

2014

Tracking Onslow: a community in transition. edition 5, October 2014

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Tracking ON SLOW

a community in transition
edition 5, October 2014





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edition five

This is the fifth edition of *Tracking Onslow* and the first that is not the result of a visit to the town. In June 2014 we were told that the Shire would not be funding the flights, accommodation or printing for the edition and so the ECU crew looked for other ways to continue documenting the impact of Wheatstone and Macedon on Onslow.

Fortunately, our previous visits in July 2012, February 2013, July 2013 and February 2014 had filled our contact books with names and numbers and clued us in to issues that needed to be followed up.

After a phone around for updates it was clear that this is not the time to be letting go of the process of documenting the challenges facing the Onslow community.

We are very grateful to teacher James Trimble and his students, Amber and Taylor, for helping with the *In Your Words* section. We'd also like to thank everyone who spoke to us by phone and sent us images.

We heard that there were concerns expressed earlier in the year about an image of the Anzac Memorial on our last cover and we would like to clarify that we did nothing to encourage the children to climb on it. We saw them there and snapped the picture. The photo is a true representation of something that happens in Onslow, and as such we reported it.

One of the key functions of journalism is operating as a 'town square', where the opinions of different members of the community are aired. In this way a publication can help facilitate debate and understanding between different groups. We know that not everyone in Onslow agrees with each other, but we seek to allow everyone a space to speak through our pages.

Sometimes opinions are based on misunderstood facts and so some of the things people say may not be true. We can't vouch for the truth of what the people we spoke to said, but we have faithfully recorded it so that this edition is a true record of what was being said in and about Onslow in mid-late 2014.

We hope you enjoy reading it.

Best regards,



Dr Kayt Davies
Editor
Edith Cowan University
October 2014

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With thanks to

James Trimble for working with us and inviting some of his students to contribute to this magazine.
You can see their work in the *In Your Words* section.



Disclaimer:

In creating this magazine we made every effort to ensure that the information published here was correct at the time of publishing. Most interviews were conducted by phone in mid-2014. While we have been careful to quote people correctly, sometimes what they say is not correct. As this publication is a record of what people are saying, we have not excluded that material. We apologise for any omissions.

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WATER

on the horizon

Story by Karma Barndon

For as long as anyone can remember, a permanent water supply fit for drinking has been the most sought after service in town.

Way back in April 1934 a letter to the editor in *The West Australian* newspaper from an unnamed Onslow resident complained of locals having to pay water rates for water that was “as salt as sea water.”

But residents are hopeful Onslow’s water woes will soon be a thing of the past after the Water Corporation completed the first stage of the \$24.6 million water supply scheme upgrade project of the Cane River Borefield in April, building four new production bores and constructing nearly 14km of water main.

The project is jointly funded by the State Government’s Royalties for Regions program and the Water Corporation, with contributions of \$9.9million and \$14.7million respectively.

Minister for Water Mia Davies said the upgrades will deliver considerably more potable water to the town now and in the future.

“Four new bores have been constructed, together with a new collector main and an upgrade to the water transfer main from the borefield into town,” Ms Davies said in a recent press release. She added: “This will support future growth, such as LandCorp’s residential development to the south of Onslow.”

Ms Davies estimates the town’s population will expand to approximately 4000 by 2025, and she is confident the close work the Water Corporation has been conducting with a number of State Government agencies within the resources and land development sectors will support this growth.

A spokesperson for the Water Corporation said work started on stage two of the upgrade in late April, and will involve construction of a ground level storage tank, pump station and additional water mains.



"The upgrade project is scheduled for completion in May 2015, and will provide Onslow residents with an additional 250 million litres of water each year," the spokesperson said.

According to Regional Development Minister Terry Redman, the upgrades will sustain new land development in the Pilbara, which is hampered by the limited availability of water and wastewater services. "The Royalties for Regions program seeks to grow Western Australia's regional areas into thriving, sustainable communities," Mr Redman said.

Another project pending is Chevron's desalination plant, funded under obligations negotiated through the Wheatstone Project State Development Agreement. Although the project is currently under environmental review by the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA), the Water Corporation has expressed confidence the plans will be approved and expects the plant to be completed by the middle of 2016.

Shire of Ashburton CEO Neil Hartley said the Shire was also confident approval for the desalination plant would be granted. "We anticipate a 'yes', certainly," he said.

Chevron too has expressed confidence in the EPA by pushing through with the tendering process for both the 2 ML/d desalination plant and the associated 9 MW gas-fired power station, which are to be built at a site on the corner of Onslow Road and the Ashburton North Strategic Industrial Area (ANSIA).

A spokesperson for Chevron said the EPA has assessed the detailed submissions for the power and water projects, and geotechnical work was recently completed in preparation for the design and construction of the power and water infrastructure. "Construction activities for the power and water projects are scheduled to commence in mid-2015 subject to a number of approvals being met," the spokesperson said.

She added that "the State, Horizon Power, Water Corporation and Chevron are working collaboratively to achieve this."

Onslow Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) President Geoff Herbert said the five tenderers for the projects were brought to town by Chevron to meet local business people and negotiate trade deals.

"It was actually really good of Chevron. Usually we're behind on meeting these guys, by the time

*"the hard work
may well be in vain
if residential lots
at the new
Barrada Estate
don't sell"*

*"The Royalties
for Regions
program seeks
to grow
Western
Australia's
regional areas
into thriving,
sustainable
communities."*

*"We anticipate a
'yes', certainly."*

REDMAN



HARTLEY



the tender is awarded they've already sourced all their gear, so this time Chevron got in front of it and gave us locals an opportunity to meet them," Mr Herbert said.

The H2Oslow proposal to supply Onslow with drinking water from the Ashburton River floated earlier in the year has failed to resurface. Mr Herbert said the OCCI deemed the ambitious plan too expensive for all parties involved.

Michael Leung from Minderoo said the H2Oslow proposal had not been accepted by Chevron or the State Government and so it had been put on hold.

He said: "We're disappointed but it was their decision."

Despite desalination plans going full steam ahead, Mr Herbert believes the hard work may well be in vain if residential lots at the new Barrada Estate don't sell.

"If they don't sell the lots quickly — remembering that the desalination plant won't be on-line for years — the upgrade the Water Corporation has done out at Cane River will be more than enough to service all the demand we have at the moment," Mr Herbert warned, before adding: "The State Government could end up with a desalination plant they didn't have to pay for, but still have to operate, and don't even need."

"The State Government could end up with a desalination plant they didn't have to pay for ..."

HERBERT



Indigenous engagement

"Things are going well here at Bindi, people are engaging with us and we are providing much needed advocacy and support." These are the words of Linda Dridi, the school engagement co-ordinator for the Commonwealth-funded Regional School Engagement Strategy, run in Onslow by REFAP.

Her area of focus is school children and she said "huge inroads" were being made in improving school attendance and helping parents engage with the school. She said one of the most useful new initiatives was a three-monthly stakeholder meeting in which all people involved with the children came together to find solutions to problems.

REFAP, which stands for Real Employment For Aboriginal People, administers employment, training and community support programs for Indigenous people. The Onslow REFAP office, based at Bindi Bindi, opened in February and according to Ms Dridi, 2014 has been a good year.

She added that providing transport to get the kids to school had made a big difference and they were hoping to extend that service to the wider community, so that it wasn't only available to Indigenous children.

REFAP is also stepping into the gap left by the closure of the Community Resource Centre in 2013 by helping people to communicate with Centrelink and other government departments.

