

SENATOR SUE LINES

#WANDEROUTYONDER WA



There's nowhere else in the world quite like regional Western Australia and over the past few weeks I have had the privilege and pleasure of seeing a lot of it.

WA's regions and rural towns are bursting with inspiring people whose strong commitment to the area they live in is palpable. There are ideas and innovation in abundance and the talent to deliver. What regions and rural towns need is governments to believe in them by providing infrastructure funds and investment. My commitment will be to amplify their voices wherever I can. Rural and regional WA deserves a strong and stable future.





Aboriginal Medical Services and Health Services

I visited local Aboriginal Medical Services (AMS) in Carnarvon, Geraldton and Bunbury. An AMS is a community controlled, primary health care provider with medical practitioners, Aboriginal health workers and nurses. Each AMS responded to huge challenges during the pandemic and adapted their services so clients have continued to receive high-quality, individualised care.

Many have added additional services, including free food and cleaning hampers to clients in need, and switching from walk-in to appointment-only consultations to ensure vulnerable patients are not exposed to high-risk environments. The South West AMS in Bunbury is currently shovel-ready on their S-W Aboriginal HealthHUB which will create 200 jobs in construction and operational phases. They are now looking to state and federal government to provide the final funding boost to get works underway.

Shires/Local Government/Authorities

Local Governments have also been on the frontline responding to impacts of the pandemic. The Shire of Esperance worked with local businesses and community groups to provide emergency accommodation and relief to local backpackers and visa workers who were suddenly out of a job with nowhere to stay, most not eligible for any government support payments.

I heard from Lara Dalton, WA Labor Candidate for Geraldton, that the City of Greater Geraldton also worked with a local emergency housing group to relocate young people living in temporary accommodation to ensure that Covid-19 social distancing measures were adhered to.





Aboriginal Corporations and Communities

Throughout WA, Aboriginal corporations provide essential services for their communities and regions, including education, rangers, tourism and cultural connections. In Carnarvon, ABC Foundation General Manager Cherie Sibosado accompanied me to the Mungullah Aboriginal Community. I met with ABC's fantastic staff who run a wide range of culturally appropriate programs for kids, and land-care and social enterprise services.

Irra Wangga Language Centre in Geraldton and Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre in South Hedland work with elders to record and conserve First Nations languages in their regions so young people can retain their Aboriginal language, culture and history.

A bucket-list trip for anyone travelling in our vast state is the new interpretive walkway at Ngajarli Gorge on the Burrup Peninsula. Visitors can now see one of the world's largest concentrations of ancient rock art up close. Thanks to Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation CEO Peter Jeffries for taking me out there and explaining the site's cultural importance and history.

I visited the Esperance Tjaltraak Native Title Aboriginal Corporation and met with their board and rangers. They are undertaking an exciting conservation of culturally significant areas in the Cape Le Grand National Park.

All these issues, and many more, were also discussed in the three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Women's meetings I hosted in Carnarvon, Roebourne and Hedland. The beautiful artwork on the front cover is by Allery Sandy, a Roebourne elder and award-winning artist.

Regional newspapers

A common theme I heard throughout the regions was the closure of local newspapers by the large, national media companies who have bought them up over the last couple of decades. Thankfully, this has been met by locals who have embraced the opportunity to start community-driven publications. *The Esperance Tide* is a monthly print and digital magazine showcasing local events, news, activities, shops and hospitality. Check out the October edition for a piece on the new *Dirt Music* film, shot in Esperance.

After the *Wheatbelt Mercury* closed in Merredin, staff at the local community resource centre started the *Merredin Phoenix*, a fortnightly newspaper delivered to homes and businesses. In a country town, I learnt that for many, a regular printed newspaper is still their only avenue to find out local news, community and regional information, and a medium to express their views and concerns.



Farming/Agriculture

I wanted to take the opportunity during my travels to meet with farmers and pastoralists and find out about the impacts of the pandemic, as well as other global issues, on their businesses and livelihoods.

In early August, during the harvest-saving rains, I visited Dorothy and David Henderson at their farm just out of Esperance and we were also joined by Wittenoom Hills farmer Megan McDowell.

Later that month I met Cindy Stevens and Simon Wallwork on their family property near Corrigin. I learnt how they are all advocating for climate solutions in agriculture and incorporating farming methods to adapt to climate change impacts and changing soil productivity.

I also met with Mad Fig (Merredin and Districts Farm Improvement Group) who explained about the ways their members are diversifying the markets to which they sell crops in response to global political and economic impacts.

Schools/Sports/Young people

I met with some amazing services and programs designed to give young people living in the regions the best opportunities in their educational and extracurricular activities. At Carnarvon Community College, the Shooting Stars Netball program provides young women with the chance to train and play with professional netballers, as well as strengthen their social and emotional skills through personal development activities.

In Esperance, Shelley Payne, local councillor and Labor Candidate for the Agricultural Region, accompanied me on a tour of the new South Regional TAFE campus. The expanded campus will allow additional courses to be offered in the far southern region and hopefully attract more students and lecturers to the area.





Community Services and Groups

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I visited the Men's Sheds in Merredin and Collie. WA Labor Candidate for Collie-Preston Jodie Hanns took me to their local shed, whose members restore vintage machinery and make practical items such as wheelbarrows to donate to the community. In Merredin, members told me about the vital support and friendship they get from fellow 'Shedders', and the importance for many older community members to have a welcoming place to meet and socialise.

Across the state there are local community services tirelessly providing essential support day in, day out. Some of the many organisations I visited during my travels included Share and Care and Avon Youth in Northam; Bloodwood Tree Association in South Hedland; Doors Wide Open in Bunbury; and Esperance Care Services. All these groups have stepped up to provide further support during the pandemic, including emergency food packages, accommodation and housing, family and domestic violence response, and financial counselling.

