



Australian Government
Department of Industry,
Innovation and Science

National Radioactive Waste Management Facility

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Overview

This factsheet provides a summary of independent socio-economic research conducted by the University of Queensland to inform the development of the proposed National Radioactive Waste Management Facility.

Introduction

The objective of the research was to conduct a socio-economic baseline assessment that captured locally relevant and meaningful measures of benefit and impact. Drawing on government data sources and interviews with people from the potential host communities, the research focused on:

- providing social and economic information about the towns to identify current trends;
- identifying existing local community strengths and values and how these can be protected and enhanced;
- identifying the preferred and socially acceptable strategies to harness expected opportunities or to avoid and mitigate negative impacts; and
- establishing a social and economic monitoring framework (including locally meaningful indicators) to track changes over time.



This document is part of a series of factsheets providing information on the process to site the National Radioactive Waste Management Facility.

For more information

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Socio-economic factors

Population

Since 2006, the population of the Kimba township has fallen by 6 per cent and the population of the district has fallen by 5 per cent. This stands in contrast with South Australia state population growth of 13 per cent over the same period.

In addition to the downward trend in population, the demographic profile of the town is changing. There has been a percentage increase in the number of retirees and elderly people in Kimba from 26 per cent in 2006 to 35 per cent in 2016.

The percentage of working aged people and youth has fallen. Only 8 per cent of Kimba residents fall within the 15-24 years of age youth age category.

Safety and well-being

The Kimba township experienced low levels of crime over the past five years and trends indicate the total number of offences has reduced over this time

In the most recent reporting period of 2017/18, a total of 14 offences were reported. Included in this total figure are the numbers of reported theft and assault incidents, which are also relatively low (4 and 2 respectively) and are both trending down.

Traffic levels on the main roads passing through Kimba provide insight into the level of daily traffic patterns. The Eyre Highway has a high proportion of commercial vehicle activity both in town and beyond. Eyre Highway west of town has the highest volume of traffic, with 37 per cent of the daily 1,300 vehicles categorised as commercial vehicles.

Education

The majority of Kimba's population (74 per cent) do not have a formal education or training qualification beyond high school level. The most frequently occurring level of education, other than high school, is a Certificate III or IV. However, there was steady growth in the number of persons with diplomas and advanced diplomas between 2006 and 2016.

Trends in post high school qualification levels have followed the same trend as the population, remaining largely steady between 2006 and 2016. Between 2011 and 2016, the percentage of people with a post high school qualification (diploma, bachelor or higher) increased 2 per cent while the proportion of persons with no formal post high school qualification fell by 3 per cent.

Employment

Unemployment in Kimba sits at 2 per cent, well below the South Australian average of 7.5 per cent. The overall size of the workforce within Kimba township has reduced by 30 people during the past five years out of a working age population of 243. Such a small unemployment rate is often indicative of a skills shortage, that is, it is unlikely that anyone seeking employment would be without a job.

Many Kimba families send their children to boarding schools during high school years, and many of these children do not return to Kimba for employment after their education or training is complete.

Income and business

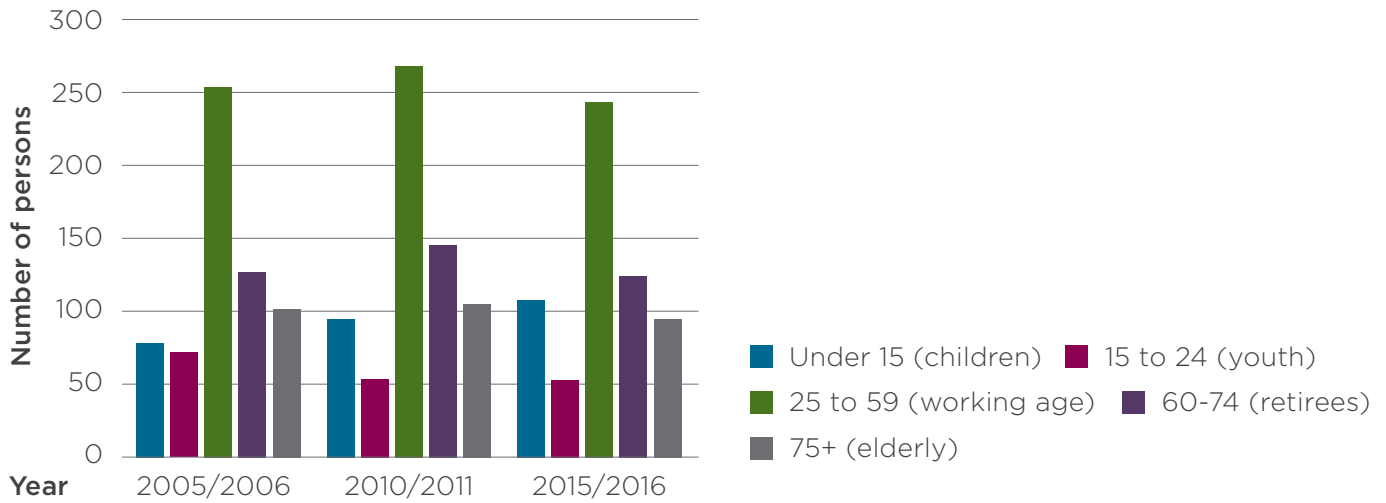
Personal income in Kimba has fallen in recent years, sitting at \$44,283 per average working adult in 2016. Total business income has varied year on year since 2012/13, while the number of businesses has remained relatively constant. Total business income was approximately \$6 million in 2016, across 49 registered businesses. In 2015/16, average annual income fell abruptly by 10 per cent, falling below 2012 levels and eliminating positive gains experienced in preceding years.