She said: "You never know what problems people will come to you with, but we are happy to provide an all-round advocacy service. That includes things like parenting support, helping people to think about what kinds of jobs suit them and how to get the right training and certificates they need for that.

"There's a lot to be done to help resolve some of the issues, but people are engaging with us and that's an important step in the process."

CHEVRON'S broken promise

Story by Karma Barndon

Photo by Kaylah Lloyd

Onslow has been in state and national media recently as reactions to Premier Colin Barnett's decision to allow Chevron to back out of its agreement to build its workers village in town have been aired.

Onslow Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) President Geoff Herbert expressed outrage in a letter published in *The West Australian*, but speaking to *Tracking Onslow* he said he understood the thinking behind Chevron and the State Government's decision to house workers on-site in the Ashburton North Strategic Industrial Area (ANSIA) instead of on the nine hectare site in Onslow's new Barrada Estate, saying the Shire forced them into it in the first place.

Mr Herbert said although people were disappointed the operations village would not be in town, it was not right to say Chevron went behind the Shire's back.

"Chevron never actually ever wanted to build the operations village in town, but because the Shire had planning approval over that, they wanted the village in town, as did the community and the chamber. So they were sort of forced to sign up for it," he said.

Premier Colin Barnett told State Parliament on July 20 that Chevron approached him months ago for permission to revisit the terms of the State Agreement and move the operations village to the ANSIA, which he granted.

"I agree with Chevron's position," Mr Barnett declared in front of stunned colleagues before

adding: "I know that the local community and the local member think it should be in Onslow. I do not agree."

According to the Premier, safety concerns over workers having to drive to and from Onslow after working 12 hour days, combined with the coming parliamentary enquiry into the prevalence of suicide among FIFO workers, had influenced his decision.

Shire of Ashburton CEO Neil Hartley said the Barrada Estate could now be at risk.

"The Shire is very disappointed in Chevron that it has sought to extract itself from its original agreement to house the FIFO village employees in Onslow.

"It is not known of the financial arrangements Chevron has with LandCorp for the land it initially agreed to acquire, but almost certainly Chevron's withdrawal from the subdivision will substantially lower investor and local business confidence and this will negatively impact on the subdivision's success."

Barrada is the Thalanyji word for 'nest' and it was the name chosen for the LandCorp land development offering 220 lots of varying size for residential use. The land release is the first significant release in the town for 20 years.

"...almost certainly Chevron's withdrawal from the subdivision will substantially lower investor and local business confidence and this will negatively impact on the subdivision's success"

In early 2014 Chevron agreed to purchase 50 residential lots and a nine hectare site dubbed the “super-lot” at the estate, which allowed Landcorp to inaugurate development.

According to Chevron, the decision not to proceed with construction at Barrada Estate is based on safety and cost factors.

The company claims it has spent more than \$200 million on over 60 Onslow businesses and organisations, and that it is well aware of its social and economic responsibilities to the town.

A spokesperson for Chevron said there is no change in Chevron’s level of commitment to the community, and the company fully intends to meet the State Development Agreement obligations.

“Chevron’s position has always been that our FIFO workforce should be housed in the ANSIA

and we made this clear in several submissions to the Department of State Development and the Shire of Ashburton during the planning phase of the project,” the spokesperson said, adding: “We were also mindful that local people did not want Onslow to become a ‘company town’.

“In the end, the Shire didn’t accept our position and required the FIFO workforce to be accommodated in town.”

The spokesperson said that Wheatstone FIFO workers will work 12-hour shifts with no days off during their rotation, which provides limited

Geoff Herbert’s letter in The West Australian, September 19, 2014



opportunities for community involvement, but the residential workforce and their families will live as proper members of the Onslow community, to better support local businesses and undertake community activities.

Mr Herbert said that without Chevron, the residential land release would not have eventuated: “We always needed that residential land for the town to grow, whether it gets sold out in 10 years or more, Chevron is still paying for their nine hectare lot and they are still pre-paying for the 50 house blocks.”

“Chevron have underwritten this development; without them LandCorp could never have done it.”

He added: “Chevron have underwritten this development; without them LandCorp could never have done it.”

Mr Herbert believes there are a number of other factors affecting sales in Barrada Estate, the most pressing being the continual absence of a dedicated Light Industrial Area. “We still don't have a LIA or any idea of when that's going to be done. So still, no new businesses can come to town and buy a LIA block for their business and buy a residential block to live.”

The Shire is currently assessing tenders for the proposed LIA, but Mr Herbert fears that in the meantime potential buyers will be put off by the lack of opportunities in town.



From the ASHES

Story by Briana Shephard

The fire that tore through the Onslow Ashburton Shire office, the town hall and public library in January 2013 destroyed more than just the physical premises. For those who worked there it had also been a place where friendships were created and part of their lives were built. Now nearing the end of 2014 they are still waiting on a new home.

According to Neil Hartley, CEO of the Shire of Ashburton, planning progress is being made towards the rebuild. The complex will include a new town hall, shire offices and a public library. Chevron is chipping in \$2 million towards the \$9.5 million project.

Shire President Kerry White explained that this was because Chevron was originally going to occupy part of the building, and therefore share the cost of it, but that plan had changed and the \$2 million was offered instead.

The insurance payout on the old building has contributed a further \$4.5 million towards the cost of rebuilding.

Following the blaze that devastated the buildings, the site was leveled. One of the hold-ups in the rebuild planning process was a concern flagged in the August 2014 *Shire Update* that asbestos and other contaminants on the site could be an issue.

A company called Aurora Environmental was employed to conduct comprehensive soil testing and reported that the site was viable for the new building.

According to the Shire, a vital component for the planning process of the new complex has been the involvement of the community. A community consultation meeting was held on January 30, 2014.

Lisa Hannagan, Administration Manager of Corporate Services at the Shire, said it was a great opportunity for the locals to speak directly to the

architects and the Project Control Group. "While we are starting with a clean slate, this is very much about replacing what was lost and making any improvements we can in the process," she said before the January meeting.

Architect company Gresley Abas was appointed to do the Conceptual Design Plans in mid-December 2013, after submissions from four architects. Founding director of the company Ahmad Abas attended the meeting and said it was low key but valuable in terms of giving them information to work with. He said that in response, they had come up with a design that sought to "respond to the signals Onslow was giving, both in the meeting and from the impression you get of being in town."

He said the main street has a charm about it and that the location of the building right on the main street meant that it was important to create a landscaped front entrance that would work in with the existing trees and buildings.

He explained: "We aimed to be very contextual and so this is not something that will look very new and modern. It's not aggressively contemporary."

While he doesn't know if the design has been altered since he submitted it, he said they had included verandahs and screens to respond to the climate and raised the building because of the risk of flooding. This had complicated the issue of providing disabled access but the problem had been solved in the design.



Conceptual Design for the new shire office complex, courtesy of Architects Gresley Abas

The budget of \$9.5 million was agreed upon following the acceptance of his Concept Design Plans by the Council.

The next stage was commissioning another company to write a Detailed Design Scope of the architect's Conceptual Design Plans, that would provide specifications for builders and important information about the costs of running the building.

According to the Shire, the new purpose-built facility will give them a chance to improve on what was there while also looking at innovative ways to increase space and energy efficiency.

