

Graduate School of Business

**An Examination of Customer Perceptions of Effectiveness
and Standards in Essential Functions and Services Delivery
in Rural Communities**

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Doctor of Philosophy
of
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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature:

Date:

Acknowledgements

As I finally reach the end of this journey, I wish to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to those who have supported me throughout and thus have enabled me to achieve my endeavours.

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Abstract

In this study, customers/consumers, representatives of public sector provider organizations, and elected policy makers conveyed their perceptions of factors influencing essential functions and services delivery in selected Western Australian rural communities. The research was exploratory in approach and applied a constructivist ontology, interpretive epistemology and a qualitative methodology. A definition of community effectiveness was developed from the findings. Two models of community relationships were presented, depicting the engagement that occurs between providers, customers/consumers and key stakeholders in the delivery of essential functions and services.

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Chapter One Introduction

Government is a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human wants.
Men have a right that these wants should be provided for by this wisdom.

Edmund Burke (1729–1797)
Irish Statesman and Philosopher

It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change.

Charles Darwin (1809–1882)
English Naturalist Author of The Theory of Evolution by Natural Selection

1.1 Introduction

This study is concerned with the delivery of essential functions and services to residents in rural Western Australia. Essential functions and services, as used in this study, means the public functions and services (e.g. health, education, and road transport infrastructure) that governments have traditionally provided to communities and their citizens (Commonwealth Secretariat 2003; Australian Government Productivity Commission 2011b).

Using six selected case study communities located throughout the state, the research examines the perceptions of residents, regarding the effectiveness with which essential functions and services are delivered to these communities by provider organizations. For these communities, the critical but inherently problematic questions of delivery of many functions and services are contributing to the issues of ongoing depopulation, demographic shifts and declining population that are occurring throughout rural areas (Race, Luck, and Black 2011; Argent and Walmsley 2007; Davies and Tonts 2009; Costello 2006; Tonts and Greive. 2002). These factors have contributed to uneven economic, social and spatial development throughout rural areas and they are influencing strategies for the delivery of essential functions and services, and decisions about these in rural communities (Tonts 2004; Tonts and Jones 1997).

Neoliberal-based reforms introduced into Australia by federal and state governments beginning in the 1980s and accelerated during the 1990s, have seen significant changes in responsibilities for the delivery of essential functions and services (Pusey 1991; Painter 1996; Australian Government – Productivity Commission 1999). Within the contemporary ‘public sector’ environment, there exists a range of functions and services (e.g. transport, electricity generation and supply, and water supply) that are no longer undertaken directly by government, but which instead are provided by government business enterprises (Bottomley 2001; Wettenhall 1998; Australian Government – Productivity Commission 2005; Martin 1996). These corporatized entities conduct their operations according to commercial principles.

Commercialization has featured prominently in government management of the public sector in Australia over recent decades. For government trading enterprises, commercialization instils characteristics from both the private and public sectors, and these entities are required to fulfil government policies and to undertake functions effectively within public sector environments. Government trading enterprises, in a similar manner to private firms, undertake profit-making, commercial activities, at the same time as being required to perform functions and services of a ‘non-commercial’ nature (community service obligations) (Bottomley 2001; Wanna, O’Faircheallaigh, and Weller 1992). The diversity of functions and services which these public sector entities provide across Australia is reflected in the different terms by which they are known throughout the federal and state and territory jurisdictions (Australian Government – Productivity Commission 2008). Despite these distinctions, a common definition of ‘government trading enterprise’ has been identified which addresses the shared attributes of these entities.

Government trading enterprises are government-owned or government-controlled entities that produce goods and services on a commercial basis by substantially or fully covering their costs. They are outside the general government sector and are separate from government financial enterprises in banking, insurance and related sectors.

(Australian Government – Productivity Commission 2008:3)

These limitations and associated economic and efficiency factors have combined to ensure that in rural areas government, through its departments and statutory

agencies, retains the predominant responsibility for the delivery of essential functions and services (Collits 1999). Within this context this research examines how, in recent decades, governments and rural communities alike have been impacted by policy and legislative reforms implementing the rationalization of some essential functions and services. The study seeks to identify if residents within the rural communities have an understanding of the issues that impact upon delivery outcomes and whether or not communities are effective in influencing the strategies of the providers of essential functions and services and the decisions of policy makers.

This research also required that the roles of governments and government business enterprises as providers be examined. In the subsequent findings and the discussion, the issues and implications of participants' perceptions of the delivery of essential functions and services are explained. The examination of issues associated with these perceptions included:

- Identifying the functions and responsibilities of government and government business enterprise provider organizations in delivering essential functions and services to the case study rural communities; and
- Identifying any perceived changes in the functions and responsibilities of government and government business enterprise provider organizations over the study period and any implications for the case study rural communities arising from these changes.

First, however, this chapter provides background to the significant political, social and economic developments that have occurred nationally and throughout Western Australia from a policy and political perspective during the study period. The chapter also explains the genesis of the study, provides some operational definitions for the research, and sets out its underlying aims. Finally, an overview is provided of the content and focus of the subsequent thesis chapters.

1.2 Background to the public sector reforms

During the mid-1980s governments of all jurisdictions throughout Australia experienced globally-induced pressures, influenced by neo-liberalism. In response, governments implemented wide-ranging reforms to the reporting and accountability systems for programs administered by departments and agencies (Halligan 2005; Cooper, Funnell, and Lee 1998; Uhrig 2003). These New Public Management reforms precipitated a significant change in the traditional role of government in the delivery of essential functions and services to rural communities (Morrison and Lane 2006; Brett 2007; Tonts and Jones 1997). The adoption by the Commonwealth and state government departments and public sector agencies of efficiency and effectiveness measures, based largely upon the imperatives of economic rationalism, translated into new public accountability and evaluation obligations in order to meet the changing expectations of broader society (Keating and Weller 2001; Russell 1999; Wanna, O'Faircheallaigh, and Weller 1992). Significant among these reforms was the rise within government of marketization as a philosophy. This has essentially seen a change from the provision of 'public' functions and services by government to their delivery by market-oriented organizations. Russell (1999) describes the marketization within which these organizations now operate as being represented in two forms – corporatization and privatization.

Under privatization, the organization providing a function or service is not legislatively created, but is a private corporate entity. It is totally independent from government and does not report directly to government on its delivery of functions and services – with the exception of performance outcomes as defined by the terms of negotiated contracts. In the contemporary context the incidence of privatization in the delivery of functions and services is high and has been seen throughout Australia in areas such as health, water supply, electricity supply and public transport services (Aulich and O'Flynn 2007; Malbon 1998). Corporatization, by contrast, refers to a government trading enterprise being established within a legislative context and this organization being ultimately accountable for its outcomes to a responsible Minister of government. The whole basis of corporatization is that enabling legislation

provides ongoing independence and requires that the organization operate according to commercial principles. At a national level, Telstra and Australia Post are arguably the most high profile examples of government trading enterprises, whilst in Western Australia, the Water Corporation and Western Power are organizations that fall within this category (Australian Government – Productivity Commission 2005, 2008; Gerritsen 2000).

1.3 Origins of the study

Other writers have undertaken studies of particular inland rural communities located throughout southern New South Wales, and in the Central Wheatbelt region of Western Australia (Alston 2002a; Haslam McKenzie 1999, 2000; Tonts 1998, 2000, 2005; Jones and Tonts 1995; Tonts and Jones 1997). These studies described the significant social, economic and political impacts on citizens that have resulted from the withdrawal of infrastructure and services by governments. This research is different in that it seeks to augment the existing body of knowledge by examining customer/citizen perceptions of the delivery of essential functions and services within the context of changes that have occurred in the relationship between governments and rural communities.

This study argues that the relationship between government and residents of rural communities has evolved from one of ‘patron and benefactor’ under a traditional paternalistic policy framework to that of ‘provider and customer’ in the contemporary neoliberal environment. Within this latter context, the research also seeks to examine customer perceptions of the effectiveness and standards of the delivery of essential functions and services in each of the six study communities in the Central Wheatbelt, Great Southern and South West regions of Western Australia. These communities are: Wongan Hills, Ballidu, Wagin, Mount Marker, Rocky Gully and Boyanup. Agriculture is the common thread that runs through the origins and history of development of the study communities. This research examines the social, economic, political, and demographic context that has influenced each study community over the study period. For this research, the broader, more significant issues relate to the empowerment of rural communities and the assessment of the

relationships that occur between communities and government and with the corporatized providers of essential functions and services.

1.4 Significance of the research

Previous research will be extended by exploring the impact of policies governing the provision of essential functions and services upon rural communities and, importantly, to questions involving empowerment of customers. Many studies identify rural communities throughout Australia as having experienced significant wide-ranging economic and social impacts which are considered to have been the result of the rationalization or the withdrawal of essential functions and services by governments. Collits (1999) explains how, paradoxically, the decline in functions and services delivery within rural communities has occurred in an environment of technological advancement and innovation that has benefited the larger communities in regions.

The provision of services, or lack thereof, has significant implications for rural communities. With the rationalisation of employment opportunities out of rural areas into the regional centre, resulting in a pull of people out of rural areas, the ability of the rural community to retain and attract residents and future investment is impaired. As services are withdrawn from rural areas, the quality of life, measured in terms of access to essential and higher value goods and services, declines.

(Collits 1999 (Online))

The problem for rural communities Australia-wide, as Collits (1999) describes it, is that a continuing loss of functions and services can have a self-perpetuating effect that will ultimately impact a community's viability. In recent decades, many rural communities, in an endeavor to reverse this trend of decline, have pursued proactive strategies aimed at promoting business interest and securing new investment (Collits 1999). In Western Australian, research has shown that changing economic, social and environmental factors have influenced government policy approaches and public sector delivery of services to rural communities located within the state's Wheatbelt region (Tonts 1996, 2000; Tonts 2004; Tonts and Jones 1997; Haslam McKenzie 1999, 2000). These communities have been significantly and directly affected by the

re-shaping of federal and state government policies, the reforms of which are reflected in the rationalization or withdrawal of essential functions and services. As Tonts (1996) describes:

These problems have been compounded in rural Australia by changes in the role of public sector institutions, which have been characterised by the privatisation of government services, policy goals based upon economic efficiency rather than social equity and, an increasing focus on rural communities meeting their own needs (Rolley and Humphreys, 1993). This transition to the politics of economic liberalism has resulted in the rationalization and, in some cases, the withdrawal of public services such as schools and hospitals in many rural areas (Jones and Tonts, 1995).

(Tonts 1996: 25)

Some of these Wheatbelt rural communities have subsequently succeeded in developing innovative and adaptive programs with the aim of maintaining economic growth. These strategies, in turn, have ensured a continuing demand on provider organizations for the delivery of infrastructure and services (Tonts 1996). As Tonts and Jones (1997) outline, rural area policies applied by governments at the federal and state levels were transformed in the period from the late nineteenth century and to the late twentieth century. Rural communities during these eras were exposed to government policies centred on state paternalism and Keynesian-Fordist approaches and, finally, neoliberalism. The success of state paternalism relied upon governments having an active role in the pursuit of outcomes centred on economic development and social equity.

Policies which provided the conditions for stable growth in the agricultural economy, together with equitable levels of access to services such as schools, hospitals and public housing, were seen as instrumental in the development of stable rural communities.

(Tonts and Jones 1997: 171)

However, these writers have argued that, for rural communities in Western Australia's Wheatbelt in particular, rather than enhancing the social and economic well-being of rural areas, contemporary neoliberal government policies are exacerbating current levels of rural disadvantage.

Prior to the mid 1970s, Australian state and federal governments recognised that the prosperity of agriculture depended, at least in part, on the cross-subsidised provision of public services and infrastructure. However, in line with the policies of neoliberalism, more recent approaches tend to emphasise userpays services, privatisation, devolution and reduced levels of government expenditure.

In many rural areas, this policy shift has contributed to the rationalization and withdrawal of basic services, such as schools and health facilities, together with the retreat from effective regional development strategies, as governments seek ways of ensuring economic efficiency.

(Tonts and Jones 1997:172)

In terms of this research, the disengagement of government from its traditional role as a provider of some essential functions and services to rural communities in favor of corporatized government business enterprises also brings into question the effectiveness with which services are being delivered. The level of empowerment accorded to the study communities and the capacity or otherwise for these communities to influence provider strategies and policy decisions affecting the delivery of functions and services was identified as being the gap in existing research to be addressed by this study.

1.5 Thesis study timeframe

This study explores significant issues and trends in the delivery of essential functions and services throughout Australia and specifically in rural Western Australia. The study timeframe to which the research relates is the approximate period from 1983 to 2006. From an Australian public policy perspective, the election in March 1983 of the Hawke Labor government marked the beginning of an era during which significant New Public Management reforms were made. The Financial Management Improvement Program (FMIP) and corporate management structures introduced into Commonwealth public sector organizations were some of the more notable of these changes. Central elements of these initiatives (e.g. new decision-making, reporting and accountability structures, and centralized budgetary efficiency objectives) were emulated throughout state and territory jurisdictions (Hawke 2007; Martin 1990;

McInnes 1990). This study's limited timeframe – up until to 2006 – was considered to adequately capture the implications of these issues which were experienced by Western Australian public sector organizations delivering essential functions and services to the study communities. This period also saw the end of a protracted period of electoral reform debate in the public policy/political arena throughout Western Australia. These deliberations culminated in 2005 when the then Gallop state Labor government successfully negotiated and passed its *One Vote One Value* legislation in the Parliament. The laws implemented equality of entitlements for voters in metropolitan and rural electorates and removed long-standing preferential electoral arrangements that were previously afforded voters in rural constituencies (Parliament of Western Australia 2005).

From the beginning of the 1980s government pursued a traditional, paternalistic approach to the delivery of essential functions and services, with a commitment to social equity and welfare goals. By the late 2000s, this model had evolved into one characterized by a diminished direct government involvement in delivering essential functions and services, driven predominantly by market-based principles of cost recovery, efficiency and 'user-pays' (Adams and Hess 2001; Fairbrother, Paddon, and Teicher 2002). The 1980s economic restructuring pressures were further exacerbated during the 1990s by requirements for public sector organizations to adhere to National Competition Policy principles in their delivery of services (Australian Government – Productivity Commission 1999).

However, for many rural communities issues related to the decline of essential functions and services were not new. Phenomena such as the ongoing depopulation of many rural communities have been cited as factors driving the commercial decisions of the government business enterprises to withdraw essential functions and services (Tonts et al. 2001). Paradoxically, however, it is these very actions that many critics argue have been causing the exodus of populations from rural communities, or at the very least, discouraging inward migration. Governments are also confronted with social equity and welfare issues as debate ensues about the perceived disparity in the level and standard of essential functions and services

delivered to residents of rural communities, compared to their urban-based counterparts (Davies 2008; Davies and Tonts 2007; Sher and Sher 1994).

1.6 Communities as customers/consumers

This study, in examining the perceptions of business and customer participants within the study communities, considered contemporary trends in the delivery of essential functions and services involving provider organizations and their customers. An important contemporary development, from the perspective of this research, concerns the emergence of the rural governance framework and the relative prominence that is accorded to the views of customers/consumers within rural communities (Cavaye 2004, Herbert-Cheshire and Higgins 2004). Governments across federal and state jurisdictions have been subjected to significant political and economic pressures over recent decades and the ascendancy of rural governance reflects the pursuit of innovative democratic and service delivery arrangements.

Governments and their public sector provider organizations, in pursuing accountability and inclusiveness obligations to customers/citizens in rural constituencies, must also grapple with the efficiency and effectiveness requirements of these communities (Adams and Hess 2001; Bishop and Davis 2002). Given these environments and their associated issues, governments continue to eschew any reliance on traditional, paternalistic frameworks for the delivery of essential functions and services, in favor of contemporary models (Cavaye 1999, 2001; Herbert-Cheshire 2000; Tonts and Jones 1997). These rural governance structures centre on capacity building and skills development within rural communities. Whereas centralized policy-making was a hallmark of the former paternalistic structures, rural governance is focused on promoting partnerships between communities and governments. Within rural communities, the devolution by governments of decision making to local leaders and community groups is crucial to these communities developing and implementing locally-sponsored solutions to perceived problems (Cavaye 2004; Morrison and Lane 2006). This research examined the rural governance approach and described its relevance and

implications for the delivery of essential functions and services to the study communities.

The background literature discussed in Chapter Two suggests that government policy goals of enhanced accountability, transparency and the fulfilment of participatory democratic principles are now the driving elements of interactions between federal and state government provider organizations, rural communities and their key stakeholders (e.g. local governments). This study also identifies such elements as being relevant within the context of the public sector's delivery of functions and services. Subsequent chapters describe the community engagement activities that government departments, statutory agencies and government business enterprise providers undertake when they consult with customers/consumers of the communities investigated in this study (Adams and Hess 2001; Bishop and Davis 2002; Head 2007). The study describes the emphasis that contemporary provider organizations place on pursuing consultation strategies with customers/citizens and in fulfilling wider participatory democracy objectives of governments (Holmes 2011; Reddel 2002).

