors into the centre, and occupies children while their parents gather information.	Karratha they cannot otherwise experience, such as a behind the gate tour of a mine (not accessible due to safety), scuba diving the Dampier Islands (not accessible due to lack of hire boats / cost of boat tours or lack of scuba experience), or a guided tour of the Murujuga rock art (not accessible due to lack of trails). Such an experience will also provide revenue.
Carnarvon, WA	Carnarvon's destination website includes a page on suppliers of essentials (e.g. supermarket, chemists, cafes, hire vehicles, vets, and outdoor gear), and a page on local trades (mechanics and hardware).	The destination website could increase sales for local businesses as well as increase information needed by visitors.
Lockhart, NSW	On its website the Visitor Information Outlet provides links to nearby visitor centres to help visitors find information for the next leg of their journey.	The Pilbara VICs could also promote each other as many visitors to the region are travelling between them on long haul journeys.