The Shire received six submissions for the design scope and awarded Hodge Collard Preston the work at a fixed price of \$58,000 (plus GST) in August. This resulted in draft technical documents being delivered to the Shire on September 19 with final documentation due by October 3, 2014.

The next stage is the commissioning of a construction company to follow Hodge Collard Preston's detailed design plans.

Mr Hartley said there had been hopes that the

construction tender would be let in mid-October, so that discussion about it could follow at the Ashburton Shire council meeting due to be held in Onslow in December 2014, but the soil toxicity study had caused delays.

He said that now the tender may not be let until March 2015, although he is hopeful they may "get in front of that".

He said that another hold-up was that Chevron would not hand over its \$2 million until it was satisfied with the letting of the construction tender.

Mrs White agreed with that timeframe saying they'd be "digging in the first quarter of 2015".

Mr Hartley's estimated completion date for the project is around May 2016.

Other good news about the project is that while it was initially feared that much of the town's memorabilia was lost in the 2013 fire, much of it was actually saved.

According to Mrs White, many of the town hall's precious items were packed up before the fire in preparation for a cyclone.

"This is not something that will look very new and modern. It's not aggressively contemporary."

Property prices **BOOM**, bust or simmering?

Story by Katherine Powell
Photos courtesy of Aubin Hay

Onslow's once booming property market seems to have come slightly off the boil in 2014. While some are ready to write the town off, others believe it's just a normal dip in the market.

For the last six to twelve months Onslow has been going through a "cooling off period". Property prices have dropped by about 18 per cent over the last year according to Alex Waters from Crawford Realty.

The average house price in Onslow is around the \$800-850,000 mark, still well above the median price for Perth, which is currently hovering around \$550-565,000.

Mr Waters said the slight drop in price is nothing to be too concerned about, as he has seen the same things happen in Karratha and Port Hedland.

"We often see these changes in the market. There will be five to six years of growth and then one year of decline, then back to five or six years of growth," he said.

But the sentiment around the town seems to be that investors have been duped. They've bought into Onslow after being promised the world but they haven't received the returns.

Long time Onslow resident Kerry White believes Onslow has changed dramatically and said the town is going backwards. She said those who've invested in Onslow would hurt the most.

"In lots of cases there are three houses on a quarter acre block and the character of the town has changed because of all these three story apartments we've got.

"People who live in Onslow just don't live in apartments. These poor investors.

"People here have all either got a wife, or a dog, or a cat, or a child, or a camper trailer, or a boat, or a 4-wheel drive motor bike. People don't live up north without all these things and you tell me where they're all going to park in one car park down the bottom."

But sales at the Onslow Oceanfront Apartments seem to have bucked that trend. The luxury apartments hit the market in the middle of the year and investors have already snapped up 14 of the 18 two and three bedroom apartments.

Aubin Hay of HPG Realty said there were still six commercial spaces as part of the development that had not yet sold. Mr Hay said two are being leased by Bechtel, but surprisingly he's had no inquiry to purchase any of the spaces.

The rental market isn't faring well either. There are currently 51 properties for rent in Onslow advertised on realestate.com.





Prices range between \$1000 and \$3000 a week; a price which some think is way too high.

"I think a three or four bedroom house should be about \$600 to \$800 but they are sitting on realestate.com and people are asking \$1500 to \$2000 and I think that's too much," Stephen Nagy, Onslow sales agent said.

Mr Nagy is the sales agent for Barrada Estate, the new development that's left another large question mark hanging over the town after Chevron decided not to house its workers on the site.

The average price of land in the estate is \$260,000 for a 500m² block and the average house and land package for a three bedroom, two bathroom home is \$620,000.

He said sales have been slow up to this point. He's getting about three or four enquiries a fortnight, 90 per cent of which are from investors.

Mr Nagy said it's hard to pinpoint the exact rental vacancy figure because factors like price, low demand and the increasing amount of time properties are sitting vacant, are all impacting.

"There is so much camp accommodation in Onslow and workers are living out on site. All these properties are being bought and built but no one is living in them. The demand for that price just isn't there," he said.

Kerry White said the higher vacancy rates are hurting those who were promised great returns from the booming town.

"These investors built these things thinking

that Chevron was going to rent them for \$2500 a week for workers, but they've got no intention of doing that."

Alex Waters from Crawfords said while the vacant lots at Barrada shouldn't impact too much on the property market itself, Chevron is still committed to purchasing the 50 lots, he does believe the absence of the workers camp on the estate will hurt the town.

"Building a camp for the workers in town would have meant they were servicing the supermarkets, servicing the restaurants and really being a part of the town. So there will be a slight impact," he said.

Apart from the mixed reviews, Mr Waters said he was positive the market would lift again in 2015.

"There's been a slight increase in owner occupier enquiry over the last couple of months and surprisingly I've had some leasing enquiries from businesses who are doing well and want accommodation for their workers.

"Wheatstone is well behind schedule and there is still 60 -70 per cent of the project left to go so I think in the long term it will be sustainable," he said.

With property developers using the 'boom town' descriptor as an incentive to invest in Onslow, it remains to be seen whether the town is off the boil completely or just on the back burner for a while.





Eco-friendly island

Story by Tiffany Nash
Boat photo by Kayt Davies
Solar photo by Drew Norrish

A 45-minute boat ride out of Onslow takes you to a picturesque five kilometre white sandy beach that meets a turquoise blue Indian Ocean water line.

Thevenard is one of 10 islands that make up the little archipelago that is the Mackerel Islands, off the coast of Onslow, and it's now on its way to becoming an eco-island.

Since 1989, a company called Thevenard Oil has been operating on the north-east side of the island extracting oil from the Saladin Field.

While this may not seem compatible with tourism, the upside for hospitality-focused company Mackerel Islands Pty Ltd has been that the oil operation provided them with power and water, but not anymore.

Thevenard Oil and the Saladin Oil Field are owned by a consortium comprising of Chevron, Mobil and Santos, and this year the project operator Chevron is decommissioning the Thevenard operation and starting the process of removing its oil drilling equipment from the island. But with the decommissioning, goes the power and water supply to the island's tourist accommodation.

Mackerel Islands CEO Drew Norrish explained the resort is now running on independent power and water.

"We have a world class solar system now, with surplus energy stored in batteries and a diesel generator for back-up. It's pretty exciting and we now produce our own water using desalination plants."

Thevenard Island will be one of the first islands in Australia to use a lithium ion battery storage system of its size, fueled 100 per cent by solar power.

It is also using desalination processes to create fresh water and has its own waste water



treatment plant. Mr Norrish said: “We have put steps in place now to operate independently and we are doing that under the eco banner.”

He said the change over of the power and water from the previous arrangement was seamless.

“We had a company called Energy Made Clean do our change over and they made sure we had no power outages. We used Tristar Water Solutions for our desalination and waste water plants installations and they did the same thing, and made sure there was no time when we were out of utilities,” he said.

The island is now running on temporary generators until the solar plant is completely commissioned in late 2014.

By the end of 2016 Mr Norrish is hoping Thevenard Island will be completely eco-friendly and self-sufficient, and attracting visitors from all over Australia.

The 5km-long Thevenand Island is currently occupied mostly by Chevron workers but the

resort is also open to visitors for overnight stays or day trips.

Mackerel Islands was granted shire planning approval in late 2012 to offer Transient Workers Accommodation on Thevenard between 2013 and 2017 and the workers are now occupying most of the island’s beds. When they leave the rooms the resort will get a revamp courtesy of a payment that is part of the deal with Chevron and a new phase of marketing will begin.