As the research explains, these sector-wide consultation and engagement initiatives embody corporate-style principles of a customer service orientation and the marketing of services (Alford 2002a; Du Gay and Salaman 1992). The accommodation of customer/citizen consultation obligations by public sector organizations must, however, be viewed against the growing pressures on these providers to achieve outcomes centered on efficiency and effectiveness (Parker and Guthrie 1993; Parker and Gould 1999; Fairbrother, Paddon, and Teicher 2002; Government of Western Australia – Department of the Premier and Cabinet 2009).

1.7 Operational definitions relevant to this study

1.7.1 Essential functions and services

In any discussion of service delivery to populations within community settings and, particularly rural communities, references to essential functions and services may be

wide-ranging and can evoke a range of social, economic and environmental connotations (Glaser 1986; Tonts and Jones 1997). However, this study adopts a narrower, operational definition of essential functions and services, namely the public functions and services (e.g. health, education, and road transport infrastructure) that governments have traditionally provided to communities and their citizens (Commonwealth Secretariat 2003; Australian Government Productivity Commission 2011b).

1.7.2 'Rurality' and rural communities

This study investigates communities which fall within the definition of 'rural' under the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008). The selection of the communities according to their 'rurality' also accorded with the classification system applied by the former Commonwealth Department of Primary Industries and Energy, and the Department of Human Services and Health (Australian Government – Department of Primary Industries and Energy and Australian Government – Department of Human Services and Health 1994). Reference to the term 'rural community' within the context of this study was consistent with the Local Government Area (LGA) criteria. Many LGAs encompassed more than one population centre, yet displayed common factors which reflect 'community'. The term 'community' is a widely applied, albeit much debated concept from a research perspective (Barraket 2001). It is generally accepted that, although grounded in geography, the term is not necessarily restricted to formal population boundaries (e.g. towns) but rather focuses on the people within "...having common goals, ties and commitments..." (Barraket 2001: 5).

1.7.3 Corporatized government entities or Government Trading Enterprises (GTEs)

Since the competition and deregulation reforms of the early 1990s, many public sector organizations at all levels of government and in all jurisdictions operate under various titles as government trading enterprises. Within the Australian context these

entities are unique because they are statutory corporations that possess a mix of characteristics derived from government and the private sector (Bottomley 2001; Mascarenhas 1988). Government trading enterprises, as is the case with other public sector organizations, are responsible for providing functions and services (e.g. public utilities, transport services), but also carry out activities (e.g. property development) in a commercial manner. The delivery of non-commercially viable services to customers/consumers by government trading enterprises on behalf of governments represents 'community service obligations' (Australian Government – Productivity Commission 2008). At a Commonwealth level, guidelines published by the Australian Government state:

A Government Business Enterprise (GBE) is a Commonwealth authority or Commonwealth company as defined by the *Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997* (CAC Act) and prescribed as a GBE under the Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Regulations 1997 (CAC Act Regulations).

(Australian Government – Department of Finance and Deregulation 2011: 6)

The Australian Law Reform Commission, in viewing the status of government business enterprises from a legislative perspective reported that the three characteristics that distinguish GBEs are:

- the Government controls the body;
- the body is principally engaged in commercial activities;
- the body has a legal personality separate to a department of government.

(Australian Government – Law Reform Commission 2008: 1305)

The Commission also identified that within the various Australian jurisdictions:

A state or territory GBE may be a body corporate established by legislation for a public purpose (state-owned or statutory corporations), or a company established under corporations law in which a state or territory government has a controlling interest.

(Australian Government – Law Reform Commission 2008: 1305)

From a Western Australian perspective, Government Trading Enterprises (GTEs) are corporate entities which are established under a statutory framework. Their purpose is to implement statutorily defined policy obligations or to carry out specific defined commercial undertakings on behalf of the Western Australian State Government (Australian Government – Productivity Commission 2008)

1.7.4 Empowerment

Kenny (2011) argues that the acceptance of the community development concept invites an acknowledgement of the interdependence of individuals within communities. Kenny (2011: 28) asserts that: “The wellbeing of each person depends on the welfare of society at large.” Another definition of empowerment which was considered as being highly relevant to this study is that provided by Zimmerman (2000), which highlights the community-wide benefits that can be derived through collaboration. He defines empowerment as:

[a]n intentional, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources.

(Zimmerman 2000: 43)

1.8 Research questions

This study is closely aligned to the ongoing public debate that has ensued throughout Australia since the mid-1980s about the new management doctrines and neo-liberal government policies that have significantly influenced the delivery of essential functions and services to rural communities. These wide-ranging market-driven developments have focused on bringing about deregulation and greater competitiveness in the provision of services (Considine 1988; Painter 1996; Parker and Guthrie 1993). Government departments and statutory agencies in all jurisdictions are now required to adhere to efficiency, effectiveness and program accountability objectives in delivering functions and services to communities,

including those that are located within rural areas. Corporatized entities or ‘government business enterprises’ that presently provide some essential functions and services to these communities are required to operate according to commercial principles. The period of reform was said to have ushered in a ‘cultural change’ throughout government organizations, and the introduction of customer-orientation was characteristic of government business enterprises (Parker and Gould 1999; Alford 2002a). The contemporary environment in which public sector providers now must operate in implementing government policy has significant implications for the delivery of essential functions and services for rural communities. This study sought to identify these factors and issues through the following two research questions:

- What are the perceptions of businesses and residents in rural communities regarding the essential functions and services provided by government and corporatized government entities?
- How do these customer groups assess their ability to identify and to convey service-related issues and needs?

The perceptions of the participants of the study have been conveyed in the research findings. These participants were customers/consumers, and the significant stakeholders in essential functions and services delivery activity, notably representatives of organizations providing essential functions and services and elected policy makers.

1.9 Research objectives

The objectives of the study were:

- To identify what rural communities define as being publicly provided ‘essential functions and services’, within the Western Australian context.
- To identify and examine businesses’ and residents’ assessments of the level and standard of essential functions and services as a basis for achieving and maintaining viability in rural communities.

- To identify whether rural communities are exerting any influence upon the political, policy and economic factors driving changes in the provision of essential functions and services.
- To identify and investigate businesses' and residents' perceptions of the responsiveness of government and corporatized entities to service-related needs and issues in rural communities.

1.10 Research method

The research was an exploratory study, utilizing a constructivist ontology, interpretive epistemology and a modified grounded research approach. Qualitative data was obtained from group interviews (focus groups), elite interviews and confirmatory surveys. Participants in the focus groups held in each of the communities were recruited through a public process, while the composition of these was intended to reflect the spectrum of customers/consumers that exist within the communities themselves (Krueger and Casey 2000).

Using stratified samples of the populations within each study community, a confirmatory survey was conducted. The survey was undertaken to gauge the extent to which the views of focus group participants were reflected throughout their wider communities. The use of the survey mechanism to obtain further information with a view to adding depth to primary data was consistent with the principles of exploratory research (Christ 2007; Patton 2002). The convening of focus groups drawn from the selected communities as the preliminary phase of the research was fundamental to the identification of participant-generated definitions of 'essential functions and services'. These outcomes informed the remainder of the research phases by identifying the types of provider organizations that were to be engaged as part of the study. These processes complied with the exploratory and emergent characteristics that are prerequisite criteria of grounded research (Whiteley 2004). Chapter Three of the study explains in detail the methodological factors that both supported and influenced the research.

1.11 Thesis structure

This Chapter introduces the study. Chapter Two provides a broad overview of neoliberal public policy and political developments and the associated literature which is considered relevant to this study. These works are presented as background to the changes in the structures and operations of the public sector organizations providing essential functions and services. Chapter Three explains the research methodology that underpins this study. Chapter Four provides background to the individual study communities. The geographical, political, economic and social factors influencing each of the case study communities are discussed in this chapter, as are the population and demographic changes affecting each community during the study period. Chapter Five provides a detailed description of the research findings, and Chapter Six explains the models of community relationships in the delivery of essential functions and services that emerge directly as a result of the research findings. Finally, Chapter Seven addresses the implications of the research, identifies potential limitations in its scope and provides some recommendations.

1.12 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to establish a foundation for the examination in subsequent chapters of the perceived changes in the models of delivery of essential functions and services in selected Western Australian rural communities. The chapter broadly explains the policy and political origins of the study. A statement of the research questions underpinning the study has been outlined, and a broad overview of the structure of the thesis and its component chapters was provided.

Chapter Two Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes significant developments and trends associated with the evolution in economic doctrines over a thirty year period beginning in the mid-1970s. Discussion then turns to the implications of these developments for public policy debates and for public sector approaches involving essential functions and services throughout the federal and Western Australian jurisdictions. An evaluation is made of the terms ‘customer’ as distinct from ‘consumer’, as applied within the public sector context. Against these inherently corporate sector notions the concept of the ‘customer as citizen’ will be considered. Finally, the chapter examines in more detail, the definitions which are central to obtaining an understanding of the political, economic and social issues driving the essential functions and services delivery outcomes that were identified within the study communities.

2.2 Overview of prevailing economic doctrines: Implications for federal and state public sector rural functions and services delivery

Historically, Australian governments have had a significant responsibility for delivering basic functions and services to populations within communities (Brett 2007; Stokes 2004). After federation in 1901 governments, both federally and at a state level, through their public service bureaucracies, continued to be responsible for delivering functions and services to communities, including those located in rural and regional areas (Butterfield 1965; McIntosh et al. 2008; Morrison and Lane 2006; Gerritsen 2000).

Significant economic and public policy developments and trends were identified as having occurred during the study period, which spanned approximately 1983 to 2006. These factors resulted in changes to the roles of governments, and these changes had consequences for the delivery of essential functions and services within

the study communities (Tonts 1996, 1998; Tonts and Jones 1997; Haslam McKenzie 1999; Gray and Lawrence 2001). In the 1970s, economies including Australia's experienced significant inflationary pressures and these in turn impacted upon the economic and social policies applied domestically by federal and state governments (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1988; Saunders 1994). The Keynesian/Fordist economic approaches of the post-1930s Great Depression era and subsequent decades were superseded by economic rationalism in the mid-1970s (Millmow 2010). By the early 1980s, neoliberalism had become the prevailing doctrine and it has largely endured throughout the contemporary era (Cheshire and Lawrence 2005; Marsden 1992; Western et al. 2007). As economic doctrines evolved in response to changing global and domestic circumstances, they greatly influenced public policy within nations. In Australia these developments impacted the role of federal and state governments in their delivery of essential functions and services to rural communities (Gray and Lawrence 2001; Hughes 2002; Morrison and Lane 2006).

Within the new economic and political dynamic, Keynesian/Fordist economics was viewed as characterizing inappropriate paternalistic concepts of excessive state intervention in market mechanisms and demand management. In Australia, and in rural areas in particular, the adherence to this approach by governments had resulted in significant political investments being made with the aim of advancing the economic security and social equity of citizens (Jones and Tonts 1995; Orchard 1998a; Saunders 1994; Wesley 2000). Economic rationalism, by contrast, was about government policies that emphasized market liberalization and promoted structural adjustment throughout the economy and the reform of traditional public institutions as a means of achieving greater competitiveness (Battin 1993; Pusey 2003). From a public sector perspective, New Public Management reforms that centred on efficiency and effectiveness were introduced at the federal level by the Hawke Labor Government in 1983 (Cooper, Funnell, and Lee 1998; Pusey 1991). Similar initiatives were subsequently adopted by governments throughout the state and territory jurisdictions (Considine 1988; Yeatman 1987). In the Australian economy and in other comparable economies, broadly speaking neoliberalism has entailed:

... much 'creative destruction' not only of institutional frameworks and powers (even challenging traditional forms of state sovereignty) but also of divisions of labour, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life and thought, reproductive activities, attachments to the land and habits of the heart.

(Harvey 2005:3)

As Harvey (2005:2) describes it, the consolidation of neoliberalism in western economies during the past three decades has provided the catalyst for governments engaging in "...deregulation, privatization and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision." Governments have typically justified embarking upon these significant reform programs by citing the failure of traditional paternalistic policy approaches, which had protected and advanced the vested interests of some to the exclusion of others, representing in fact 'government failure' (Painter 1996). Consequently, it was argued that long-standing government policies and associated modes of the delivery of essential functions and services were neither the most effective nor the most relevant to addressing contemporary issues or needs (Cahill 2004; Conley 2001; Dollery and Hamburger 1995; O'Neill and Moore 2005; Painter 1996; Wiltshire 2008).

Rural communities throughout Australia have maintained an ongoing requirement for the delivery of essential functions and services, despite these policy developments (Collits 1999; McIntosh et al. 2008). Governments at both federal and state levels have been confronted with resource scarcity and policy choice dilemmas as they have sought to balance these demands with other priorities. From a Western Australian perspective and for the study communities, the progression from Keynesian economics to neoliberalism highlights the tensions that exist between prevailing government policy imperatives and the needs of customers/citizens in the delivery of essential functions and services (Haslam McKenzie 1999, 2000; Tonts 2000; Tonts and Haslam McKenzie 2005; Tonts and Jones 1997).

The ongoing rationalization or withdrawal by governments of important functions and services from many Western Australian rural communities has been identified as being symptomatic of what is considered to be the new role of government (Jones

and Tonts 1995; Tonts 1998; Tonts and Jones 1997). Government, in its contemporary neoliberal context, is now not so much concerned with achieving the social welfare and equity goals for communities, but rather it gives preference to the attainment of efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of functions and services.

2.2.1 Corporatization and privatization

The corporatization of statutory authorities that commenced throughout Australia in the early 1980s highlights how the traditional role of government as a provider of functions and services has evolved, and has affected the plight of rural communities (Collits 1999; Mascarenhas 1988). Throughout that decade, changes to functions and services delivery were evidenced within the federal arena – most notably with the corporatization of iconic institutions such as Telstra and Qantas. However, over this decade, the states and territories undertook extensive corporatization processes, and public utilities were replaced by government trading enterprises. These reforms were assisted by government policies and guidelines that promoted structural adjustment, deregulation and greater market competition (Australian Government – Productivity Commission 1999; Bottomley 2001; Fairbrother, Paddon, and Teicher 2002).

The new policy guidelines enabled government trading enterprises to operate under market-based conditions similar to those enjoyed by private sector entities and free of the legislative constraints affecting government departments. Responsibility for the ongoing operations and strategic decisions vested in autonomous boards which were accountable to their minister for achieving outcomes stipulated in corporate plans (Bottomley 2001; Keating 2003; Quiggin 2009; Uhrig 2003; Wettenhall 1998).

2.2.2 National Competition Policy

While the 1980s marked the corporatization of many government activities, it was during the 1990s, with the onset of the National Competition Policy, that Australia experienced a significant acceleration of microeconomic reforms throughout the public sector. National Competition Policy had its genesis in the Hilmer Review initiated by the Keating Government in October 1992, with the Review Committee

submitting its findings to the Heads of Government in August 1993 (Hilmer, Rayner, and Taperell 1993). The Review Committee Chair, Professor Fred Hilmer, explained that the review findings had been built around the following propositions:

- 1) that competition policy covers a broad set of laws, policies and government actions that should be seen as an integrated whole
- 2) the main elements of competition policy dealt with by the review were the processes, institutions and broad principles that would generate specific guidelines for various sectors of the economy
- 3) the recommended processes and institutions leave much of competition policy squarely in the political domain.

(Kain, Kuruppu, and Billing 2001 (Online))

From a Western Australian perspective, it was following the adoption by the federal and state governments of the Hilmer Review recommendations into the National Competition Policy that the state's public sector experienced significant corporatization-related reforms (Australian Government – Productivity Commission 2005a). Some notable public utilities made the transition from statutory bodies to government trading enterprises. In 1995 the State Energy Commission, responsible for gas and electricity transmission functions, was split into separate corporate trading entities, AlintaGas and Western Power. AlintaGas was subsequently privatized in late 2000. The Water Authority of Western Australia was another public utility to undergo corporatization, becoming the Water Corporation in 1996.

Government trading enterprises were now required to operate according to commercial principles when carrying out their activities, with profit-making being the overriding goal. Unlike their counterparts in the private sector, however, these entities had the added responsibility of carrying out government policies, such as the delivery of non-commercial services, referred to as “community service obligations” (Australian Government – Industry Commission 1994; Legislative Assembly of Western Australia 2000). From the outset of this corporatization phase considerable debate ensued in Western Australia regarding community service obligations in the public sector (Legislative Assembly of Western Australia 2000). Government business enterprises have, in the past, been perceived as lacking commitment to

fulfilling community service obligations. From a Western Australian rural community context, the transfer of responsibility for the delivery of some important functions and services from government departments and statutory agencies to government trading enterprises has raised serious concerns about the ongoing viability of many communities (Legislative Assembly of Western Australia 1999; Tonts and Jones 1997).

These factors have also brought into question the effectiveness of rural communities and the capacity of customers of essential functions and services within these communities to influence the government business enterprise provider organizations (Legislative Assembly of Western Australia 1999). For many functions and services that government continues to be involved in providing to rural communities however, the efficiency and effectiveness of delivery now seem to be the highest priority. These are issues that this research has identified in relation to the study communities and they will be explained and explored in subsequent chapters.