Housing and property values

No new residential housing construction has occurred in the past 3 years. The median weekly rent in Kimba rose by 45 per cent between 2006 and 2016 (from \$76 to \$120) but this remains well below the South Australian median. A similar upward trend occurred for residents with mortgage obligations, with the median weekly repayment increasing 94 per cent between 2006 and 2016.

Information from local real estate agents indicated a perception that not many people are moving to Kimba to live. While valuations in the rural market (farms etc.) have increased 30 per cent over the past 5 years, value in the residential housing market has fallen by 30-40 per cent over the same period.

Kimba age group population numbers, by year



Understanding community responses to the NRWMF

The research will help the department protect Kimba's local community strengths and values, manage concerns and maximise opportunities, if the township is chosen to host the facility.

A strong community spirit was identified as the main core value of Kimba. It was described as a proactive and caring community with a long history of supporting persons in need. This often manifests in high levels of volunteering and a strong work ethic.

Community values

Interviews with residents revealed a number of community values seen as important by the people of Kimba.

The community values safety and its rural lifestyle. It has a strong sporting culture and holds strong family values.



Key factors

Education and training pathways for local people (particularly youth) and additional opportunities for the current workforce were identified as the primary opportunities for the community. Emphasis was placed on the potential for local school students to improve STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subject offerings and uptake. The community identified the need for training programs to build skills that will be required for the construction and management of the facility.

A diversified and invigorated economy was also identified as a key benefit of the facility. Residents expect the facility will create jobs for locals and bring additional workers to the community – these new arrivals and their families would likely increase student numbers, and create opportunities for local businesses. There is an expectation that hosting the facility would create an alternative and constant source of income that would help reduce the town's reliance on agriculture.

The researchers recommended setting a minimum level of local employment and purchasing of goods and services, pointing to a range of case studies where 'community agreements' have been very effective in ensuring benefits to the local economy.

Some residents raised concerns that hosting a waste facility would create stigma and ultimately have a negative effect on property prices. However, these concerns are mirrored in a Czech study about perceived risks, and a US study about hazardous waste facilities more broadly. A UK study shows that while site selection is likely to result in the perception that property values will decline, residents can be reassured that evidence suggests the opposite. Monitoring the long term effects of low to intermediate level radioactive waste management facilities in France shows that property values in the vicinities remain higher than the national median.

Despite having a hospital in town the lack of a dedicated full-time doctor in Kimba was a concern for many who were interviewed. There was some discussion around the idea of Kimba becoming a 'government town', which would bring additional services including an increase in doctors.

The community raised concerns about uncertainty in particular aspects of the project, such as the facility operator. "What if..?" was a commonly used phrase in interviews. The dominant concern was around possible threats to human and environmental safety if the integrity of the structure was compromised or damaged, deteriorated over time, or failed unexpectedly. Ensuring the community fully understands the high safety and security standards required under legislation, will be key in developing the facility.

Some people were concerned that while they might agree to a low or intermediate-level facility, high level waste would be stored there.

Several local farmers who export internationally, expressed concern about the possibility that produce from the region would become stigmatised given its proximity to the facility.

Community concerns underline the need for transparency and close community engagement as the project progresses. Moving forward, having a pathway which clearly maps the next steps, challenges and opportunities would help the Kimba town and broader region maximise the benefits of the project.