Mr Norrish said: “It is going to take time, we are excited that the oil operation is decommissioning and they’re removing all their items so we can get on with our eco-tourism product.”

While Mr Norrish is upbeat about it all, he’s got his work cut out if he wants Tourism WA to get involved in attracting tourists.

Tracking Onslow contacted the state government agency responsible for promoting WA and was told that they were: “unable to find anyone here who is aware of this development.”

- According to WA law, Chevron must remove all infrastructure and facilities from the island and “return the leased area to a nature reserve”.
- Chevron has commenced removal of all residual oil and associated by-products from its facilities and is in discussion with Department of Mines and Petroleum (DMP) on its proposed Decommissioning and Rehabilitation Management Plan. The current plan is to complete rehabilitation by the end of 2020.
- A DMP spokesperson said, officers from DMP, Department of Environmental Regulation, Department of Parks and Wildlife, and other agencies will do site inspections as required.



Support for local businesses

Story by Amber Johnston
Photo courtesy of Vince Catania

Vince Catania officially opened the Onslow Chamber of Commerce and Industry's (OCCI) long awaited Business Services Hub on Wednesday, September 3, 2014.

The hub, located at 453 Beadon Creek Road, welcomes small business owners from Onslow to come and use its services, in hope of alleviating some of the pressures associated with owning a business.

Mr Catania said: "The Business Hub is a great concept and I congratulate the OCCI on the completion of this project. I look forward to many business opportunities for local industries being generated through the Hub."

Before the opening of the Onslow Business Services Hub, the closest business support centre was located in Karratha. Demelza Franklin, the Onslow small business representative, believes that the new Onslow office has made life a lot easier for local business owners.

"It has been fantastic for the community to be able to access these services locally.

"Removing the three hour drive to the Karratha office means more people will access the West Pilbara Small Business Centre's services and the workshops they provide," she said.

She added said that since its opening, the Onslow Business Services Hub has received a lot of support and positive feedback from the community.



Chevron's Eric Dunning, Mark Lewis MLC, OCCI Geoff Herbet & Vince Catania MLA at the opening.

It has hosted a number of events such as OCCI sponsored workshops that have proven to be very successful.

"It is important that business owners realise they need to take time to attend these workshops or have one-on-one meetings to develop and strengthen what they can bring or provide to their business," she said.

The Onslow Business Services Hub offers an array of free services ranging from workshops, one-on-one support, referrals and programs relating to finance, marketing, business planning, pulse checks, mentoring, grant applications, websites, resources, licensing and registrations.

Exmouth chiropractor Dr Asha Burkett travels to Onslow every three weeks and has been using the services provided by the new Onslow Hub.

She said: "It has provided a space for me to offer my chiropractic services. It is also great for business networking and keeps me up to date with the changes in the town."

Chevron is responsible for financially supporting the construction of the Hub through a community partnership grant.

As part of the partnership agreement, Chevron promised the OCCI that it would work alongside the Onslow community to deliver "lasting benefits" through the Wheatstone Project.

However, some are skeptical about Chevron's promise.



“Removing the three hour drive to the Karratha office means more people will access the West Pilbara Small Business Centre’s services and the workshops they provide.”

Mr Catania said: “Only through engaging with local industry and services will Onslow benefit from the Wheatstone project and I sincerely hope that Chevron keep to their word on this commitment.”

Dr Burkett said she had struggled to make arrangements with Chevron that would solve the problems that Wheatstone workers have accessing her services.

She said she had asked for permission to be able to offer allied health services onsite at Ashburton North to save her clients from having to drive into town, but that Chevron was so uncooperative she had given up.

A lot of Dr Burkett’s clients are Wheatstone workers so one of the challenges she has had to face, like a lot of business owners in Onslow, is proximity. Either her or her clients are forced to travel long distances in order to reach one another.

“I have found it frustrating trying to communicate the need to Bechtel and Chevron for allied health services on site ... dealing with such big companies can be difficult.”

Although operating a business in a developing town, such as Onslow, comes with its challenges and hardships, Dr Burkett is optimistic about the future of her chiropractic business in Onslow. As she said: “The town is growing and people are always going to have sore backs.”

D-I-Y power & water

Discovery Parks in Onslow has had a busy year, working on setting up their own power supply and a desalination plant.

Three months ago they started running off their own transformer and they’re very pleased with how it’s operating.

Customer service manager for Discovery Parks Julie Dodds said it had cost them a lot of money but it was a necessity.

“The town just couldn’t supply our needs,” Mrs Dodds said.

“We still have our back up generators, just in case. With 405 guests we can’t ever afford to be without power.”

On the other hand their desalination plant, although all set and ready to go, hasn’t been needed so far.

“So far Water Corp are supplying our needs,” Mrs Dodds explained.

The company provides deluxe apartments for workers and was recently granted a liquor license, but it can only supply alcohol to guests who are staying there.

Mrs Dodds said the wet mess had taken off slowly, and requires a lot of policing because they accommodate not just Wheatstone project workers but other contractors as well and they all have different rules when it comes to alcohol.

“Some guys are allowed four drinks, some six while other contractors have zero tolerance to alcohol,” she said.

“What’s really nice is that now they are able to have a beer on a Saturday, sitting back and watching the footy.”

The two and half year long building process for Discovery Parks is almost finished, and beautification is the last step. This means 4000 plants were recently delivered with the hopes that some greenery will help break up the red dusty environment.

WHERE'S OUR AIRPORT?

Building of the Onslow Aerodrome has been a turbulent endeavour, with the final cost blowing out by around \$22 million.

The tarmac provided its own problems, needing to be built out of a specialised mixture that included saltwater to avoid erosion, however that was completed in July 2013.

Moving ahead to present day, October 2014, and the airport, which is still just a runway and a shelter, is not yet being used by anyone other than Chevron workers.

The terminal building that is nearing completion is dark inside and could stay that way — well, forever.

“Worst case scenario could be that the only people who ever fly in and out of Onslow are Chevron blokes,” admitted Neil Hartley, CEO of the Shire of Ashburton.

The problems at the moment are varied and many, mainly to do with the town not having the infrastructure for the airport to be optimized.

According to Mr Hartley, it is a case of needing a lot of factors to fall into place before the general public can use it.

“Nothing about running an airport is simple,” Mr Hartley said.

“We need airline carriers, licensing, Chevron, tourism opportunities and other mining companies all to come together at once to make it work.”

The project was initially a \$30 million Chevron funded undertaking, now it is sitting closer to \$52 million, with the Shire covering \$5 million themselves.

Stories by Briana Shepherd
and Kayt Davies
Photo by Kayt Davies

President of the Shire Kerry White said they expect the airport to be ready for Regular Passenger Transport by January.

“That’s to go on Chevron’s planes, for their charter flights to allow a certain amount of seats,” she said.

The difficulty is that Chevron has not agreed to allow other passengers on their planes yet.

“Originally the Shire had an understanding that as soon as the airport was capable of taking passengers then Chevron would,” Mr Hartley said.

“Now they are saying not until first gas, which is 2016.”

According to both Mr Hartley and Mrs White the issue lies with the extra costs that having normal passengers on their planes will incur.

“There’s lots of issues to address like flight times, seat numbers and scanning responsibilities,” Mr Hartley said.

“If a plane weighs less than 20 tonnes they don’t need to be scanned, but Chevron uses larger planes, so as soon as one regular passenger goes on board then everyone has to be scanned.”