2.3 Theoretical discussion

This section of the chapter outlines some of the key concepts that apply to individuals as users of products and services. The discussion firstly investigates the distinction between users as ‘consumers’ and as ‘customers’. Issues involving the behaviour of individuals and the importance of organizational culture to customer empowerment are then examined. This discussion then focuses on the significance of these concepts for the public sector entities and government business enterprises engaged in the delivery of essential functions and services.

2.3.1 Neoliberalism, New Public Management and the emergence of the consumer focus in public policy

With the advent of neoliberalism in major western economies and the prominence afforded to market-based mechanisms over regulatory frameworks, consumerism has had a substantial influence upon the functions and responsibilities of public sector organizations (Clarke 2007; Trentmann 2007). Neoliberalism, in the public sector

context, has encouraged a convergence of cultures and ideas from the private and public sectors. Within public sector organizations these trends are highlighted by the elevation of customer relationships and service quality strategies. (Du Gay and Salaman 1992; Osborne and Gaebler 1992). An approach adopted by public sector organizations invoking strategies of consumer power and choice in functions and service delivery transactions, as Clarke (2007: 161) describes, stood in “contrast with the passive and dependent recipients of public services under the ‘old’ model.”

Customer-orientation priorities have been integrated into the overall performance outcome measures of public sector organizations, representing initiatives that flowed from the New Public Management (Fairbrother, Paddon, and Teicher 2002; Hood 2000; James 2005; Moll and Hoque 2008; Saint-Martin 2001). In many public sector organizations, organizational restructuring has also contributed to the adoption of enterprise imperatives and the accompanying heightened focus on a consumer culture (Du Gay and Salaman 1992; Halligan 2005). As far as functions and services’ delivery capabilities are concerned, the corporatization of statutory authorities and public utilities that has occurred federally and throughout the states and territories since the early 1980s, has involved more than structural change (Commonwealth Secretariat 2003; Martin 1996; Uhrig 2003; Wettenhall 1998). These reforms were broad in scope and included:

- Legislated requirements regarding the transparency and decision-making accountability of the independently operated, commercially-focussed government trading enterprises;
- Organizational programs and associated outcomes of government trading enterprises centered around the principles of commerciality and competitiveness;
- Formalized reporting structures and defined, published performance measurement criteria; and

- Formalized commitments of government trading enterprises to customers and stakeholders concerning service delivery obligations (Legislative Assembly of Western Australia 1999; Bottomley 2001; Mantziaris 1998; Martin 1996).

The degree of dominance that the consumer culture now occupies within government is clear, even in those circumstances where organizational restructuring has involved the ‘traditional’ government departments or statutory agencies that remained under direct government control (Alford 2002a; Alford and Speed 2006; Du Gay and Salaman 1992). In Australia, federal and state government departments and agencies are required to engage in public consultation processes. Central to these requirements are the needs and views of the consumer. Organizational performance in interacting with consumers is also highlighted in service quality outcome measures (Considine 1988; Government of Western Australia – Department of Health 2012a; Main Roads Western Australia 2011; The Health Consumers’ Council WA (Inc) 2013; Vardon 2000; Zanetti 1998).

Within this contemporary public sector context, the emergence of the concept of the ‘sovereign consumer’ has changed significantly the perspective of how organizations operate. The idea of sovereignty shaping the perceptions and actions of consumers is important, as it re-affirms the link between the activities of government machinery and the pursuit of the political objectives of elected governments. In a public sector context, the fulfilment of these objectives may be at risk where consumers, having access to information, decide to exercise choice, or to instigate political action (Marsh 1983). The emergence of consumer sovereignty has therefore been largely a function of the prominence that organizations give to the objective of satisfying consumer demands (Du Gay and Salaman 1992; Orchard 1998a; Pagnato 1997). Some writers assert that the “culture of the customer” and the consolidation of market-based philosophies within contemporary service provider organizations have been to the detriment of more communitarian goals previously pursued by the traditional bureaucracy (Du Gay and Salaman 1992; Korczynski 2004; Pollitt 1988). From a broader perspective, these shifts within public organizations to more customer-oriented paradigms highlight some deeper ideological tensions concerning

the contemporary role of the citizen-consumer within democratic societies (Clarke 2007; Soper 2007; Trentmann 2007). These issues are briefly addressed in a subsequent section of this chapter.

2.4 Empowerment and accountability in bureaucratic functions and services delivery

Notwithstanding the wide-ranging public sector reform initiatives that have occurred throughout Australia since the 1980s, the federal and state governments continue to be directly involved in providing many essential functions and services (Australian Government – Productivity Commission 2011c). The nature of many essential functions and services (e.g. health and hospital services, education, public housing, policing and law enforcement) is such that these can only be delivered directly to consumers, particularly to those residing within rural communities, by governments using traditional bureaucratic structures (WA Country Health Service 2009). The concept of the ‘customer’ within the public sector context is both a unique and complex one (Rowley 2000). Customers comprise a wide range of stakeholder groups and individual users. The varying level of exposure of customers to services means: “all have different roles in service definition, the evaluation of service quality and participation in the service experience” (Rowley 2000: 159). This enables useful distinctions to be drawn between the similar notions of “citizen”, ‘customer’ and ‘consumer’ in as much as:

“Citizens” generally have rights of access to public service, and may be vociferous through political channels and pressure groups in ensuring that appropriate services are available. Thus, citizen’s rights might include access to education for children between 4 to 18, and access to hospitals when they are needed. Most citizens do not exercise these rights most of the time, but they still expect the service to be available to them when they need it.

“Customer” is the generic term for any stakeholders, individuals or groups for whom the organization in some way provides a good or service.

“Consumers” are the users of the service.

(Rowley 2000: 159)

Importantly, and from the perspective of the issues that have been addressed within this study, Rowley (2000) asserts that:

There are clearly overlaps between these groups, and members of one group will influence the attitudes and behaviours of members of other groups through word of mouth across family and social networks. Consumers for public sector organizations are generally a subset of customers. Most customers are citizens, but due to geographical boundaries and other factors, they may not always have right of access to the public services over which they have some influence.

(Rowley 2000: 159)

Empowerment is a significant factor in determining whether or not customers are capable of exerting influence over the essential functions and services delivered by public sector entities. A re-focussing towards the customer throughout the federal and state jurisdictions has also occurred during the time of widespread restructuring of many traditional public services (Alford 2002a; Orchard 1998; Wettenhall 1998). Whilst customers might perceive themselves as being empowered, in reality many remain vulnerable to corporatized service provider dominance and government legislative control (Australian Government – Productivity Commission 2011a; Hodgson 2001). Despite service providers seeking to be more entrepreneurial and customer-focused to rural community residents, as customers for essential functions and services these residents may actually be faced with a relative lack of alternatives (Tonts 1996; Tonts and Jones 1997).

Within the context of this study, Foucault's theory of governmentality provides a framework for exploring the concepts of 'power' and 'freedom' of customers/consumers (Foucault 1991). The research seeks to identify whether individuals within these selected rural communities come together effectively as empowered groups (Foucault 1991; Speer et al. 1995). Central to the examination of this question are the mechanisms that such groups use in conveying to political and policy actors information about the issues affecting the delivery of essential functions and services in their particular communities. The research also explains whether or not such communities are effective in asserting their influence as

customers/consumers of essential functions and services delivered by government trading enterprises and government departments and statutory agencies.

Within a public sector context Alford and Speed (2006) have described service quality as comprising two dimensions, specifically:

Technical quality (which refers to the outcome of the buyer–seller interaction – i.e. what the customer receives) and functional quality (which refers to the process – i.e. how they receive it).

(Alford and Speed 2006: 316)

A perceived service quality model was first developed by Christian Grönroos in 1984 and has since been the subject of much analysis by many writers (Grönroos 1990, 2001; Kang and James 2004; Woodall 2001). The Grönroos model postulates that perceived service quality is determined by the customer's *expectations* and their *experiences*. Customer expectations are driven by a number of aspects of the customer–organization relationship, including: *market communications*, *image*, *word-of-mouth*, *customer needs* and *customer learning*. Customer experiences on the other hand, are influenced by organizational *image*, a factor which itself is subject to outcome (technical quality) and process (functional quality).

Grönroos (2001) argues that the different characteristics of physical products in comparison to services also mean that they will be treated differently by both providers and consumers. Whereas physical products are the outcomes of an organization's production process, services are intangible and they involve continuing interactive processes between the organization and the customer/consumer. Importantly, it is these interactions between what Grönroos (2001: 150) describes as “the customer and the quality-generating resources controlled by the service provider [that] go to the heart of services marketing”.

A further model known as SERVQUAL, or the ‘five gaps’ model of customer service quality, is a multi-dimensional framework for measuring service quality developed by Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithmal (1985). Their research found that “... the key to ensuring good service quality is meeting or exceeding what customers

expect from the service” (Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithmal; 1985:46). The research was instrumental in: (1) producing a definition of service quality – that is, the difference between customers’ service expectations and the service they perceive they received; and (2) identifying the key elements that influence customer expectations. Research involving this model has suggested that a correlation exists between customer experiences and perceptions of service quality. Subsequent studies conducted in this field by, Zeithmal, Parasuraman, and Berry (1990) asserted that:

(W)hen customers experience a service problem their perceptions of service quality are adversely affected. Moreover, companies fare best when they prevent service problems altogether and fare worst when service problems occur and are not resolved to the customer’s satisfaction.

(Zeithmal, Parasuraman, and Berry 1990: 31)

The Grönroos perceived service quality model and SERVQUAL are both relevant to the discussion in this study. The qualitative-based components of these models relating to the factors influencing the development of customer perceptions concerning service quality have direct relevance for the analysis of study participants’ perceptions of essential functions and services delivery.

2.4.1 Customer as citizen

For public sector organizations providing essential functions and services for populations throughout many western nations, the ‘citizen-consumer’ is a concept which has been in existence since the mid-1990s. Its origins reflect endeavours by the United Kingdom’s Blair Labour Government to introduce modern customer service principles and programs promoting consumer choice, responsiveness and democratization into its public service organizations. The idea of the ‘citizen-consumer’ represents a melding of two previously opposed principles grounded in bureaucratic and entrepreneurial beliefs and behaviours (Soper 2007; Trentmann 2007). Conventional wisdom previously viewed the citizen as part of a group that shared some collective responsibility in utilizing public goods and services, whereas the consumer, having no such obligations, was seen as being concerned with maximizing self-interest (Soper 2007).

From an international perspective, governments of other nations such as the United States of America and Australia have also embraced the consumer-focussed public service reforms initiated by the Blair Government (Alford 2002a; Mulgan 2012; Pagnato 1997). In Australia these policy developments, coupled with the ongoing corporatization of traditional public service functions and services, go some way to explaining the ambiguity in the use of the terms consumer and customer (Alford 2002a). Likewise, the concept of the ‘customer as citizen’ is now debated within the context of public sector organizations being highly responsive customer-focussed entities, while government trading enterprises operate within what are increasingly competitive, deregulated environments (Alford 2002a; Adams and Hess 2001; Bishop and Davis 2002; Pagnato 1997).

2.4.2 From New Public Management to public value

As the foregoing discussion suggests, heightened community demand for services within a highly constrained public policy context have encouraged governments to investigate new delivery frameworks. In Australia since the 1990s, these developments have contributed significantly to the debate within the bureaucracy about the merits of moving from a culture dominated by new public management to one centred upon public value (Alford and O’Flynn 2009; O’Flynn 2007; Smith, Anderson, and Teicher 2004; Stoker 2006).

The ‘public value’ approach was developed in the United States by Moore (1995) and is a highly innovative but contestable area of public administration theory. It is, among other things, concerned with providing a relevant view of the role of public managers in contemporary society (Alford and O’Flynn 2009). The approach posits that public managers implement the collective aspirations of citizens and their elected representatives through the operations of government organizations. There is an acknowledgement of public managers operating predominantly within a political context rather than in an economic context, as had been the tendency in new public management (Alford and O’Flynn 2009). Public value provides weight to the ongoing philosophical argument about governments having to intervene and ensure that public goods are provided in circumstances of market failure (Bozeman 2007).

Public value is based on a 'strategic triangle' comprising three components, namely: (1) value; (2) legitimacy and support; and (3) operational capabilities (Alford and O'Flynn 2009).

In applying this approach, a public sector organization must:

- 1) aim to create something that is substantially valuable (i.e. public value);
- 2) have legitimacy and be politically sustainable (i.e. through the backing of policymakers and stakeholders);
- 3) be feasible (i.e. capable of being implemented taking into account the operational and administrative factors that the organization is required to contend with).

(Alford and O'Flynn 2009: 173)

The strategic development and implementation process within a public sector organization involves the public manager having to find an optimum 'alignment' among the three components of the strategic triangle (Alford and O'Flynn 2009). Although each of these components is strategically important, the public manager must negotiate effective trade-offs among them to achieve organizational outcomes (Alford and O'Flynn 2009). Proponents of new public value assert that such outcomes are increasingly being pursued through relationships (i.e. partnerships and networks) between policy makers and stakeholders at all levels (Smith, Anderson, and Teicher 2004), or what has also been termed 'networked governance' (Stoker 2006).

Rhodes and Wanna (2007) argue strongly that public value elevates public managers to a status such that they challenge the primacy of elected actors who, through electoral structures, must remain accountable to their constituents. Others, however, point out that these views reflect a fundamental misconception of Moore's public value approach (Alford and O'Flynn 2009). Indeed, a recent review of the core elements of the public value paradigm suggested that it is for public managers to function without compromising the political and institutional mandates provided to elected officials as the ultimate decision-makers in a democracy (Prebble 2012).

Public managers have an important contribution to make, firstly by informing public policy considerations and, subsequently in implementing policy decisions (Smith, Anderson, and Teicher 2004; Stoker 2003). In the contemporary *networked governance* context therefore, desired outcomes cannot be achieved without effective engagement and interaction occurring between policy actors at all levels (Smith, Anderson, and Teicher 2004). The competing goals of ‘efficiency’ and ‘democracy’ must also be successfully reconciled.

2.4.3 Overarching Theoretical Framework

Neoliberalism, couched as it is within the context of this study, is identified as having significant overarching implications for rural communities that receive essential functions and services and which continue to rely heavily upon them. Throughout Australia and among the rural communities that were examined in this research, the subscription to neoliberalism ideals over the study period has coincided with ever-increasing demands being imposed upon governments and on elected policymakers in relation to essential functions and services delivery. Across all Australian state and territory jurisdictions, the corporatization of public sector functions and services has been significant and widespread, reflecting the import of the fiscal/economic pressures that governments now face with consequent staff reductions. Within this contemporary framework the need by governments to generate efficiencies and achieve to value for money outcomes has greatly influenced essential functions and services delivery. In the process these imperatives have transformed the relationship that transpires between providers and their customers/consumers.

Under traditional paternalistic governance structures and the associated bureaucratic public service styles, citizens and consumers of essential functions and services were primarily regarded as being “passive recipients of services rather than active agents” (Alford 2002a: 337). Historically the pursuit by governments of social equity obligations and state development opportunities has also contributed to the establishment throughout rural communities of a universal sense of entitlement to these services. In the current environment however essential functions and services

have become highly specialized, with service quality measures and performance targets being linked to delivery outcomes of providers. Within the public sector the application of such approaches has markedly changed the provider-user context and has seen the ascendancy of the concept of the empowered customer/consumer. That government trading enterprises have been required to adapt to significant challenges arising from contemporary reforms is evidenced by internal governance arrangements and in complex customer service mechanisms (Alford 2002a; Barrett 2003a, 2003b; Holmes 2011; Mascarenhas 1988). For those functions and services in the public sector which remain in direct government control, the rise of consumerism means that these organizations have also been required to adopt performance measurement and service quality initiatives as part of their activities (Considine 1988; Pollitt 1988; 1995b; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2003; Potter 1988). Federal and state governments in implementing these measures have also been compelled to accommodate constituency-based demands for transparency and accountability (Reddel 2002; Edwards 2008; O'Toole and Burdess 2005).

Client-orientation and democratization are now entrenched characteristics of public sector organizations throughout Australia. Moreover economic and political pressures are such that imperatives apply equally to the functions and services delivered by corporatized government entities and those that are provided by government departments and statutory agencies. In reality the functions and services in rural communities are declining or have been subject to rationalization, however customer/consumer awareness of issues surrounding these developments is high and scrutiny of policies and decisions can be intense (Gray and Lawrence 2001; Haslam McKenzie 1999; Orchard 1998b; Tonts 2005). A number of factors may be considered as having contributed to this heightened sense of consciousness among rural communities and these in turn can influence customer/consumer perceptions of the levels and standards of essential functions and services that are delivered by government departments and statutory agencies and government trading enterprises (Considine 1988; Bottomley 2001). Many issues were identified as being significant to the research in terms of the relationship to perceptions of community

empowerment and community effectiveness in influencing essential functions and services delivery outcomes. These factors include:

- Information/knowledge - The widespread availability of information and technology (e.g. the Internet; Main Stream Media) means that citizens who reside within Western Australia's rural and urban communities are highly knowledgeable of policy/political developments in essential functions and services delivery. In terms of the study communities, this information serves as a foundation upon which customers/consumers evaluate the functions and services that are being delivered. Information also influences customer/consumer perceptions of delivery levels and standards and community views regarding entitlement.
- Political party policy debates and impact on public perceptions – From a state-wide perspective, public debates between political actors about the merits of different approaches to essential functions and services delivery throughout rural communities are ongoing. Such discussions typically have been set against a backdrop of parliamentary and media scrutiny of government programs and initiatives and involve argument for the introduction of alternative proposals. This research sought to identify whether or not these wider political/policy factors had played a significant role in shaping customer/consumer perceptions of essential functions and services delivery within the study communities.
- Provider organization service undertakings and effects upon public perceptions - The period spanning this study is one that has been marked by wide-ranging public sector reforms both at the national and Western Australian levels. At the heart of these developments has been the gradual but noticeable change in the role of government as a direct provider of many essential functions and services to customers/consumers in all communities.

Extensive restructuring and enlargement of the public service which ensued during the study period saw the new public sector organizations being compelled to apply sector-wide approaches that focussed on performance measurement and efficiency. For the corporatized entities that operate as public utilities the adoption of these imperatives is reflected in functions and services being delivered according to commercial principles and prominence is given to the pursuit of efficiency/effectiveness outcomes.

Within government, departments and agencies that carry out functions and services such as health, education and road network infrastructure are themselves subject to performance indicators. As Australia in general experienced highly volatile economic circumstances in recent years, Western Australia has consolidated its position as a centre of mining exploration/production and an important source of national wealth creation. At the state level however, this enviable position has brought with it significant inward population migration with the resultant essential functions and service delivery demands and associated implications. Successive governments have been subjected to growing budgetary pressures and heightened public demands with the effects of these factors spilling over to public sector organizations which are required to generate efficiency dividends. At a practical level, it is now widely debated that the efficiency based obligations which governments are imposing upon public sector organizations is being reflected in reductions in functions and services. The engagement of residents within rural communities as research participants was considered appropriate in identifying customers/consumers perceptions of essential functions and services issues that are attributed to decisions of elected policy makers and the strategies of the provider organizations.

- Citizen-centred participation - Over the past two decades, governments and elected representatives throughout Australia have placed significant emphasis on public sector organizations applying greater efficiencies in the conduct of their activities. But within the context of these broader neoliberal policy

reforms political and policy actors alike have acknowledged the need for accountability to constituencies and political credibility in policies underpinning functions and services delivery. This accountability has been advocated in the form of citizen-centred participation governance mechanisms. Experiences of systemic failures in government accountability that occurred throughout Australia during the 1980s, and the demands of contemporary highly informed constituencies are among some of the key factors driving greater scrutiny of government policymaking and its implementation. Governments throughout Australia today reflect their commitment to participatory democracy through their use of a range of public engagement mechanisms (e.g. citizen juries, planning forums, consultative committees). At an operational level, public sector organizations delivering functions and services are obliged to maintain similar approaches to transparency and accountability by undertaking community engagement and consultation with customers/consumers. More detailed explanation is provided in Chapters Five and Six about these activities generally and the implications for the study communities.

Within this context, the study through the research questions sought to identify:

- What are the perceptions of businesses and residents in rural communities regarding the essential functions and services provided by government and corporatized government entities? Each of the study communities has a long-standing relationship with essential functions and services from a state paternalism context. Deregulation and competition policy reforms implemented throughout the public sector by governments over time and more recent efficiency/effectiveness measures were identified as having had significant implications for customers/consumers throughout the state. The study therefore sought to examine from within the different participant categories: customers/consumers of the study communities; representatives of provider organizations and elected representatives, perceptions of essential

functions and services delivery and to identify any issues that may be influencing levels and standards.

- How do these customer groups assess their ability to identify and to convey service-related issues and needs? During the research, the conduct of focus groups provided opportunities where participants representing customers/consumers could convey perceptions about the effectiveness of functions and services delivery issues in the study communities.

This chapter has previously stated that government trading enterprises and government department and statutory agencies are required by governments to apply participatory/democratic principles as part of their activities. The focus groups that were conducted within each of the study communities enabled participants to describe their experiences with community engagement and consultation initiated by provider organizations. Elite interviews involving representatives of government trading enterprises and government departments and statutory agencies and elected members of parliament also allowed these participants to convey their perceptions of the effectiveness of provider community engagement and consultation activities. The methodological and administrative issues relating to the convening of the focus groups and the elite interviews are described within Chapter Three. Participant-generated perceptions of provider organization community engagement and consultation and the implications for essential functions and services delivery outcomes are discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

The objectives of the study were:

- To identify what rural communities define as being publicly provided 'essential functions and services', within the Western Australian context. The reliance upon participant-based definitions of essential functions and services for this study was consistent with the principle of emergence that is inherent within exploratory research methodology. Further explanation about the use of this qualitative research approach is included in Chapter Three whilst

Chapter Five provides a detailed description of the methodology outcomes as they relate to different categories of functions and services.

- To identify and examine businesses' and residents' assessments of the level and standard of essential functions and services as a basis for achieving and maintaining viability in rural communities. In the discourse involving the concept of rurality that has ensued internationally and in Australia over almost three decades, issues of rural community well-being, vibrancy and viability have featured prominently (Cloke 1985; Gray and Lawrence 2001; Haslam McKenzie 2000; Tonts 2000, 2005). Much of this discussion has endeavored to focus on the reasons for citizens choosing to locate within rural communities or otherwise being drawn to them and the economic, financial and social factors that may be attributed as a consequence. Few investigations or debates involving these issues have occurred without consideration of government policy approaches in rural communities relative to those for urban populations and the implications for rural community viability. One of the aims of the focus groups convened within the six study communities was to enable participants to convey their perceptions about the relationship (if any) between levels and standards of essential functions and services delivery and community viability. Likewise, views about perceived links between essential functions and services provision and viability were also sought from representatives of provider organizations and elected representatives during the elite interviews.
- To identify whether rural communities are exerting any influence upon the political, policy and economic factors driving changes in the provision of essential functions and services - Participant-defined essential functions and services have emerged from perceptions of customers/consumers in their interactions with provider organizations and these have been examined and reported. More broadly as part of this research the perceptions of participant categories (i.e. customers/consumers of the study communities; representatives of provider organizations and elected representatives) have been examined. The significance of participant-generated outcomes relating

to the perceived issues of decline/rationalization/deficiency of essential functions delivery within the study communities will be reflected by their relevance or otherwise to existing knowledge.

As Chapter One of this study identified, rural communities throughout Australia have endured declines in essential functions and services and are experiencing further challenges emanating from the adoption of these contemporary policy arrangements and the role of government has been recast from that of a provider of 'traditional' functions and services to being one of capacity builder and coordinator between rural communities and agencies. These strategies seek to provide rural communities with greater latitude and direct influence in policy decisions that affect essential functions and services delivery (Bellamy and Brown 2009; Morrison and Lane 2006). The realization of these broader policy objectives does not depend solely upon the actions that governments take in seeking to move communities beyond traditional rural landscapes into contemporary rural spaces which are based around productivist and post-productivist approaches (Gray and Lawrence 2001; Lockie, Lawrence, and Cheshire 2006). These new rural governance frameworks demand an increased devolution of responsibilities to rural communities while seeking to engender a sense of resourcefulness and self-reliance among citizens as a basis for encouraging communities to develop localized solutions to problems (Cavaye 1999, 2001).

These governance structures have the advantage over past paternalistic arrangements in that they afford rural communities significant opportunities to exercise empowerment. The pursuit of solutions to introduce autonomy and self-government throughout rural communities is not without its obstacles as their achievement will depend upon the ongoing presence of a strong social fabric and existence of the leadership capacity and a commitment to involvement on the part of citizens (Cavaye 2001, 2004; Herbert-Cheshire 2000). Through the focus groups that were convened within the study communities this study was able to examine participant-based perceptions about the operation of contemporary governance approaches as

these relate to essential functions and services delivery issues. These processes also enabled participants to convey views of community effectiveness in maintaining essential functions and services by the exercise influence over the decisions of elected policy makers and the strategies of provider organizations. During elite interviews that were held with representatives of the provider organizations and the elected representatives, participants' views were sought about the influence that study communities had applied over government policies and the strategies of providers. Issues concerning the perceived effectiveness of the study communities in securing ongoing essential functions and services were also discussed. A detailed explanation of the outcomes of the data collection processes involving the research participants is presented in Chapter Five of the study, whilst Chapter Six contains further narrative on these contemporary rural governance approaches as they relate to the study outcomes.

- To identify and investigate businesses' and residents' perceptions of the responsiveness of government and corporatized entities to service-related needs and issues in rural communities. Neoliberal era reforms which governments introduced universally including Australia were aimed at improving the efficiency/effectiveness of public sector organizations that provide essential functions and services (Barrett 2000; Orchard 1998a; Considine 1988; Halligan 1997). Participative/democratic initiatives introduced by governments requiring that provider organizations engage more directly with customers/consumers in the design and delivery of functions and services were also important and their significance cannot be overstated (Alford 2002b; Alford and Speed 2006; Clarke 2004, 2007; Trentmann 2007). Such community engagement and consultation interactions had been predicated on promoting transparency and accountability on the part of provider organizations and were ultimately aimed at achieving improvements in service standards (Aberbach and Christensen 2005; Du Gay and Salaman 1992; Needham 2009; Pollitt 1988; Potter 1988). Consultation and engagement processes that public sector organizations undertake with

customers/consumers are of themselves insufficient to guarantee that provider accountability obligations are being fulfilled (Holmes 2011). Consequently it is necessary that government trading enterprises and government-based providers of essential functions and services have appropriate operational mechanisms in place so that customers/consumers can make complaints and provide feedback on issues (Auditor General Western Australia 2001; Auditor General of Western Australia 2007; Brewer 2007). The research outcomes of perceptions of provider responsiveness are presented in Chapter Five of the study and issues associated with accountability and transparency in community engagement are discussed within Chapter Six.

2.5 Definitions

Chapter One of this study introduced some operational definitions that were to be used in examining and understanding some of the issues related to the delivery of essential functions and services in the study rural communities. This section explores these in more detail.

2.5.1 Essential functions and services

Central to this thesis is an examination of the issues surrounding the delivery of essential functions and services to rural communities. It is necessary to first identify some appropriate, universally understood definitions of ‘essential functions and services’. Chapter Five of this study explains how the pursuit of the exploratory research objectives invoked participant-derived definitions or perceptions of essential functions and services. These provide a basis for discussion of any divergence between what may be termed the ‘theoretical’ definitions and the ‘actual or perceived’ definitions of participants.

A review of the Australian-based literature suggests there is general agreement as to the concept of ‘essential functions and services’, and about their importance from a rural perspective (Australian Farm Institute 2006; Australian Government –

Productivity Commission 2011a, 2011b; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001). This consensus also appears to extend to an acknowledgment that urban and rural populations are entitled to access essential functions and services, and to a view that governments are responsible for ensuring that they are delivered effectively (Collits 1999). The literature also indicates that considerable scope is provided within the definition for many functions and services to be categorized as ‘essential functions and services’.

The Australian Farm Institute (2006), in its comparative research of issues affecting urban and regional Australia, nominated the following as constituting essential services:

- health services, including hospital, medical and aged-care
- social welfare services
- primary, secondary and tertiary education
- communications, including telephony and data services
- cultural and public entertainment services.

Australian Farm Institute (2006: 2)

Further items were identified as being worthy of examination, either as services in their own right, or as an ancillary to the processes of delivering essential services.

The Australian Farm Institute (2006: 2) described these as:

- transport
- fuel and power
- financial and management services

(Australian Farm Institute 2006:2)

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001), in its publication, *Measuring Wellbeing: Frameworks for Australian Social Statistics*, has collected, analysed and reported on a range of data about Australian society in terms of what it describes as:

major area(s) of concern (i.e. population, family and community, health, education and training, work, economic resources, housing, crime and justice, and culture and leisure).

(Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001:5)

The Bureau reports that this data highlights the vulnerability to economic and social problems that families living in rural areas may suffer. Ongoing global developments in agricultural production and trade have forced structural changes on domestic industries, with significant impacts for the rural communities that have traditionally relied on agricultural activities. Consequently, families in rural communities may suffer disadvantage and health and wellbeing problems due to a diminished level of access to essential government delivered services, e.g. hospitals, schools, higher education and organized family support programs (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001; Hallebone, Townsend, and Mahoney 2000). The notion of wellbeing is premised on the fact that it:

...has individual and social dimensions and is influenced via transactions between individuals and society, and by life events, transitions, and other factors that can be grouped within some core areas of concern.

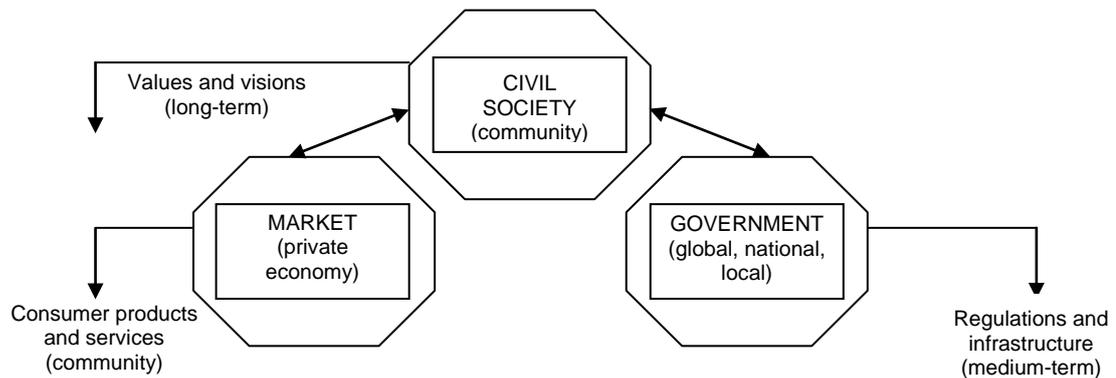
(Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001: 22)

Arguably, therefore, it is the attainment of the ‘wellbeing’ of society and its citizens that governments at all levels in Australia are responsible for pursuing through their delivery of essential functions and services. From a Western Australian perspective, this quest for societal wellbeing is supported by more contemporary policy frameworks that have been developed with the aim of ensuring the ongoing sustainability of rural communities.

The former Gallop Labor Government in Western Australia, in its 2003 policy document: *Hope for the future: The Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy* foreshadowed the concept of the ‘Enabling State’, under which Government’s fundamental role is to: “enable, resource and empower local communities to be a solution to their social problems” (Government of Western Australia – Department

of the Premier and Cabinet 2003: 231). The influence of government, therefore, extends into the free enterprise market and throughout the wider community.

Figure 2.1: The Interconnection of community, government and the market



Adapted from *Hope for the future: The Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy*, Figure 11 p. 222

The concept of the ‘enabling state’ is useful for highlighting the range of functions and services that governments provide to rural communities. It also allows parallels to be drawn between the definition of ‘essential services’ as applied throughout this study and that of ‘community services’. The former Western Australian Labor Government’s State Sustainability Strategy describes ‘community services’ as those delivered by government agencies, including:

the Departments of Housing, Police, Health, Education and Training, Disability Services, Community Development, Justice, Indigenous Affairs, Local Government and Regional Development, Planning and Infrastructure and Sport and Recreation.

(Government of Western Australia – Department of the Premier & Cabinet 2003: 223)

Within this construct of ‘community’, the effective coordination of community services’ delivery between agencies at all levels of government is viewed as being important to generating the social capital needed for sustainability.

2.5.2 Community

Superficially at least, the universal impression of ‘community’ is one of a concept that possesses among its prerequisites, the characteristics of commonality, harmony and a sense of shared interest and belonging (Zimmerman and Rappaport 1988). Heller (1989) identifies two widely acknowledged approaches to the concept of ‘community’. The first and traditional view has seen community grounded in geography, as a basis upon which the above described prerequisites or characteristics can be met. The second of these notions is described as being the ‘relational community’, or one created through the human interaction that is the result of close and common social bonds between people (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001; Heller 1989). Community is a concept which the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001: 56) defines as comprising: “an interconnected group who can influence one another’s wellbeing”. It is from this perspective that the term ‘community’ has been used to describe the phenomenon of populations being drawn together as ‘communities of place’ or ‘communities of location’ (Barraket 2001; Black 2005; Dibden and Cocklin 2005). A third and novel view advanced by Heller (1989) is that of ‘community’ as collective power. This view contends that:

The power of organized constituencies is the leverage for social change, regardless of whether that social leverage comes from localities or organized interest groups.