The Shire is looking at other ways to make the airport operational, and is in discussions with a few airline carriers with the hopes regular flights can use the high-class facilities the Onslow Aerodrome provides.

So far the most promising negotiation has been with Skippers Aviation, a company that would use smaller planes to avoid the scanning.

The expectation is that eventually all carriers will use the airport, including big companies like Qantas and Virgin. However, this is what Mr Hartley says relies on many aspects.

“For the airport to be used, it means a lot of people need to get on board,” he explained.

“There needs to be communication between airlines, accommodation, fishing charters and the likes to organise packages for Onslow.

“Tourism and other miners are the key to the success of the airport.”

But tourism numbers in Onslow are dwindling and carriers will only fly in and out of Onslow if the demand is there. The harsh truth is that it isn’t there, at the moment. The Shire is hopeful that tourism will pick up and Onslow will become the attractive destination it could be.

“The airport would not have been possible to build without Chevron, it was an opportunity that was too good to pass up,” Mr Hartley said.

“In ten years time when people look back they’ll have forgotten all the problems and setbacks and they’ll just be enjoying the service.”

“People will arrive in Onslow and go ‘bloody hell, how did you guys get an airport like this?’”

On page 21 we quote Colin Barnett saying the cost overrun was \$13 million and that the State and Chevron are picking up the tab, Shire President Kerry White talks on page 23 about how hard the cost overrun has hit the whole Shire, and in this interview Neil Hartley talks about an overrun of \$22 million or so. Feeling puzzled, we asked Neil about these numbers. He said the ‘approximately \$22 million’ figure included the cost of completing the airstrip and the airport and as it wasn’t finished, yet the final figure is still guesswork.

The initial commitment was \$30 million from Chevron, Barnett has offered to contribute an additional \$13 million from the \$250 million Wheatstone Onslow infrastructure fund, described here <http://www.dsd.wa.gov.au/9037.aspx> — but this is not really new money for Onslow. Chevron, however, has chipped in an additional \$4 million or so for extra things not included in the original scope, in addition, the shire has kicked in \$5 million so far.

So $\$30m + \$13m + \$4m + \$5m = \$52$ million-ish as the final tab for the airport, but it’s not finished yet and any additional expenses will have to be covered by the Shire, which is contractually bound to build it.

elected perspectives

We asked the politicians elected to represent the people of Onslow for their thoughts on what's happening.

VINCE CATANIA
Nationals, WA lower house
Member for NW Central

“Over the past few weeks I have been battling it out with the oil and gas giant that has the potential to bring so much to the town of Onslow, the community and the entire Shire of Ashburton.

The decision by the Premier to allow Chevron to change its mind and build a workers' accommodation site at the gas plant instead of in the town of Onslow will impact the town of Onslow and people of Ashburton for many years to come.

This short-sighted plan will reduce the regular population of Onslow for the next 30 years, future governments and future shire councillors will look back on this event as the defining moment that shaped the future of Onslow. That's why I am doing everything I can do and have taken on this battle with the Premier and the bosses at Chevron.

I ask that all members of the community sign the petition that I have sent to every household in the Shire of Ashburton.

The petition demands that:

- All agreements between Chevron, the State of Western Australia, the Shire of Ashburton and community are honoured.
- Chevron meets the full cost of upgrading Onslow airport.



- Chevron sticks to its agreement to build its workers camp in Onslow to underpin development of the town.

If Chevron fails to adhere to previous agreements made, it will have a dramatic impact on the ability of Ashburton Shire to deliver services to the Onslow community.

This means less funding for playgrounds, parks, pools and community amenities for all towns in the Shire including Pannawonica, Paraburdoo and Tom Price.

I ask that you stand up for your community and call on the Premier to ensure the original hard-fought for terms of the State Agreement are retained so that Onslow and the Shire of Ashburton can have a secure, well-planned, well-funded and well-managed future.

The future of Onslow depends on it.

”

This short-sighted plan will reduce the regular population of Onslow for the next 30 years, future governments and future shire councillors will look back on this event as the defining moment that shaped the future of Onslow.



BILL JOHNSTON
Labor, WA lower house
Shadow Minister for State Development:
Energy, Mines and Petroleum

“I don't think there is a more difficult task than that facing the Onslow community. To balance with wisdom, care and sensitivity the needs and aspirations of the people who live and work here the 'Onslow way' with the development plans of the juggernaut that is Chevron/BHP Billiton is a formidable task.

We see it in many regions of Australia. Quiet little towns that are home to tight-knit communities are promised jobs, a brighter future for their children, funds for community projects and improved infrastructure. Community reaction is generally somewhere between cautious anticipation and trepidation.

Unfortunately, companies rarely live up to their promises: a quick look around WA mining towns is evidence of this.

So, can Onslow and Chevron/BHP Billiton do it differently? Can the companies ensure the community is no worse off than when they came to town and does, in fact, benefit? The community offered support after commitments were made by the companies that much of the wealth would flow into the town. I wonder how that's going?

Can Chevron/BHP Billiton care for the magnificent environment in their backyard?

While I hold deep concerns about potential for the Macedon and Wheatstone projects to cause devastating and long-lasting environmental harm, I also have great faith in the Traditional Owners and wider Onslow community to care for the area, as long as the government supports them in this endeavour.”

I invite community members to contact me with their questions and concerns.

“The gas projects around Western Australia offer an excellent example of industry working with government for state development.

I'm looking forward to the completion of Wheatstone. In my mind domestic gas is the major issue for state development in Western Australia.

Gas projects in Western Australia establish jobs, economic benefit, and perhaps most importantly secure energy resources for West Australians.

Gas represents approximately 56% of the primary energy fuel source in Western Australia, which is significantly more than in other Australian jurisdictions.

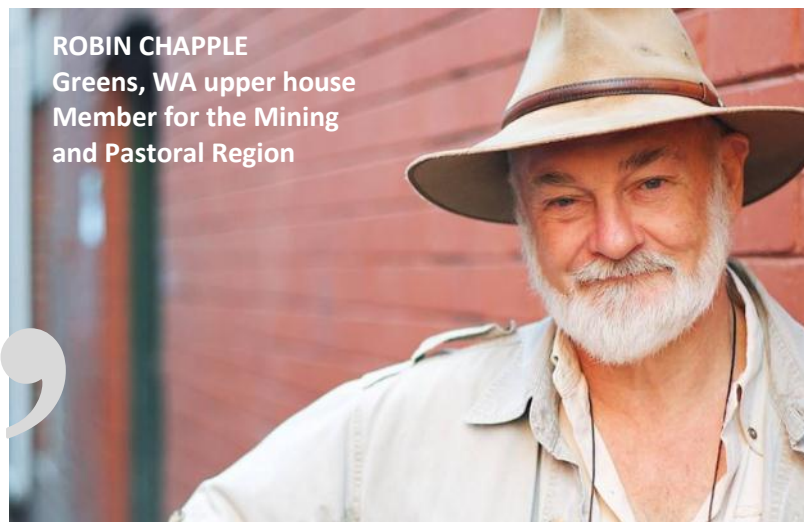
During his time as Premier, Alan Carpenter imposed a gas reservation policy of 15%, ensuring gas is secured for the WA domestic market.

This policy has been retained and now plays an important role in WA's state development.

Under the reservation policy, Wheatstone will process 200 terrajoules of gas per day for the WA market, and will contribute significantly to energy resources across the state.