(Heller 1989: 4)

Community can also be what Head (2007: 441) describes as a ‘vague and value-laden’ concept because it often ignores or devalues “the social, economic and cultural differentiation of localities or peoples.” The widespread availability of effective communications technology (i.e. computers and the Internet) has also now required a broadening of the definition of ‘community’. These circumstances have encouraged ‘communities of interest’ comprising like-minded individuals and groups whose interaction can transcend local, regional, national and international boundaries (Dibden and Cocklin 2005).

An assessment of many rural communities throughout Western Australia is likely to suggest conformity with the geographical and relational factors that have been posited above as the basis for a definition of 'community'. Davidson (2005) offers the view that the notion of a rural community is one centred on a 'commonality of interest' between farmers and residents of the rural towns. However, both the purpose and character of rural communities is changing. With this in mind, 'community' and 'commonality of interest' may be manifested in a number of forms. These concepts are influenced by factors such as traditions and historical links, current needs, common social bonds, and economic and political interdependence.

2.5.3 Rurality

The establishment of an instructive definition of 'rurality' was pivotal to this research. This can be seen in the fact that the study itself was aimed at building on the acknowledged relationship between historical, geographical, economic and social attributes of rural areas and factors influencing the delivery of essential functions and services (Haslam McKenzie 1999, 2000; Tonts 1996, 2005; Gray and Lawrence 2001). Chapter One of the study has already described some of the characteristics of rurality which are likely to be held in common throughout each of the study communities, namely geography, demography and socio-economics. This chapter supports that assertion by providing evidence from further literature review.

Early British research pointed to geographical and economic factors as having traditionally provided the basis for discussion of what constitutes 'rural' and the broader notion of 'rurality' (Cloke 1985). The term 'rural' is synonymous with anything non-urban in character; however, the specific attributes of a rural environment are diverse, highly contestable and have become very difficult to define (Cloke 1985, 2006; Woods 2011). From an Australian perspective, more recent studies have suggested that the notion of 'rural' can be examined within geographical and demographic contexts (Aitken 2005; Duncan and Epps 1992; Race, Luck, and Black 2011). The debate about rurality, and the attempts to define it, seems to revolve around philosophical and social issues.

This wider debate also emphasizes the influence of diversity and social construction in setting the context of 'rurality'. The substantial body of research undertaken in this area would suggest that there have been significant changes in the character of Australia's rural communities. Rural communities have diversified, largely because agriculture no longer serves as the dominant force that it had done in past eras (Halpin 2003; Jones and Tonts 1995; Tonts 1996). In contrast, issues concerning land use are highly contested and politicized, such that strategies cannot be developed without the engagement of a diverse range of stakeholders. Consequently, the relevance of the traditional notion of 'rurality' is also in question and Lane, McDonald and Morrison (2004: 110) assert that: "Rurality in Australia is now a space inhabited by diverse communities pursuing diverse practices; the rural landscape is a mosaic not a monoculture."

2.5.4 Empowerment

Empowerment was identified as being an important consideration to be examined within the context of this study. As Ayeni (2001: 7) explains, a 'customer' is "... an individual member of the public who is the recipient of public services". The term customer generally also implies that there is a choice of services available, otherwise suppliers will dominate in the marketplace. In practical terms, however, customers of public services typically find themselves offered very limited choices or alternatives (Ayeni 2001). As a consequence, customer empowerment programs have become important initiatives within contemporary public sector organizations.

2.5.5 Empowerment and community

Over the past two decades, the global phenomenon of 'community engagement' has largely been driven by developments in governance and political economy. Head (2007) attributes this to:

a shift away from a managerial or top-down approach, towards a revitalized emphasis on building institutional bridges between governmental leaders and the citizenry.

(Head 2007: 441)

Empowerment has served as the 'bridge' for linking the effective leadership structures and communication mechanisms and knowledge networks needed to successfully implement Landcare programs within the rural communities described by Sobels, Curtis and Lockie (2001). These programs have proved to be invaluable in terms of value-adding and in the generation of social capital (Speer et al. 1995).

Within communities, organizations can be used for what Speer and Hughey (1996) have identified as 'mediating structures' to facilitate empowerment by bringing individuals together to address common issues. A 'mediating structure' encompasses a range of community organizations such as school-based committees, religious bodies, voluntary organizations and neighbourhood groups. The power-based community organization is central to the notion of empowerment in that it seeks to change the structural make up of a community with a view to generating the 'social power' needed to achieve community change (Speer and Hughey 1996).

These concepts of mediating structures and power-based organizations are relevant to the research of the communities examined in this thesis. The research has examined whether these communities are effective in influencing the decisions of policy makers and the strategies of providers of essential functions and services. The goal of such processes is to ensure that policies and delivery models accommodate local issues and needs.

2.5.6 Democracy and empowerment

So that the preceding discussion can be drawn to its logical conclusion, the implications of existing democratic structures and representative arrangements on the study rural communities must be understood. Parliamentary democracy has been subject to ongoing debate about legitimacy, which according to Sorensen (1997: 553), can be the result of an absence of trust between the: 'representative' and the 'represented'. Empowerment and political representation issues are significant for the study communities. Traditional public sector organizations, which have been accountable to governments and communities in their delivery of essential functions

and services, are in many cases being replaced by corporatized, commercially focussed entities.

2.5.7 Rurality and community definitions as applied to the study communities

This study asserts that each of the six study communities contains the attributes that are commensurate with the commonly applied definitions of ‘rural’ and ‘rurality’. For the purposes of this research, each of the study communities also falls within the category of ‘rural’ as applied by the Australian Standard Geographical Classification administered by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008). Some of the attributes of the study communities which associate them with the ‘rurality’ definition are also reflected in the criteria of the lesser-known Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas (RRMA) classification. (Australian Government – Department of Primary Industries and Energy and Australian Government – Department of Human Services and Health 1994).

The RRMA has been identified in much literature describing social and economic and wellbeing issues affecting Australian rural communities (Argent and Dollery 2000; Hugo 2005; Jones, Humphreys, and Adena 2004). As the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008) has explained:

The ASGC provides a common framework of statistical geography which enables the production of statistics that are comparable and can be spatially integrated. In practice, statistical units such as households and businesses are first assigned to a geographical area in one of the seven ASGC structures...

(Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008: vi).

Each community contains its own Local Government Area (LGA) which in turn equates to the Statistical Local Area (SLA). Geographically, the communities are located in the Central Wheatbelt, Great Southern and South West regions of the state. Chapter Four of this study contains further detailed explanations of statistical data and other characteristics of the six study communities.

2.5.8 Viability and sustainability

The six study communities date back to the early decades after the 1829 settlement of the colony, which today is Western Australia. Each of the study communities has, since its inception, relied predominantly upon agriculture and related 'rural' industries as the key drivers of their economic activity and in promoting ongoing viability. This research examines the trends in and outcomes of the delivery of essential functions and services in each community, and considers how these influence the ongoing sustainability and viability of these communities. It is important to recognize and to acknowledge not only the important characteristics that constitute the distinct, but also related terms of 'viability' and 'sustainability'.

2.5.9 Viability

Within the context of ongoing social, economic and political developments in Australia's rural communities, 'viability' is a concept that engenders much public debate (Collits 1999; Kenyon 2013). However, before 'viability' may be effectively discussed it is necessary to identify and select the most applicable and relevant definitions from among the many that are available. In its purest context, 'viability' (*n*) is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as being: "feasible, possible, practicable, practical, workable". Likewise, to be 'viable' (*adj*) represents something that is "practicable, capable of living or surviving" (Oxford 1996: 569).

Discussion about the viability of rural communities does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, it is generally conducted in terms of the impact of social, economic, environmental and policy factors upon the practicality, capability and survival of these communities (Collits 1999; Haslam McKenzie 1999, 2000; Tonts 1998; Tonts and Jones 1997). The depopulation of rural communities and the structural changes in agricultural practices have impacted adversely on these communities. When coupled with these naturally based and globally driven phenomena, the neoliberal policies of successive federal and state governments have also seen a rationalization of many essential functions and services in rural communities and a shifting of responsibility for their provision, thereby severely undermining the opportunities for

these communities' ongoing viability (Davies 2008; Gray and Lawrence 2001; Sher and Sher 1994; Tonts and Jones 1997).

In this post-globalization environment, the economic prosperity attributed to market-driven policies of governments has not necessarily guaranteed the viability of rural communities (Alston 2002a). Instead, and whilst the importance of a strong local economy is acknowledged, it is the 'human, institutional and social capitals' underpinning rural communities which also figure highly as determinants of viability (Alston 2002a, 2002b). Long-term adjustments in government philosophy and policy approaches have affected the delivery of a range of 'social' or 'welfare' services to rural communities. These changes also result in social capital and viability implications for rural communities (Alston 2002b).

2.5.10 Determinants of community viability

In so far as the discussion about the future of rural Australia is concerned, the concept of wellbeing is now widely acknowledged as being a relevant and reliable indicator of a community's viability. This may explain why organizations and individual researchers have invested considerable resources in investigating, analyzing and reporting on various factors that combine to comprise wellbeing (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001; Collits 1999; Kenyon 2013; Tonts 2000). From a Western Australian perspective, these studies have led some writers to assert that the delivery of essential functions and services in areas such as health, education, transport and communications is crucial to a rural community's wellbeing and, therefore, to its viability (Tonts 2000; Tonts and Jones 1997).

2.5.11 Sustainability

Sustainability is an ambiguous and contestable concept that needs to be considered in context (Dibden and Cocklin 2005). Some writers have sought to overcome this ambiguity by setting out ecological, economic and social dimensions of sustainability. To sustain something or someone is to: "support it, (or) keep it alive, keep it going so that it can endure" (Oxford 1996: 516). Researchers have examined

the sustainability implications of the three abovementioned factors on communities, societies and wider economies. As Hembd and Silberstein (2011) write:

Sustainability refers to the ability of humans and human society to continue indefinitely within a finite natural world and its underlying natural cycles. At the center of this dynamic is human economic activity and its relationship with and impacts on the natural environment. It is no longer possible to think of the world as so big that the human enterprise has no impact on the planet's climate and the functioning of its ecosystems. The challenge is to move this relationship toward sustainability.

(Hembd and Silberstein 2011:263)

Throughout rural communities there appears to be a general acknowledgement among elected policymakers, public officials and populations about the economic, social and environmental challenges that confront these communities (Alston 2002a; Dibden and Cheshire 2005; Tonts 2005). However, in rural communities impediments to the achievement of sustainability outcomes will arise so long as ambiguities over definitions of sustainability continue to exist (Black 2005). To be effective, any policies developed in response to these issues must prescribe an integrated approach and be long-term in nature. Within contemporary public policy environments these prerequisites cannot always be readily accommodated. Factors such as the expected term of government funding that would attach to the policy or the extent to which it was synchronous with the electoral cycle would influence government decisions.

2.5.12 Determinants of rural community sustainability

Turning to the discussion about the perceived pre-requisites for rural community sustainability, Dibden and Cocklin (2005) offer guidance through what they describe as 'the three pillars or dimensions' of sustainability, namely its economic, social and ecological (or environmental) elements. This framework accords with the 'triple-bottom line' approach that is used by governments and private sector organizations alike in assessing the potential sustainability implications of decisions, and in monitoring performance outcomes against expressed targets (Government of

Western Australia – Department of the Premier and Cabinet 2003; Tonts 2005; Tonts and Jones 1997).

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter set out by outlining some of the significant economic developments that had occurred internationally and within Australia, beginning in the early 1980s and for the period covered by this study. It explained their implications for associated public policy decisions made by governments concerning the delivery of essential functions and services. A detailed assessment of various theories of customer behaviour and the associated customer service models demonstrated their relevance to the issues examined in this study. The chapter has also addressed some of the definitions that are critical to an effective understanding of contemporary political, economic and policy issues that drive customer service programs and the strategies of public sector organizations delivering essential functions and services. Chapter Three will explain the methodology that has been applied in carrying out the various stages of the research and in arriving at the findings reported in this study.

Chapter Three Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology that has been applied in carrying out this research involving the selected rural communities. As part of this discussion the choice of research design is also addressed. The chapter briefly discusses the main principles underpinning qualitative research and highlights their relevance within the context of grounded research, which is the underlying methodological approach for this research (Whiteley 2004). The chapter also outlines the procedural and ethical considerations that were factored into the research design to facilitate trustworthiness and authenticity of outcomes, and to ensure the academic rigour of the study (Guba and Lincoln 1989; Shenton 2004).

3.2 Research background

The preceding chapters have established the framework for the proposition underpinning this research, notably that state-sponsored essential functions and services are a critical resource for many Western Australian rural communities. The evolving nature of government's role in the delivery of essential functions and services over time has implications for the participants within the study communities, and the participants within government departments, statutory agencies and the government trading enterprises. These factors have necessarily informed this research and are matters that have been appropriately incorporated into the research objectives outlined in Chapter One.

This chapter, in providing background to the relevance of broader qualitative research principles to this study and specifically the application of grounded research, also discusses the issues associated with the research design. The research design applied to the data collection phase sought to promote an emergent approach to identifying participants' perceptions of issues related to the delivery of essential functions and services within the study communities (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Marshall and Rossman 2006).

3.2.1 Case selection

Communities were selected with a view to injecting diversity into the research, although the arbitrary nature of this process is acknowledged. The research was not considered to have been compromised by this selection process, however, because the case study types were exploratory and collective (Shkedi 2005; Stake 2005; Yin 1994). The selection of the six study communities as cases was based on the requirement to ensure conformity with the rurality criteria that underpinned this research. Chapter One of this study set out the operational definitions for these rural communities.

Significant regard in case selection was also given to the likely historical role that essential functions and services had played in the establishment of these communities. The selection tracked the historical development of Western Australia, from when the Swan River settlement expanded after 1829 when many farming communities were established in the south, south east and the near north (Crowley 1960) of the then colony. The study communities were located within these areas.

The selection of the case study sites was also influenced by the researcher's expectations of customers' perceptions of issues related to the delivery of essential functions and services within their communities, along with the potential implications of these factors on the strategies of provider organizations and the decisions made by elected policy makers (Yin 2012). The primary focus of the research was hence not the cases themselves. Rather, the aim was to discover some wider phenomena, namely the implications on the study communities of issues related to the delivery of essential functions and services, and the effectiveness of the communities in influencing the outcomes of these issues (Shkedi 2005; Stake 2005; Yin 2012). Through specific questions, the research explored issues of customer/citizen perceptions and understandings and the extent to which the selected case study rural communities were able to influence the strategies of providers of essential functions and services and the decisions of policy makers.

3.3 Research questions

Insofar as qualitative research is concerned, the research questions play a significant role, both in shaping the research design and in driving its ultimate outcomes (Creswell 2003; Lewis 2003; Snape and Spencer 2003). The credibility, trustworthiness and academic rigour of the research is considered, and an explanation is given of the mechanisms implemented within the research design at different points of the data collection process. These measures were aimed at ensuring that data arising from the processes of engagement between the researcher and participants was at all times transparent and consistent with co-creation (Marshall and Rossman 2006).

For this research, the grounded and exploratory characteristics of the research design framework were explained with the research questions:

“What are the perceptions of businesses and residents in rural communities regarding essential functions and services provided by government and corporatized government entities?” (The question can otherwise be re-phrased to read: “How do businesses and residents in rural communities perceive the essential functions and services provided by government and corporatized government entities?”)

and

“How do these customer groups assess their ability to identify and to convey service-related issues and needs?”

The case study method brings with it some particular requirements with respect to the formulation of questions. Essentially, the scope and focus of questions chosen must be compatible with the type of case study strategy being pursued. To this end, Simmons (2009) recommends that ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions are most effective for researchers carrying out exploratory study. Conversely, for descriptive study the use of open questions is considered beneficial because they enable the researcher to document the case in detail (Swanborn 2010). For case studies, as with other forms of qualitative research, flexibility is an important factor in the overall research design (Holloway 2005; Merriam 2009; Marshall and Rossman 2006). This research set out with a research design aimed at identifying a number of exploratory/descriptive case

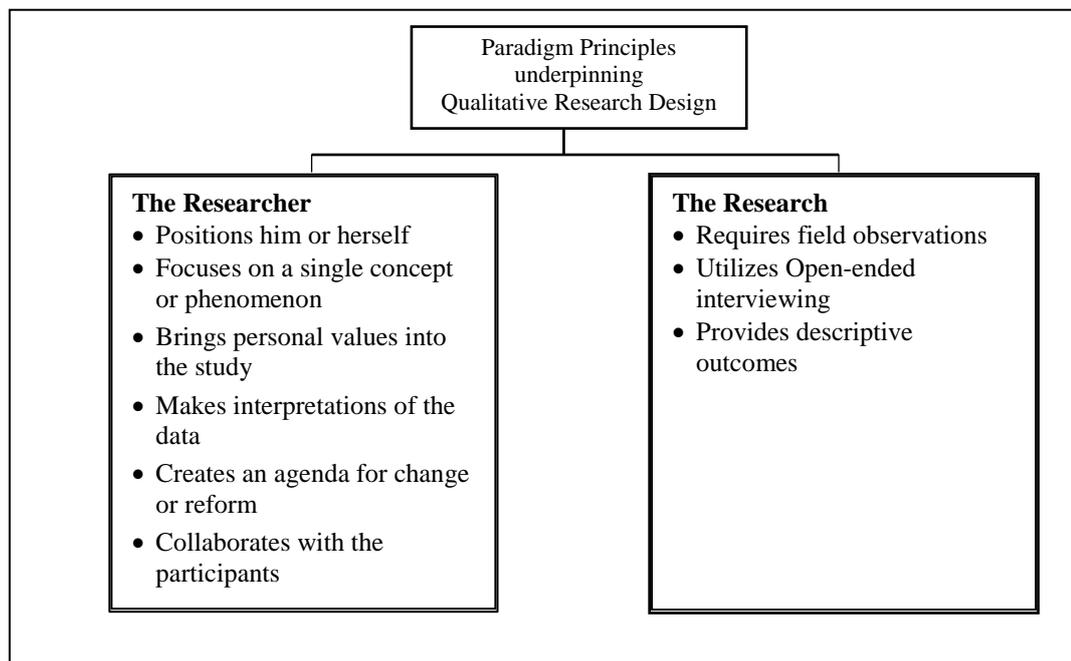
studies. The initial design envisaged that the cases examined would be of the singular type, with the findings not being generalizable. The researcher, after revisiting this proposed approach, settled upon a research design incorporating exploratory (multiple), instrumental (collective) case studies, with a view to the research identifying phenomena within the cases and building theory (Stake 2005; Yin 1994).