The Domestic Gas Reservation policy is essential for ensuring an appropriate level of gas is supplied into the domestic market to achieve reasonable price outcomes. Given the flexibility of the policy, fair market processes can operate promoting investment in new and existing projects.

Projects like Wheatstone evidence how industry and the Government can work together to achieve state development.”



ROBIN CHAPPLE
Greens, WA upper house
Member for the Mining
and Pastoral Region

elected perspectives

MARK MCGOWAN
Labor, WA lower house
Leader of the Opposition
Shadow Minister for
Regional Development



“Onslow is one of the most historic and charming towns in WA, and it’s undergoing a period of significant change and upheaval.

It is a community we should cherish and protect. The Pilbara town has survived bombings during WWII and several powerful cyclones.

Built originally as a port for the wool and sheep industry, Onslow has transformed itself into an important coastal centre for fishing, tourism and the salt industry.

The development of the Wheatstone Liquefied Natural Gas processing plant has placed Onslow at the centre of a multi-billion dollar development.

The project is huge. The benefits are great. More job opportunities, including indigenous employment, improved infrastructure and

increased local investment.

Wheatstone has also provided a good example of how government and business can work together to provide good outcomes for the local community and the State of WA.

But as with any major development, there are also increased pressure points on the town and its services. For this reason, Onslow requires some consistency, certainty and support from governments.

This is why it was disappointing when we learned recently that the Premier, Colin Barnett, allowed Chevron to break an agreement to build a FIFO operational workers’ village in the town.

This move was surprising and I will be maintaining pressure on the Premier over his decision. I look forward to visiting Onslow in the near future to discuss these issues further with local businesses and residents.”

*Onslow requires some consistency, certainty
and support from governments.*

*This is why it was disappointing when we learned recently that
the Premier, Colin Barnett, allowed Chevron to break an agreement
to build a FIFO operational workers’ village in the town.*

COLIN BARNETT
Liberal, WA lower house
Premier and Minister for
State Development



I've got a great affection for Onslow. Some people in the town might remember that I was the Minister that played a role in the development of the Onslow Salt project, which nearly failed after two cyclones hit.

So I have had two involvements with Onslow; Onslow Salt, and the Wheatstone project. They are the best two things to happen in Onslow for 100 years.

Onslow is the beneficiary of over \$250 million worth of Chevron and state government investment. No small town in Western Australian history has ever had an injection like that. It includes money for recreational facilities, power supplies, water supplies and a refurbished main street. It is going on; there is more to come.

Before this project got underway Onslow was a pretty quiet sleepy village with about 600 people. It's growing and it's going to bring great prosperity.

But some issues have arisen. When the local shire undertook the project of building the airport the project ran over cost by about \$13 million. There's a bit of contention about how that was managed, but at the end of the day Chevron and the State are going to pick up that shortfall and get that Shire out of trouble.

Now any major project will have changes during its planning and construction and operation. Chevron approached me about the requirement that had been agreed to, about the operational workforce camp being on the edge of Onslow.

Whilst they had originally committed to having the fly-in, fly-out workforce actually based in Onslow, they have now got concerns that fly-in,

Onslow is the beneficiary of over \$250 million worth of Chevron and state government investment.

No small town in Western Australian history has ever had an injection like that.

fly-out workers doing a 12-hour shift would have to have close to an hour travelling by bus from Onslow to the site, and then back. So that makes it close to a 14-hour day for them.

I don't think that's safe in terms of transport. I don't think that's in the interest of the workers, and I don't think it really does much for Onslow. So I agree with Chevron.

I think we should vary that and allow those workers to be accommodated on the site, not three-quarters of an hour's drive away in Onslow. I think the people of Onslow would probably understand the common sense in that.

I understand that the Shire might think that all of these fly-in, fly-out workers are going to live in Onslow. But all they're going to do, if they were there is come back from work, go to sleep, get up in the morning, get on the bus, and go back to work again. It's not going to have an impact on the economy of Onslow.

And Onslow is deriving fantastic benefits from both the State Government and Chevron out of this project. I intend to visit Onslow shortly, and will be available to talk to local people.

elected perspectives



MELISSA PRICE
Liberal,
Federal
Lower House
Member for Durack

Durack is Australia's largest electorate and second largest in the world; one of its fabulous assets is its mining region within the Shire of Ashburton.

“During my twelve months as the elected representative of Durack, I have made solid progress in visiting Durack’s 47 local government areas and had the pleasure of engaging with the Ashburton Shire President Kerry White and CEO, Neil Hartley.

On a number of occasions, Kerry and I have discussed the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity presented by the Wheatstone project — for the people of Onslow, the north-west and the State.

As we know, development comes with challenges and all projects have concerns as they relate to community impacts and benefits.

Onslow is no different. It’s no secret that project developers, Chevron, and the Shire, don’t always see eye-to-eye, however I remain confident that the relationship will improve.

I recently met with Chevron in Canberra, and encouraged them to work harder with the Shire and the Onslow community — to strengthen their relationships and to focus on achieving the best possible outcomes for the town and region within the parameters of project development.

With a resources background, I have made the offer to the Shire and to Chevron, to assist in any way that I can and remain optimistic that a win-win shall be achieved.

Onslow and WA's north west is home to some of our state's most unique marine life, natural beauty, culture and heritage. These are assets that should be protected and which should form the basis of strong, sustainable industries which can support and build communities in the years to come.

Like too many other communities in north west WA, Onslow has now got big mining and resource development in town and the character that makes Onslow could be lost. The community needs to be engaged in meaningful consultation about the future of the town and the region — how do people want to see the town develop, what important services are needed, what makes the place special that needs to be retained?

Employment opportunities should be available to local community members and particularly for Aboriginal people. Mining and development has not delivered benefits to many Aboriginal communities.

The impact of potential budget measures, including moves to deny young jobseekers access to income support for six months at a time, cuts to indexation of pensions, cuts to family payments and the introduction of new costs burdens, all threaten to have a significant impact in parts of regional WA. Especially in places like Onslow, where costs are high and issues like housing affordability and employment opportunities are critical.

We are committed to ensuring investments are made across regional WA to keep towns like Onslow strong, well beyond the short term mining boom, and we welcome discussions about these important issues.

RACHEL SIEWERT
Greens
Federal Senate
Member for WA
Portfolios: Indigenous
Issues; Rural Affairs;
Community Services,
Marine



In your words



Shire president **Kerry White** is angry disappointed, grateful and worried. It's been a big year, and the work's not over.

She's bitterly disappointed with Chevron and with the Premier for allowing the change of plans about where the Wheatstone workforce will live.

She said: "They lie to us all the time. They are very hard people to negotiate with. That's why we are going to the US with our Memorandum of Understanding to explain to the big boss that we're over this. We're over the bullying tactics, the broken promises."

The plan is for a delegation from Onslow to visit Chevron head offices. So far the posse includes Kerry, Neil Hartley, Geoff Herbert and Vince Catania, but Kerry said other business groups and political stakeholders will be invited.

Describing the mission, Kerry said: "We're going to do up our brief and prepare everything. We're not stupid enough to just go waltzing up the street saying 'hello, here we are, this is what we want'. No, we'll have all guns blazing, don't you worry."

Explaining her beef, she said: "Chevron keep bragging on that 'we've given you \$200 million worth of infrastructure' but we already had power, we had water, we had a hospital. They've given us nothing. It was all for them coming, it was not for us locals that live here. And house prices then were \$150,000-\$200,000. They're the ones that put them up to a million dollars, they're the ones that have done all this and they've turned our lives upside down, absolutely upside down."