3.4 Foundations of qualitative research

The success of qualitative research ultimately depends upon the research approach adopted, which in turn is heavily influenced by the methodological foundations upon which the study is based (Creswell 2003; Merriam 2009). This process can be assisted, however, by an explanation of the assumptions behind the paradigms that underpin the research and by providing examples to illustrate these assumptions.

The underlying assumptions for this research have been drawn from many writers, including: Creswell (2003), Charmaz (2006), Denzin and Lincoln (2005), Guba and Lincoln (1989), Glaser and Strauss (1967), Marshall and Rossman (2006), and Yin (1994). The common concepts in the works of these writers that were identified as being appropriate to this research were: the preferencing of emergence, the rejection of *a priori* theory, and the favouring instead of inductive analysis. The application of processes giving voice to the participants during the data collection phase enabled a participant-centred construction of reality. The positioning of the researcher as *participant-observer* within certain processes brought the researcher's personal understandings into the study, consistent with subjectivist epistemology (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). The trustworthiness and rigour of the study was facilitated by the provision within the research design of appropriate confirmatory mechanisms that involved participants. The assumptions behind the paradigm of this research were centred on a hermeneutical/dialectical approach which facilitated the subjectivist environment and led to co-created findings (Guba and Lincoln 1989).

Figure 3.1: Foundations of Qualitative Research



Source: Cresswell: 2003; Merriam: 2009 (Adapted from McCabe 2002)

3.5 Research framework

This research examines customer assessments of the level and standard of essential functions and services delivered within selected case study rural communities. It also focuses on whether or not participants within these rural communities perceive that they are exerting influence upon the policies and strategies associated with the delivery of these functions and services.

The use of a constructivist and interpretivist approach was considered appropriate in conducting the study for a number of reasons. Firstly, the research was undertaken within communities as complex social settings and it involved a diverse range of participants. Within this context, no singularly accepted version of ‘effectiveness’ of community-initiated empowerment strategies for influencing government policy or the strategies of the providers of essential functions and services delivery was expected to exist. The expectation of divergent and complex views of study participants regarding these questions accords to the “relativism – local and specific

constructed realities” position espoused by Guba and Lincoln (1989). The use of focus groups (study community group interviews), elite interviews and confirmatory surveys provided the alternative data sources or the *multiple realities* that are fundamental to relativist ontology. These mechanisms required interaction and facilitated the pursuit of shared knowledge and understanding between the researcher and the participants (Guba and Lincoln 1989; Krefting 1991; Melia 1997).

3.6 Grounded research

This research had its origins in the principles of ‘grounded theory’ and, specifically, its successor, ‘grounded research’, which was designed to recognize emerging qualitative issues within the business and organizational realm (Whiteley 2004). Grounded theory was identified first by Glaser and Strauss in *Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The significant popularity of grounded theory among researchers may be attributed to it having promoted a new, emergent language. Similarly, the complementary nature of inductive and deductive tools in grounded theory, applicable to many areas of qualitative and quantitative research, was recognized (Bryant and Charmaz 2007; Charmaz 2006; Hood 2007).

Glaser and Strauss (1967: 2) defined grounded theory to be: “...the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research.” However, more recently, grounded theory has been explained as being:

...a method of conducting qualitative research that focuses on creating conceptual frameworks or theories through building inductive analysis from the data. Hence, the analytic categories are directly ‘grounded’ in the data. The method favors analysis over description, fresh categories over preconceived ideas and extant theories, and systematically focused sequential data collection over large initial samples. This method is distinguished from others since it involves the researcher in data analysis while collecting data – we use this data analysis to inform and shape further data collection. Thus, the sharp distinction between data collection and analysis phases of traditional research is intentionally blurred in grounded theory studies.

(Bryant and Charmaz 2007: 608)

The application of grounded theory principles in developing middle-range theory is evidenced in a range of qualitative research, such as that addressing rural communities and leadership – both of which are relevant to this research (Bowen 2006; Parry 1998).

Kathleen Eisenhardt has researched extensively the application of the grounded theory principles in theory-building within case study typology (Eisenhardt 1989; Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007). Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007: 25) propose that “the central notion is to use cases as the basis from which to build theory inductively.” Yin (1994), having been a leader in establishing the exploratory, and descriptive qualities of the case study as qualitative research, also highlights the capabilities of the case study in theory-building. The importance of this link between case study strategy and theory-building is highlighted in the form of six alternative illustrative structures that are available to researchers for composing case study reports (Yin 1994). These are summarized below:

Table 3.1: Yin’s Application of Six Structures to Different Purposes of Case Study

Type of Structure	Purpose of case study (single or multiple-case)		
	Explanatory	Descriptive	Exploratory
1. Linear-Analytic	X	X	X
2. Comparative	X	X	X
3. Chronological	X	X	X
4. Theory-Building	X		X
5. ‘Suspense’	X		
6. Unsequenced		X	

Source: Yin 1994: *Case Study Research*, “Ch6. Composing the Case Study ‘Report’” page.138

Whiteley (2004) has proposed that the increasing diversity of the contemporary business environment and a heightened ambiguity in problems emerging from the

organizational setting are factors which render the use of pure grounded theory being somewhat impracticable. Rather, what has been called for, given this vastly different environment, is the utilization of a modified grounded research model to highlight the competing problems within the qualitative research framework, recognizing the impact of social interaction upon respondents' attribution of meaning (Whiteley 2004). The research environment involving customers/citizens as participants was also considered as having been impacted by social, economic and political factors. Within this context, social interactions have been important, and it is expected that these exchanges are influenced by the personal constructs of various participants.

The utilization of the modified grounded approach was considered to be appropriate to this study given the issues of a 'traditional' study community's dependency on the delivery of essential functions and services, while these were being reduced or withdrawn. Public sector organizations, in their roles as providers of essential functions and services, have also been subject to change (Whiteley 2004). During the research a number of qualitative strategies for data collection, data management and data analysis were operationalized in order to conform to criteria which Whiteley (2004) designed specifically for use within grounded research. These are provided at Appendix A-1.

3.7 Research design

Many scholars have highlighted design soundness as a significant factor in the successful conduct of research (Marshall and Rossman 2006; Flick 2007). This design soundness is informed by decisions made by the researcher prior to research work being undertaken, based upon their understanding of the methodological literature. Design soundness or '*want to do-ability*', however, is also achieved when the researcher can demonstrate that a valid relationship exists between the conceptual framework and the research questions (Marshall and Rossman 2006). These concepts are operationalized through:

- 1) the assumptions of qualitative approaches;
- 2) the logic for selecting a site, a sample, the participants, or any combination of these;

- 3) the choice of overall design and data collection methods;
- 4) an acknowledgment of the intensive aspects of fieldwork;
- 5) a consideration of ethical issues;
- 6) the resource needs; and
- 7) attention to the trustworthiness of the overall design.

(Marshall and Rossman 2006:13)

The design of this research was influenced by principles of the constructivist–interpretivist paradigm, bringing with them requirements for a methodology supporting the concept of emergence that is fundamental to grounded research. Figure 3.3 below outlines the manner in which research design soundness considerations were addressed in this study.

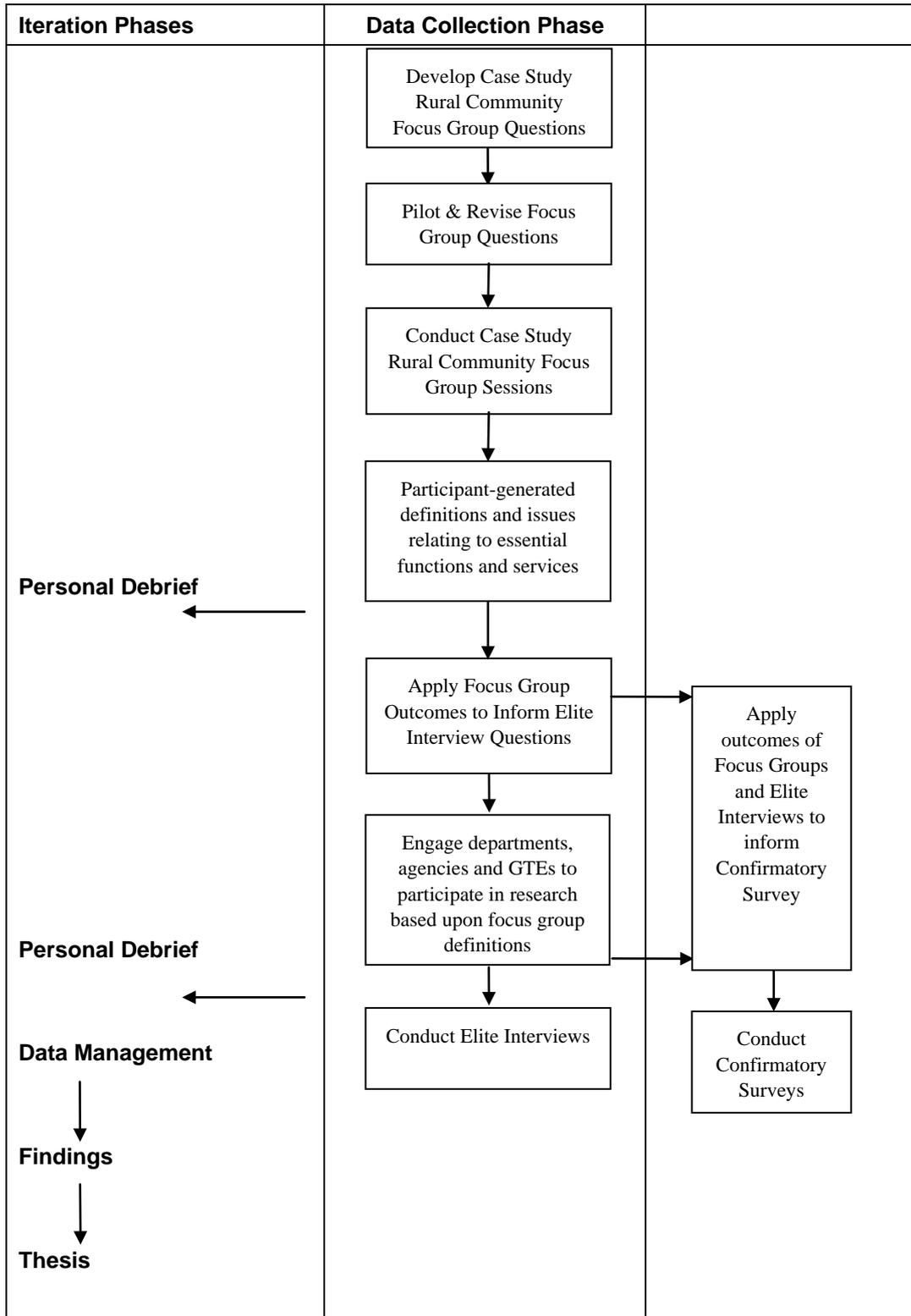
3.8 Data collection

Data for this research was collected using three primary methods, namely: focus groups, elite interviews and confirmatory surveys.

3.8.1 Focus groups

Where focus groups are used, the degree of influence that is reflected in the research depends on whether these processes are applied as *methodology*, or whether they are treated as one of many optional means of *data collection* (Jamieson and Williams 2003). Where the emphasis is on data collection, focus groups provide but one research tool within the context of the overall methodological framework (Jamieson and Williams 2003; Lane, McKenna, Ryan, and Fleming 2001).

Figure 3.2: Schema of the Research design



For this research, the focus groups were utilized as one of three data collection methods (i.e. together with elite interviews and confirmatory surveys), while case study typology served as the primary methodology by which all data was presented, discussion conducted and theories proposed. Membership of the focus groups comprised representatives of local government, volunteer-based organizations, sporting and leisure groups, business representative bodies (or local business representatives where applicable) and community members.

The process of recruitment of participants for the focus groups within the study rural communities was designed so that groups comprised multiple categories of participant. These categories were:

- Local government – two representatives;
- Local businesses – two representatives;
- Community service /volunteer organizations – two representatives; and
- Community members – two representatives.

These arrangements sought to reflect, insofar as was possible, a broad representation within the six communities that were examined. As the recruitment process was implemented throughout the case study rural communities, the impact of certain demographic, social and economic factors became apparent, meaning that it was not always possible to engage participants according to the original criteria for representative categories. As a result, purposive sampling was unavoidable in the recruitment of focus group participants (Merriam 2009; Ritchie, Lewis, and Elam 2003).

For this research, it was considered imperative that the focus groups be convened locally within each of the six study communities. This created familiar environments for participants and made it easier for them to be engaged in the process of discussing relatively complex issues over relatively short timeframes. The focus group process hence compares favourably to other similar qualitative methods, such

as *participant-observation* (Edmunds 1999; Krueger and Casey 2000; Morgan 1997).

3.8.1.1 Introductory letter to local governments

The participant engagement phase of the research was begun by the researcher writing to the local governments responsible for administration and functions and service delivery within a number of rural communities. The successful engagement of the local governments within each of the study communities was crucial to this research. Representatives of the local governments were assigned appropriate participant categories for the focus groups and in each community the local government administration centre or similar public facility was used to conduct the sessions. The researcher, in return for receiving the agreement of local governments to participate in the study, offered to provide them an executive summary of the approved research thesis. The proposition put to each local government was that the thesis findings and recommendations might benefit the community in its future advocacy for essential function and services delivery issues with provider organizations and elected policy makers. The researcher approached a total of eight local governments seeking their participation in this study; four responded favourably, two declined and two did not respond. Copies of these communications are included at Appendix A-2.

3.8.1.2 Introductory letter to community organizations, sporting groups and representative bodies

Another facet of the focus group recruitment process involved the researcher seeking the participation of various volunteer-based organizations, sporting and leisure groups, and business representative bodies (where applicable). The researcher, utilizing contact information published by each local government in its community services directory, wrote letters to the office bearers of each of the above groups. The letters outlined the background to the research, and explained the focus group recruitment process, as well as how the study would seek to achieve representativeness. Invitations were extended to these entities to nominate

representatives to participate in the forthcoming focus group sessions. Copies of the letter of introduction sent by the researcher to community organizations, sporting organizations and representative bodies within the study communities are included in Appendix A-3.

3.8.1.3 Public advertisement for community members

The third element of the focus group recruitment process involved the researcher inviting members of the community to participate. An advertisement calling for nominations from members and providing background to the research was placed in a local newspaper or, alternatively, in a local newsletter circulating in the study communities. Additional information regarding the administrative processes and instruments that the researcher used in recruiting participants for the focus groups held throughout the study communities is provided at Appendix A-4.

3.8.2 Elite interviews

For this research, elite interviews were conducted with representatives of government departments, statutory agencies and government trading enterprises. Interviews were also undertaken with elected representatives of the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of Western Australia. As Marshall and Rossman (2006) have identified, there are advantages in elite interviewing because important context can be derived from data that is associated with a participant's social, political financial or organizational status.

For this research, the pursuit of a broad range of perceptions of essential functions and services led to elite interviews being conducted with representatives of a significant number of government departments, statutory agencies and with two government trading enterprises. Given the quantity of data contained in the transcripts of the interviews conducted with representatives of government departments and statutory agencies, these transcripts are not reported in this study. However, the outcomes arising from those engagements were considered to be represented within the findings and models relating to statutory organizations.

Copies of the letters sent by the researcher to these public sector organizations inviting their participation in the study and providing background to the study are provided at Appendix A-5. A sample copy of the letter sent to elected representative participants is included at Appendix A-6.