Turning to what she's grateful for, she said: "The other Ashburton towns, Paraburdoo, Tom Price and Pannawonica, have all had to go without for two years because of the cost overruns with this airport and I thank those councillors from the bottom of my heart, for supporting us.

"They haven't even had a footpath or anything constructed in those towns because of that airport. It's been so hard for them but they've been so supportive, it's unbelievable."

What Kerry's worried about is the impact of Chevron's decision on both the town and the FIFO workers. She said that the workcamp life style and 12-hour shifts were irresponsible given the rising rates of FIFO suicides.

"Chevron should be looking at this because at least if they are in town, if they are feeling depressed they can come down town and might see a local and say hello or go for a walk along the beach where its pleasant and you can sort yourself out. Or they might be volunteer fireys or play some sport on the oval and that's what people need."

She's also upset that so many of the locals have been forced to move out because of rising prices.

Summing up she said: "That's the long and short of it all and that's why we wanted interaction, we need this interaction of people because we've lost our community, we need new people to take its place."

In your words



Linda Dridi works in the Real Jobs for Aboriginal people (REFAP) office at the Bindi Bindi Indigenous community. She is passionate about community integration and explains that efforts to break down barriers are important because they give everyone more access to what Onslow has to offer.

“There are people who were born and bred here whose voices haven’t been heard before in conversations about what could and should happen, and whose good news stories are not being heard, because of this sense of separation. We are working at making connections to overcome that,” she said.

“Things like the recent Chevron-funded school holiday activities down at the back beach were terrific because they got heaps of children involved doing things that were fun and educational, and they were interacting with the whole community and forging strong community

relationships. While she admitted that there were still difficult ‘grey areas’ that they were working on in order to improve school, employment and health outcomes for Onslow’s Indigenous people.

She added that she was incredibly grateful to the Bindi Bindi community for being so welcoming to her and for making her feel so at home here.



Sparky Mel Seymore said that when the news broke about Chevron and the accommodation deal, it put a damper on things for a while. “But the mood’s improved a bit since then,” he said. “People are getting on with their lives.”

He understands the disappointment though and said he thinks the biggest difference that having the FIFO workers living in town would have made was in terms of what they would have bought at the shops and how good it would have been to have them join in with sports in town. “Having that many extra people would have made an extra team or two and that makes such a difference in terms of how much fun the competition is.”

In terms of his own business he said 2014 had been pretty busy and that he was picking up work from Chevron out on site doing air-con, refrigeration and bits of electrics work.

He said: “We’re not a major contractor but we work on the bits and pieces that need doing. In town work has slowed down a bit for now but I’m confident it will pick up again.” He added that he and his wife had recently bought a house in town because they think it will be a good place to work and live for a while yet.

“We’re here to be part of the community, so we’re not feeling too negative about it,” he said. “I think that if we can keep working with Chevron and get them to agree to doing just a bit more to support local industry then it might not be too bad in the long run.”

Hayley Brett was originally from Esperance. She lived in Broome for 10 years before moving to Onslow. In actual fact, in 2009 she was moving to Karratha and simply came to Onslow for a holiday. She never left!

Hayley said: “Onslow has plenty of opportunities. It has great fishing and camping as well as a relaxed lifestyle. Although the lifestyle is great, there are definitely negatives about living in such a remote town.

“My biggest gripes are the fact that there are no passenger flight services available, the general cost of living is extreme, with overpriced fresh fruit, veg and meat, not to mention other essentials and grocery items. The cost of accommodation is for most unaffordable and the lack of reasonably priced residential and industrial land is, to put it simply, a joke.

“I think that most of the time there is a good sense of community. There are always committees that run short of volunteers, which will always happen. I think there are a lot of organisations (government or not) that put a lot into the community to greatly increase the community atmosphere.

“The changes over the last five years have been incredible, some good and some not so good. I would hope that the changes over the coming five years are actual improvements to infrastructure, affordable living and an implementation of procedures to ensure that the town and community can only go forward and reap the benefits of what’s happening (like it or not) around us.

“In saying this, I don’t want to see a mining town. I want to see a town that is able to sustain itself and to prosper; a town that you do want to and can afford to live in or visit.” *Interviewed by Taylor Brett*



High school teacher **James Trimble** has mixed feelings about the approaching end of his family’s four year stint in Onslow.

“We will certainly miss our friends here. We originally signed up for three years but stayed on an extra year because we were having such a good time,” he said.

He described the Community Garden as a wonderful focal point for community gatherings in Onslow saying they’d often enjoyed getting together with other people, working in the garden and staying on for a feed of homemade pizza.

Being housed in government accommodation protected the Trimbles from what he called: “The ridiculous cost of housing in recent years.”

He said: “While it didn’t affect us, we have seen families driven out of town because of the rising prices.”

He added he and his wife and daughters would be leaving town at the end of the year with great memories of good times and good people.

In your words



Kathleen Drummond has lived in Onslow since April 1, 1971 and says that then it was “a beautiful place. Quiet, laid back, no fuss, no bother and everyone knew everyone else. Children could safely walk down the streets and go fishing. We knew whose children belonged where. That was Onslow then.”

Now she’s not so impressed.

She said: “There is so much traffic. There are buses and work cars and everywhere one looks there are fluoros. I realise progress must happen, but I don’t have to like it!

“Progress means that our fishing places are taken over by people out at the camps. Our shops, post office, hotel and club are swamped. Everyone seems to cater to the workers. I live quite close to the club and some days the noise is overwhelming.

“It’s not all ‘doom and gloom’, though. We have quite a large number of people who help out at busy bees around the town. That’s *wonderful* and is appreciated by all.

“But as is the case in many other communities, you have just a few who think they’re doing us a favour just by being here. Maybe things will even out and settle down, but I won’t be here to see that. I’m leaving my home.

“Not without regrets, but the changes have been too much, too soon. It breaks my heart to see the land dug up, razed and flattened - all for the sake of progress. No thank you!” *Interviewed by Taylor Brett*

Historian at the Onslow Goods Shed Museum **Dawn McAullay** said that although it was a shame that Chevron had pulled out of its plans to house its workers in town, the decision didn’t affect her personally. She added though that she felt sorry for the investors who had committed money hoping that they would get a return.

She said: “The Shire seems to be neglecting the town because it is focused on the bigger picture with Chevron.”

While all the basics are still happening, she said she was niggled about little things like the stupid parking bays that were installed at 4 Mile Creek that irritated everyone, the fact that the roofs had not been put back over the picnic benches on the foreshore and the lack of street banners for tourist season. Dawn still loves Onslow though and said: “You can’t stop progress.”



Tania Crawford has lived in Onslow for over 20 years, although she was in and out of town in her earlier years.

Her dad used to live out on the stations while Tania, together with her mum and sister, lived in town for school.

The supplies in town were better suited for the family than what was available on a station. Later, Tania's family moved to Tom Price for better schooling.

At 19, after finishing school, Tania moved back to the little town of Onslow. She worked behind the bar at the sports club. Moving on from there, Tania has been working at the hospital for years.

Tania moved to Onslow because her family moved there. "This town is home to me. I grew up here, in Tom Price too.

"The best things about living in Onslow are my family and the beach. Although a lot has changed in Onslow, I still call this place home, because it *is* home. The beach is a great place to go and hang out with the family on weekends, the water is usually calm and beautiful on the weekend which is great for fishing and the view is amazing.