3.8.3 Confirmatory surveys

The conduct of confirmatory surveys of business customers and residential customers throughout the study communities followed the completion of the focus groups' processes and the elite interviews. Stratified samples of potential survey participants for each category within each community were obtained using publicly available information (i.e. telephone directory, local government/community directory and enrolment data from the Australian Electoral Commission electoral rolls) (Coyne 1997; Marshall 1996). Letters written to the potential participants contained the survey document, as well as a pre-paid self-addressed envelope to facilitate the return of the completed survey to the researcher. The covering letters provided background to the research and explained the ethical and privacy-related considerations associated with the operation of the survey. Potential survey participants were offered an opportunity to enter a competition draw to win a token prize as an encouragement for their completion and return of the survey.

The researcher distributed a total of 415 confirmatory surveys to potential respondents within the residential and business stratified samples across each of the six study communities. At the conclusion of the confirmatory survey process, the researcher had received a total of 105 completed surveys. The quantities of survey instruments that the researcher initially distributed to each study community varied according to the community/population size and these quantities and community/population sizes are reflected in the numbers of responses received. However, based on the total number of survey instruments that were distributed to residential and business customers within each study community, response rates ranging from between 21 per cent to 28 per cent were attained, representing a rate of 24 per cent overall. A detailed breakdown of the confirmatory survey distribution and subsequent responses received across all of the study communities represented is

provided at Appendix A-7. The confirmatory survey instrument and the covering letter forwarded to participants are included at Appendix A-8.

3.8.4 Data management

Qualitative research brings with it various problems relating to data management. Among the issues often confronting qualitative researchers are that the diversity of sources accessed and the resultant volume of information create a need for data to be organized into a consistent, logical and useable format. This research, therefore, applied various data management measures aimed at achieving a systemic and credible approach to data collection, data analysis and, ultimately, theory development. This research centred upon the *inductive method*. Patton (2002) describes the inductive approach as applicable for research designs in which the researcher allows the important analysis dimensions to emerge from patterns in the cases under study without presupposing beforehand what the important dimensions will be. Likewise, the qualitative analyst seeks to understand the multiple interrelationships among dimensions that emerge from the data without making prior assumptions or specifying hypotheses concerning linear or correlative relationships among narrowly defined operationalized variables (Patton 2002).

Many writers (Goulding 2002; Holton 2007; Kelle 2007; Stern 2007; Strauss and Corbin 1998) describe the coding process within a grounded theory paradigm as comprising three separate phases. These are: *open coding*, *axial coding*, and *Selective coding*. Coding represents that element of the grounded theory approach which is applied to conceptualize data into 'patterns' or 'concepts' (Polit and Beck 2004). The result of this conceptualization is the creation of *substantive codes* (i.e. those that address the empirical substance of the topic being examined), and *theoretical codes* (i.e. those that address the basis by which substantive codes relate to each other).

Polit and Beck (2004) describe the Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory approach as forming two types of substantive codes – open coding and selective coding. The authors, in this context, explain the differences, thus:

Open coding, used in the first stage of the constant comparative analysis, captures what is going on with the data.

Open codes may be the actual words used by the participants. Data are broken down into incidents and their similarities and differences are examined. During open coding, the researcher asks: “What category, or property of a category does this incident indicate?” Glaser (1978: 7)

Open coding ends when the core category is discovered, and then selective coding begins. In selective coding, researchers code only that data that are related to the core variable.

Polit and Beck (2004: 581)

Axial coding is ‘operationalized’ by the researcher carefully analysing all field notes, transcripts or similar documents on a line-by-line basis, or, even word-by-word, before being coded into categories (Kelle 2007). Importantly, as Kelle (2007: 202) highlights, categories developed during open coding are to be investigated on whether they relate to properties of *conditions*, *context*, *action/interaction strategies*, and *consequences*. Ultimately, however, the role of axial coding and these properties within categories is to enable the researcher to arrive at a simplified view or interpretation of the phenomena being studied.

For this research, the coding process resulted in the creation of theme-based ‘nodes’ and ‘sub-nodes’ (i.e. categories and sub-categories) arranged to resemble a hierarchical (interrelated) structure (Bazeley 2007; Charmaz 2006; Corbin and Strauss 2008; Richards 1999). The availability of *NVivo* 8 enabled *open coding* to be undertaken simultaneously with *axial coding* (Bazeley 2007; Bringer, Johnson, and Brackenridge 2006; Pollio, Graves, and Arfken 2006).

Selective coding occurs after open coding and axial coding have concluded. The process is so titled because it involves the researcher selecting from among the data core categories to form theory (Gray 2009). According to Punch (2005) and Flick (2009) selective coding consolidates the propositions derived from axial coding. In the selective coding process, integration between the core category or categories and the other related categories in the data occurs at a higher level of abstraction. At the conclusion of the *open coding* and *axial coding* stages, this researcher conducted

selective coding and settled upon coded categories and related sub-categories that were deemed to constitute a core construct labelled *Effectiveness*. The study communities being perceived as *effective* in influencing the provider organizations and elected policy makers on the delivery of essential functions and services matters was considered the core construct. The basis of this approach is shown in Appendix A-9.

3.9 Research quality and academic rigour

3.9.1 Ethical principles

Qualitative research does not operate within a detached or isolated setting. Rather, it is based fundamentally upon interactions among individuals and between individuals and groups (i.e. the researchers and their subjects). Acknowledging the significance of such interactions, and having regard to the broad context within which qualitative research occurs, the researcher must also continually re-evaluate their priorities when pursuing their work. This calls for the application of appropriate strategies to enable the researcher to present various data and associated findings, while also safeguarding the wellbeing and the best interests of their human subjects. All research undertaken throughout this study adhered to Curtin University of Technology's Code of Conduct for the Responsible Practice of Research and the Joint NHMRC / AVCC Guidelines on Research Practice. All letters of introduction inviting participation in the data collection phases (i.e. focus group processes, the elite interviews and the confirmatory surveys) affirmed the voluntary nature of any involvement. Letters of introduction sent to individuals within study communities also stressed the anonymity of the process as did the survey instrument itself (its cover page).

None of the participants attending the focus group sessions, nor the representatives of the provider organizations or elected policy makers engaged in the elite interviews were referred to by name or otherwise identified within the body of the thesis. Similarly, and with respect to the confirmatory survey, respondents were only requested to indicate the name of their community by way of an identifier.

Accordingly, the requirements of both privacy and confidentiality were complied with.

The conduct of qualitative study involving individuals is significant because there is an overriding onus on researchers to ensure that the research design and its various components conform to ethical standards. The adherence to these requirements within research is necessary in order that compliance with the general principles of responsible research can be assured. The national Code of Conduct sets out these principles (National Health and Medical Research Council and Australian Vice Chancellors Committee 2007: 1.3)

For this study, the fulfilment of these objectives was assisted by the researcher having submitted for approval to the University Human Research Ethics Committee all proposed data collection mechanisms and associated documents involving participants. This material comprised: the focus groups question guide, the elite interview questions, the confirmatory survey mechanism, Information Sheets and Participant Consent Forms.

3.9.1.1 Consent

In this research, the participants attending focus group sessions and those in elite interviews were provided with an Information Sheet and accompanying Participant's Consent Form. The Information Sheet outlined the background to the research and the purpose of the study, together with the expected scope of involvement of participants. The Participant's Consent Form required individuals to sign in consent to their participation, thereby specifically acknowledging that they had been apprised of the research information. Copies of the Information Sheets and accompanying Participant's Consent Form are provided at Appendix A-10.

3.9.1.2 Identification of participants by self or others

As Chapter One of this study has outlined, together with section 3.8.3 above, processes were included within this research to assure participants of their privacy

and of the confidential and voluntary nature of their involvement. Issues relating to the maintenance of privacy and confidentiality arise in research when information extends to third parties (Hadjistavropoulos and Smythe 2001; Richards and Schwartz 2002). A professional contractor was engaged by the researcher to transcribe the audio-taped proceedings of focus group sessions. The researcher required the contractor to sign a non-disclosure statement for the purposes of adhering to the privacy and confidentiality requirements of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Research and consistent with the commitments made to participants.

3.9.2 Academic rigour

Demonstration of the trustworthiness of qualitative research outcomes is considered critical. Guba and Lincoln (1989) assert that credibility has been essential to securing trustworthiness in qualitative research. Such outcomes are achieved through the construction of a framework comprising components which promote the credibility of the research.

3.9.2.1 Prolonged engagement

Guba and Lincoln (1989) identify substantial “on-site and ongoing involvement in the ‘field’ by the researcher” as being essential to addressing the consequences of “misinformation, distortion, or presented ‘fronts’”. Immersing a researcher in the field of inquiry is also necessary for trust-building, and to promote the understanding of culture and context-setting.

The focus groups involving the selected case study rural communities were convened locally by the researcher, within the communities themselves. The processes of recruitment and selection of focus group participants, logistical arrangements associated with arranging each of the sessions and other preparatory work facilitated the researcher’s familiarization with context and culture. The elite interviews involving representatives of government departments and statutory agencies and government trading enterprises were conducted in various regional locations and in the Perth metropolitan area.

Context-setting was promoted through the researcher travelling to the regional areas to conduct interviews with senior representatives of government departments and statutory agencies. Other interviews held at the central head office locations of government trading enterprises and at Parliament House in Perth served a similar purpose. Cultural understanding of the essential functions and services providers was sought through the investigation of published organizational documentation, including enabling legislating, annual reports, strategies and policies. A comprehensive review was also undertaken of the range of available information outlining the powers, procedures and functions of the Parliament of Western Australia.

3.9.2.2 Persistent observation

According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), observation must be sufficient to enable those attributes and elements considered most pertinent to a circumstance to be identified. For this research, such observation was encouraged by coordinating the data collection phase and the responses to the emergence of key issues or themes phase. Each element of the research built upon that which preceded it: the process of observation began with the focus case study community groups; it continued through to the elite interviews; and concluded with the confirmatory survey phase. One priority for the researcher involved identifying the emerging issues at the conclusion of each phase, adapting the data gathering mechanisms as required while ensuring that the fundamental, core, common elements were maintained.

3.9.2.3 Member Checks

In qualitative research, Guba and Lincoln (1989) explain that research design must allow for mechanisms to enable researchers to verify that the multiple realities presented are those of participants. They identify the following examples of this adherence to credibility: “processes of testing hypotheses, data, preliminary categories, and interpretations with members of the stakeholding groups from whom the original constructions were collected” (Guba and Lincoln 1989: 238–239).

Focus groups

For this research, participants in the focus groups held in case study rural communities were provided with a copy of facilitator's screen notes showing the issues identified in relation to questions put during focus group. The researcher's covering correspondence had specifically encouraged participants to review the contents of the draft document and to provide feedback if appropriate.

Elite interviews

The interaction that occurred was overwhelmingly between the researcher and one participant, save for one circumstance, where two participants representing the same organization were interviewed. Participants were each provided with copies of draft transcripts of the interview proceedings and were given the opportunity to review the contents and provide feedback.

3.9.2.4 Triangulation

The use of triangulation for promoting reliability of case study research is also highly appropriate. Stake (2005: 454) describes the procedure as being one "...that has generally been considered as a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation." From a qualitative research perspective, however, he also acknowledges the impossibility of the repeatability of observations and interpretations. Triangulation, particularly insofar as case study is concerned, is about: "identifying the different ways the case is being seen" (Stake 2005: 454).

Triangulation of method

Triangulation can be pursued using different methods, which are commonly applied throughout most qualitative research (e.g. the focus groups and elite interviews utilized for this research).

Diversity of informants

Triangulation can be achieved through the use of a wide range of data sources (Burns and Grove 2005). As Shenton (2004) identifies, the information or informants used for such purposes can be wide-ranging in qualitative research and certainly in case study. For this research, it was necessary to access information from a range of official documentation published by government departments, statutory agencies and government trading enterprises responsible for the delivery of essential functions and services to the selected case study rural communities. Other documents, such as reports of inquiries into the activities of these organizations, as published by the Parliament of Western Australia, were also utilized.

Credibility and trustworthiness criteria

Shenton (2004) identifies that the credibility of research projects can be seen in the adoption of research methods well established both in qualitative investigation in general and in information science in particular. Within these acknowledged methods, credibility is attained through what Yin (1994: 40) describes as the “correct operational measures for the concepts being studied.” For this research, the use of the widely accepted technique of an exploratory case study helped to create each of the six rural communities as a field of inquiry. The case study approach also provided a mechanism for the descriptive reporting of outcomes of issues that were identified as having emerged from within the field. The operating procedures used during the course of the research for data collection, focus groups, and elite interviews, are widely established techniques for exploratory case studies (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Edmunds 1999; Krueger and Casey 2000; Lane, McKenna, Ryan and Fleming 2001; Marshall and Rossman 2006).

Confirmatory surveys were conducted with the aim of identifying the extent to which the views and issues arising from each of the focus groups were represented within the communities. The confirmatory survey procedure sits appropriately within the overall case study research framework (Stake 2005).

3.9.2.5 *Data administration and retention*

Raw data collected during the course of study was in both electronic and paper format. The focus group proceedings and the elite interviews were recorded by means of micro-cassette recorder (audiotape). Data collected in hard copy format through the confirmatory survey processes was translated and saved electronically in Microsoft Excel format as part of the analysis process. All data analysis and data management outcomes, including *NVivo 8* related-work was on Compact Disc and USB devices, saved for retention at the Graduate School of Business, Curtin University of Technology. Pursuant to the Joint NHMRC/AVCC *Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice*, all data collected during this research is available for audit and will be retained for a five-year period.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a comprehensive outline of the investigative domain within which this research was conducted, and the various qualitative research strategies and methods have also been explained. The chapter also identified the grounded research method as the preferred methodology for the research and addressed in detail the reasoning behind this. The chapter identified case study typology as providing the foundation for data collection, data analysis and, ultimately, theory-building. Information about the activities and procedures used to ensure the reliability and integrity of the research processes and their associated findings has also been provided.

Chapter Four Scene-setting: Profiles of the Study communities

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide background to the six study communities examined as part of this research. This task will be pursued through the presentation of data and a map showing the geographic location of these communities, along with information about the economic and social characteristics and demographic profiles of populations.

Chapter Three of the thesis described how the study communities were selected arbitrarily by the researcher. This selection process, however, was undertaken with a view to securing a cross-section of communities from throughout rural Western Australia which had been experiencing similar issues and challenges in the delivery of essential functions and services. This chapter will also provide an overview of the factors influencing the establishment of some of the essential functions and services and their current status within the study communities. The discussion involving historical factors will be limited, given the contemporary period within which this research is framed. The chapter will aim to demonstrate that such factors have contributed to the establishment of essential functions and services provided within the study communities from a historical perspective. By the same token however, such factors continue to be important in influencing delivery within the contemporary context.

Through these discussions, the chapter briefly introduces the six study communities. This provides an entree to the more comprehensive explanation of issues and findings relating to the delivery of essential functions and services within these communities, which will be addressed within chapters five and six.

4.2 Background to the study communities

4.2.1 Putting the communities in geographical context

This research examined customer perceptions of essential functions and services in rural Western Australian communities. It utilized a case study approach involving six discrete communities drawn from different geographical regions of the state.

The concept of essential functions and services delivery is one which is considered as having universal application for rural communities. Evidence of this fact can be seen in the vast body of work that has been written about the Western Australian rural context specifically, and about rural Australian life generally (Beer, Maude, and Pritchard 2003; Government of Western Australia – Department of Premier and Cabinet 2003; Haslam McKenzie 2000, 2011; Lockie 2000; Tonts 2000, 2005; Tonts and Jones 1997).

For this research, the concept of essential functions and services provided both the subject of an investigation and it assisted in identifying relevant outcomes. There was particular interest in essential functions and services, therefore, both from the perspective of their implications for effectively functioning communities, and as factors contributing to the ongoing viability of the communities themselves. Issues related to the delivery of essential functions and services within the study communities were investigated with regard to their historical and contemporary contexts.

The researcher considered it important to endeavour to pursue some ‘representativeness’ in the issues associated with the examination of the delivery of essential functions and services in rural communities. This was sought through the presence within selected study communities of the benchmark concepts of ‘rurality’, ‘community’ and ‘empowerment’, as set out within the research framework. Representativeness also was attained through the pursuit of the common factors identified as being significant to the establishment and ongoing delivery of essential functions and services within the study rural communities. These factors are

indicated in the maps, along with the information relating to the communities, which is provided within various tables. A map showing the positions of the study communities within the state is included at Figure 4.1 (over).