"Something that I would love to see change in Onslow is the rental costs. They are too high for Onslow. I think they should be dropped to a reasonable price." Tania believes that the town will change in five years' time: "The town is going to change! Without a doubt. It's called progress". But Tania is sure that she will continue to live in Onslow for many years to come. *Interviewed by Amber Montgomery*



Post master **Gerry Carroll** was at the Wheatstone Community meeting in August and said: "Chevron got told in no uncertain terms that we were not happy that they had welched on every promise." He added that the Premier was "likely to get a bloody nose from his colleagues for just agreeing to Chevron's request without even consulting the National Party ministers."

He also questioned the Premier's reasoning that shifting the worker's village to Ashburton North was justified because it was an hour's drive each way, saying: "It's a 44km trip there and back so they must have some very slow buses if it's taking them two hours." He added that raising Occupational Health and Safety as an issue now was also hypocritical as the construction phase workers had been doing 12 hour shifts and commuting from town all year.

Taking stock of history

Story by Briana Shepherd

The Goods Shed Museum was awarded a Chevron Spirit Grant of \$10,000 earlier this year to digitally catalogue its collection and it went so well they are in the process of applying for another grant to continue the very large task.

Curator Sue Lennard and Edith Cowan University student volunteer Kyle Lipthorpe attended a one-day workshop in Perth to learn how to use Mosaic, the system for cataloguing, before spending two weeks hard at work in Onslow.

"The first couple of days were a bit daunting, the collection is huge," Mrs Lennard said. "It went really well, we only really went at it at a surface level though."

This allowed them to get through around 700 pieces in the short time they were there and now Sue has taken all of the data and records with her back to Perth to add more information.

"Over the summer, when it's too hot to be out in my garden I'll flesh out the entries we made," she said.

"It's all about the history of the items; the people, places and events attached."

"If I get stuck with anything I know I can always call Dawn (McAullay), who I call the oracle."



Dawn McAullay, the Onslow Goods Shed Museum historian and volunteer, said she was very pleased with the progress the two had made. Both Sue and Kyle plan on visiting again next year, with Sue saying the trip and the cataloguing will be an annual pilgrimage for her.

"The focus of next year will be organising the photographs," she said.

"We need to whip them into some sort of order and then store them, along with important documents and letters, into an archival system, something that will protect them for years to come."



OLD

Onslow, new

money

Story by Karma Barndon

Photos by Aine Ryan

The Shire of Ashburton has endorsed a plan by the Pilbara Regional Council to protect and manage the heritage and tourism value of Old Onslow.

The 'Old Onslow Town site Conservation Plan', funded by a \$1 million allocation from >

the Wheatstone State Development Agreement Social Infrastructure Fund, will enable priority works at the historic site such as stabilisation of ruins and structures, and provide long-term protection for the heritage site.

Shire of Ashburton CEO Neil Hartley said the Onslow Community Development Fund has \$1 million for the purpose of Old Onslow conservation.

“The conservation works at Old Onslow will be undertaken over the next 12 months,” Mr Hartley told *Tracking Onslow*, adding: “Longer term upgrading and tourism plans are anticipated, but will be subject to future budget considerations by the Shire of Ashburton.”

A conservation plan prepared for the Shire of Ashburton and the Heritage Council of WA in 1991 described the Old Onslow townsite as being in “ruinous” condition, and warned that the only surviving structure, the police station complex, required urgent attention.

The townsite, situated 3.2km from the mouth of the Ashburton River, was gazetted as the original settlement of Onslow in 1885 but abandoned in 1925 repeated cyclones and associated tidal surges made the site unliveable.

The old townsite is listed as an A-Class Reserve, and was placed on the Australian Heritage Register in 2011.

Sites identified in the 1991 conservation plan include ruins of James Clark and Company’s Clandon Street general store and Rob Roy Hotel, the Ashburton Roads Board office and Joseph Peake’s old boarding house.

A conservation plan prepared ... in 1991 described the Old Onslow townsite as being in "ruinous" condition





Funding for fun and other things

Stories by Katherine Powell
Photos courtesy of Chevron

Onslow kids are getting in touch with their creative side as part of a free music education program funded by Chevron.

The program was launched in June 2014 and will give Onslow Primary School kids a chance to receive free music lessons from musicians with the West Australian Symphony Orchestra.

The lessons are taught by percussionist Paul Tanner and wind-player Mark Cain, and to add to the fun they are also teaching the kids to make their own percussion instruments.

WASO is no stranger to Onslow. They have been visiting the town since 2006 as part of its *WASO On The Road* tours, but now with the help of Chevron funding they have launched a music education program designed to get kids more involved with their schooling and increasing attendance rates.

The program is available to every student, prep to year 7 and it is also expected to help train non-specialist music teachers in the hope of encouraging the use of music in teaching.

Chevron's Community Spirit Fund awarded \$80,000 in total last year to nine Onslow businesses including the hospital, community garden and Variety WA.

The Onslow Sports Club and Tennis Club received \$10,000 each for sports programs and facilities, and the Onslow Goods Shed Museum received \$10,000 to go towards preserving the town's history.

Back in 2012 St John's Ambulance was one of the lucky recipients of two \$5000 grants to help equip its ambulances with satellite communications equipment and install a defibrillator and First Response Unit at the shopping centre.

As a whole the fund has donated over \$1 million to community businesses and projects across the Pilbara region. Last year 46 projects were awarded funding to help support and grow local communities.

Chevron says it wants to support these kinds of grass roots projects as they are at the heart of small communities like Onslow.

Any business can apply for a grant of up to \$5000 to improve programs and services that fit within the following categories: health, education, economic development, sense of community or environment.

Applications for the next round of community grants closes on October 31.



What's new? in town

Architect Ahmad Abas, who did the conceptual design for the new shire office, is hoping to be back in Onslow in the near future to work with Thalanyji Corporation on something for their site near the school. He said they have had some initial conversations, but it is not yet set in stone.



According to Shire President Kerry White, 2015 is the year that Onslow will get its swimming pool. She said the Shire had advertised for the pool design, and construction should be underway by mid-year. The project is proceeding thanks to \$7 million in funding from Chevron. She said she's been talking to school principal Jackie Barrie who was keen on school swimming lessons and a 'no school – no pool' rule for kids wanting a dip. The pool is set to be built not far from the Onslow School. Shire CEO Neil Hartley said it was likely to be a 25m pool.



Sue Lennard and other history lovers are hoping to get a Chevron Spirit grant to do important restoration work on the heritage-listed St Nicholas Anglican Church built in 1927. Sue said: "It's been a community touchstone in Onslow for nearly 100 years. It's one of the very few remaining buildings and because of its vesting orders, it's not subject to 'Chevron-isation'."

Expect to see some landscaping soon around Macedon House. The property was built to house the people working at BHP Billiton's Macedon gas plant but the company and workers have yet to give its surroundings a homely feel. On September 17 the Ashburton Shire issued a directive to BHP Billiton to commence landscaping at Macedon House in order to comply with the planning approvals that required a front garden.





And yes, there's more.

To watch the video interviews,

to find this and our other magazines online,

and to see more of your changing town visit

www.trackingonslow.net

We are hoping to be back in February

to continue telling the story of Onslow.

If you'd like your story to be part of our next edition

email the editor at k.davies@ecu.edu.au



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