Figure 4.1: Statewide map showing the study communities

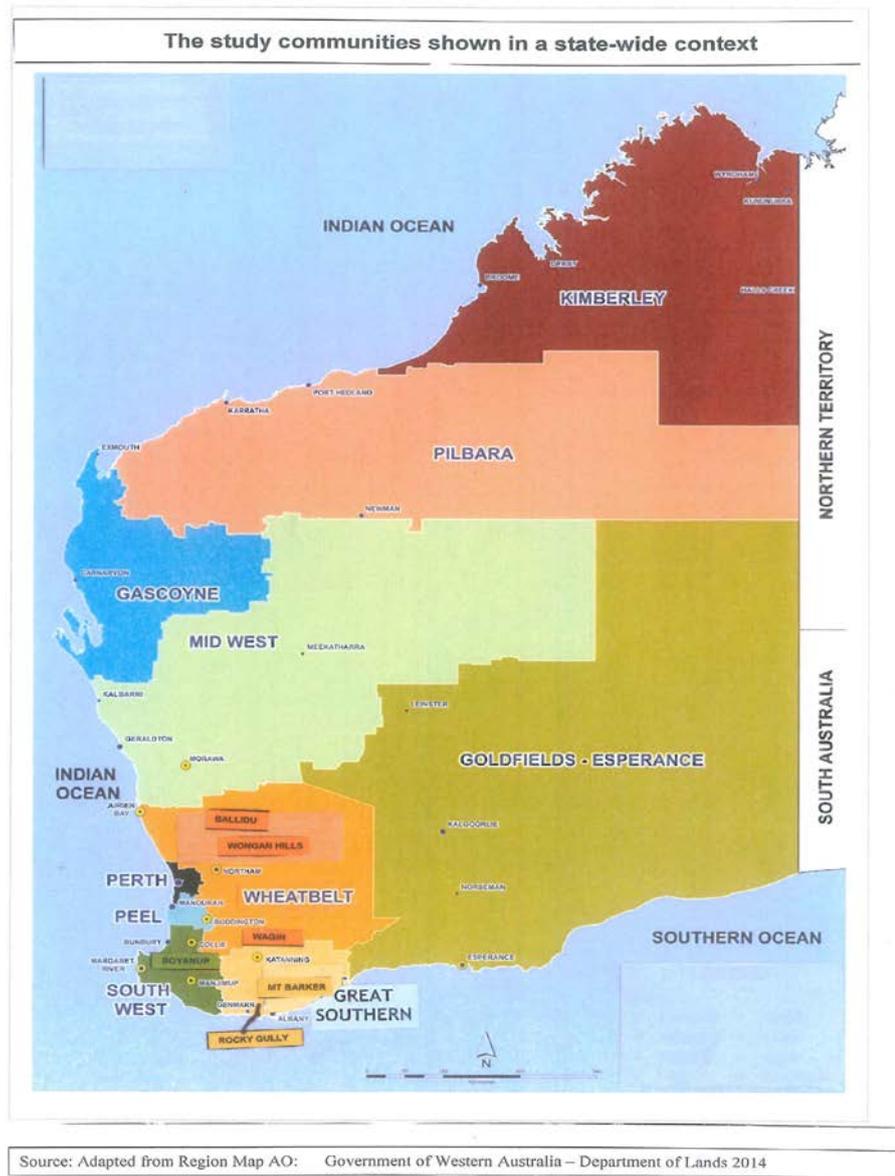


Table 4:1: Statistical information relating to the study communities

Study Community	Regional Development Commission Classification	Australian Bureau of Statistics Statistical Subdivision	Local Government Area	Regional Centre ¹	Commonwealth Electoral Division	State Legislative Council Region	State Legislative Assembly Electorate	Estimated Resident Population (Census 2006)	Estimated Resident Indigenous Population (%) 2006	Total Gross Value of Agricultural Production 2006 (\$mill)	Number of Businesses at 30 June 2007*
Wagin	Wheatbelt	Midlands	Wagin	Northam	O'Connor ²	Agricultural	Wagin ³	1,910	4.7	46.4	288
Mount Barker	Great Southern	King	Plantagenet	Albany	O'Connor	Agricultural	Blackwood-Stirling ⁴	4,733	2.7	95.3	693
Rocky Gully	Great Southern	King	Plantagenet	Albany	O'Connor	Agricultural	Blackwood-Stirling	193	2.1		
Boyanup	South West	Preston	Capel	Bunbury	Forrest ⁵	South West	Collie-Preston ⁶	615			
Wongan Hills	Wheatbelt	Avon	Wongan-Ballidu	Northam	O'Connor	Agricultural	Central Wheatbelt ⁷	1,473	4.5	95.9	225
Ballidu	Wheatbelt	Avon	Wongan-Ballidu	Northam	O'Connor	Agricultural	Central Wheatbelt	82			

¹ As defined pursuant to Regional Development Commission criteria and boundaries.

² The O'Connor Electoral Division spans an area of 1,587,758 sq km and included 85,032 electors as at 14 December 2007. Source: (Australian Electoral Commission 2011).

³ The Wagin Electoral District spans an area of 72,488 sq km and included 20,152 electors as at 26 February 2007. Source: (Office of the Electoral Distribution Commissioners 2011).

⁴ The Blackwood-Stirling Electoral District was renamed from the Mount Barker Electoral District after a re-distribution of electoral boundaries was conducted in 2007. The Blackwood-Stirling Electoral District spans an area of 29,934 sq km and included 20,009 electors as at 26 February 2007 Source: (Office of the Electoral Distribution Commissioners 2011).

⁵ The Forrest Electoral Division spans an area of 12,781 sq km and included 94,504 electors as at 14 December 2007. Source: (Australian Electoral Commission 2011).

⁶ The Collie-Preston Electoral District was renamed from the Capel Electoral District after a re-distribution of electoral boundaries was conducted in 2007. The Collie-Preston Electoral District spans an area of 4,345 sq km and included 22,195 electors as at 26 February 2007. Source: (Office of the Electoral Distribution Commissioners 2011).

⁷ The Central Wheatbelt Electoral District spans an area of 53,898 sq km and included 20,299 electors as at 26 February 2007. Source: (Office of the Electoral Distribution Commissioners 2011).

4.2.2 Historical and contemporary essential functions and services issues in the study communities

4.2.2.1 Wagin

Wagin was the first of the six study communities to be examined by the researcher.

Wagin is situated within the Great Southern region of Western Australia, approximately 230 kilometres south east of Perth and some 250 kilometres from the key regional city of Albany. The settlement of Wagin and its surrounding districts occurred over a twenty year period beginning in the late 1880s. The impetus for such events had come primarily as a result of the construction of privately funded railway infrastructure southward between Beverley and Albany. The Great Southern Railway project was an innovative one and it saw the government of the day and private business interests working in partnership to facilitate the settlement of new migrants into the state (Pederick 1979). The project was significant both to the emergence and the growth of the fledgling agricultural industry of the district, with many new landholdings being opened up along the course of the railway.

Having originally been established as agricultural lands, Wagin and its surrounding districts today continue to be sustained predominately through mixed wheat and sheep farming activities (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010b). Pederick (1979), in recounting the record harvests of the 1973–74 seasons particularly, describes the contribution made to Wagin by the renowned Western Australian grain handling and storage entity, Co-operative Bulk Handling (CBH). The association of this organization with Wagin has spanned many decades, and is represented by a significant capital investment in grain receival infrastructure and on employee accommodation throughout the town. Co-operative Bulk Handling classifies Wagin as a primary receival site within that entity's statewide grain storage and handling network (Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd 2009). It has previously been rated among the top 20 Australian receival sites by grain type (Australian Competition & Consumer Commission 2011).

Wagin and its surrounding districts have, over many decades, established a reputation as being a region which produces the finest merino wool. Since 1972, the Shire of Wagin and an organizing committee have held the *Wagin Woolarama* as an annual event to showcase this quality of production to the agricultural industry, to commercial buyers and the public at large. The Woolarama is the major event on Wagin's social calendar, attracting many thousands of visitors annually and providing a significant source of economic benefit to the community as a result (Wagin Woolorama 2011).

Essential functions and services

An assessment of the history of Wagin suggests that essential functions and services have made an important contribution to that community. They have been integral in sustaining populations and in promoting growth and development. Some of these functions and services were made possible as a result of the large scale infrastructure associated with the Great Southern Railway. Today, the state no longer operates this railway infrastructure and hence cannot directly control the transportation of bulk freight⁸. Likewise the government no longer uses the railway as a mode of public transport of passengers between the Perth metropolitan area and Wagin. The responsible agency, the Public Transport Authority, instead provides a daily road coach service between Perth and Albany, which incorporates Wagin as one of the intermediate stopping points.

An illustration of the relationship between Wagin's early beginnings and the community's reliance upon essential functions and services can be seen in the establishment of its town water supply. Pederick (1979) writes that the initial water supply for the town was in the form of dam constructed to service the steam locomotives travelling the Great Southern Railway. The establishment in 1956 of a Comprehensive Agricultural Areas Water Supply Scheme at Wellington Dam near

⁸ In 2000, the Western Australian Government Railways (Westrail) ended its monopoly of the state's rural freight network. It established WestNet Rail (now Brookfield Rail) and entered into new track access arrangements with a number of operators, including the Australian Railroad Group (ARG). Consequently, these entities together determine issues relating to track infrastructure, maintenance, depot location and track access fees.

the South West town of Collie enabled the Wagin townsite to connect to an abundant and reliable water supply (Le Page 1986; Pederick 1979). The ongoing benefits to Wagin of this were highlighted in the findings of a groundwater study of the Wagin townsite prepared in 2001 by the then Department of Agriculture (Crossley 2001). The study reported that the Water Corporation supplied 300,000 kilolitres of water for up to 800 households within the Wagin townsite annually. The report also identified that 90 percent of households were connected to the mains sewer network.

The supply of electricity to Wagin is another service that has experienced significant improvement over time, due to growth throughout the region and advances in technology. Pederick (1979) reports that community-generated electricity first came to Wagin in 1914. In 1960 Wagin was the first town in the Great Southern region to obtain power from the State Electricity Commission facility in Bunbury (Pederick 1979). Wagin today is included within the Country South Region of the South West Interconnected System (SWIS) of electricity generation maintained by the government trading enterprise Western Power⁹. Another government trading enterprise, Synergy, is responsible for retailing electricity to the residential and small business customers within the community.

Education has been an important factor in the advancement of the Wagin community over time (Pederick 1979). Government schooling began in Wagin in 1892 and attendances were minimal at that time. However, by 1906, such was the population of the town that 190 students were enrolled in school and by 1913, the student numbers had increased to 270. In 1954, the Wagin primary school was upgraded to a junior high school and in 1957 total enrolments at the junior high school had reached 450 students, with 85 of these being in the secondary school section. The 1965 school year saw the growth of the junior high school, with 500 students in attendance (Pederick 1979).

⁹ Western Power was formed in 1995 as the successor to the State Energy Commission of Western Australia. In 2005, following the passage of the *Electricity Corporations Networks Act 2005*, Western Power became an electricity networks corporation, along with three other separate government trading enterprises undertaking the functions of electricity generation, retailing, and regional distribution.

Wagin today, by contrast, hosts a District High School, albeit with a smaller total enrolment of 272 students. Details of the distribution of the student population and the allocation of teaching and administrative resources within the school are provided at Appendix B-1.

Health services have also played a crucial role in the progress of the Wagin community from both a historical and contemporary viewpoint. The first 'public' hospital building to service Wagin townsite and the surrounding district was constructed in 1908 (Pederick 1979). The government assumed formal responsibility for this facility in 1921, with various extension works being subsequently undertaken in 1929, in 1944, in 1952 and again in the 1960s. Today, the Wagin District Hospital operates as an 18 bed facility and offers a range of public in-patient and out-patient services to the community (Government of Western Australia – Department of Health 2013). This research identified perceptions from participants of some hospital services (e.g. obstetrics, radiology and some surgery) having been downgraded. These participants claimed that the combined factors of the tendency by medical practitioners towards specialization and the impact of government policies in health program delivery have seen many local hospital services relocated to the larger regional centres of Narrogin and Albany (Government of Western Australia – Department of Health 2003).

The history of Wagin suggests that, since 1900, a number of doctors have relocated to the town, set up their practices and served the community well (Pederick 1979). This research identified that the Wagin community places a high value on residents having fairly immediate access to a local medical practitioner. The local government is required to contribute financial resources to supply the items required to retain a medical practitioner (i.e. consulting rooms, residence, and motor vehicle) (Shire of Wagin 2009).

Tables have been developed showing population trends that have been identified within the study communities. The information was based on Australian Bureau of Statistics census data over an extended timeframe (1971 to 2006) and is reported at a

Local Government Area classification. The reporting category that the Australian Bureau of Statistics uses is aligned with local government boundaries (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005). In terms of the implications for this research, the Local Government Areas involved were Wagin, Plantagenet, Capel and Wongan-Ballidu.

The first of the population data tables for the period 1971 to 2006 to be presented relates to the Wagin Local Government Area and it encompasses the Wagin study community. Population data tables relating to the Local Government Areas and other larger study communities of Plantagenet and Wongan-Ballidu have also been prepared. The data that is presented within these tables includes population data for the smaller study communities (i.e. Rocky Gully and Ballidu) and form part of the larger Local Government Areas. Individual population data reports for the three smaller study communities during this same time frame were not available. In the case of the Rocky Gully and Boyanup study communities, tables comparing resident population data arising from the 2006 and 2011 census are provided. For the Ballidu study community information relating to resident population obtained during the 2006 census is included.

Table 4.2: Estimated Resident Population for Wagin (S) (LGA) (1976 to 2006)

Year	Persons	% Growth in Population LGA
1976	2,550	N/A
1981	2,400	-5.88
1986	2,206	-8.08
1990	2,094	-5.08
1991	2,092	-0.10
1996	1,868	-10.70
2001	1,725	-7.65
2006	1,785	+3.48

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008e; Government of Western Australia – Department of Local Government 1993b.

Adapted from: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 Census of Population and Housing. Wagin (S) (LGA 58610) T01 SELECTED PERSON CHARACTERISTICS FOR TIME SERIES and Government of Western Australia – Department of Local Government 1993 *Statistical Profile for Shire of Wagin*.

The data suggests that the Wagin study community has been trending toward population decreases over the long term. On the other hand for example, the Wagin study community includes a sizeable aged population with the state and local governments being subjected to essential functions and services delivery demands as a result. A more comprehensive profile of demographic characteristics that relate to the population of Wagin over this timeframe is provided within Appendix B-2.

This research heard how many long-term residents have chosen Wagin as a place for retirement in preference to relocating to Perth or to larger regional centres. Such decisions have, however, led to pressures upon the community to ensure that suitable accommodation infrastructure is constructed and that appropriate health care programs are available to support aged persons residing within Wagin in the longer term. Consequently, the first three units in the *Wagin Cottage Homes* aged persons' accommodation facility were opened in June 1970. The project was financed jointly through fundraising by the local Lions Club and by the Shire of Wagin (Pederick 1979). The facility today comprises 32 units (Thompson 2011). A further aged persons' accommodation facility, *Waratah Lodge*, has subsequently been constructed in Wagin and is operated as a 14-bed private aged care nursing hostel.

Although Wagin lies within the Wheatbelt Regional Development Commission for economic development purposes, for many practical, socio-economic reasons, the community arguably aligns itself more to the Great Southern Region, and especially with the regional centre of Albany. This relationship has not always been one of choice. Rather, as the above discussion concerning government policy decisions and service delivery changes suggests, the association has often been very much one of necessity for Wagin and its residents.

4.2.2.2 *Mount Barker*

Mount Barker was the second of the study communities to be investigated in this research. It is situated in the state's Great Southern Region, 359 kilometres south of Perth and only 50 kilometres from the port city of Albany. Mount Barker was established in 1835 as a farming community, soon after the founding of the penal

colony of Albany (Glover 1979; Shire of Plantagenet 2011). The returns from mixed agriculture and subsequently fruit orchard production contributed significantly to the economic wellbeing of the Mount Barker community. These benefits endured throughout the Depression, both World Wars and into the 1970s (Glover 1979).

By 1975, Mount Barker had experienced a new phase in its development with the focus of local agricultural production having shifted away from unviable orchard farming to substantial investments in grape growing and viticulture (Great Southern Wine Producers Association 2006; Heritage Council of Western Australia 1999). Consequently, the community today plays host to a thriving wine industry, with mixed agriculture and tourism also being major contributors to the local economy. Since the early 1990s, Mount Barker has also been host to activities relating to commercial blue gum timber plantations (Government of Western Australia - Forrest Products Commission 2002). These enterprises, whilst generating significant economic benefits for the community and the Great Southern region generally, have not been without some negative consequences; for example, they experienced severe financial difficulties in 2009 (Williams and Hopkins 2009). In addition, this study identified views about the pressures on road transport infrastructure and potential road safety issues associated with the conduct of commercial timber plantation activities.

Essential functions and services

Essential functions and services have played an important role in sustaining the residents of Mount Barker. These services have typically been crucial in attracting new populations to town and in fostering the development of the community.

One such service involves health. Glover (1979) writes that Mount Barker appointed its first doctor in 1911. The community, by contrast, is today serviced by the Plantagenet Medical Group, a facility which comprises a number of practitioners and which was established with substantial local government support (Shire of Plantagenet 2008). The first hospital in Mount Barker was a five-bed facility which opened in 1922 (Glover 1979). Today, as the Plantagenet Hospital, the facility

operates a 58-bed venture and provides a wide range of medical services. Its activities are supported by 40 nursing staff, 25 carers and 44 administrative and other personnel (Ford 2011). The services provided from the hospital are not limited to Mount Barker and its surrounding districts, but instead encompass a wide geographical area of the Great Southern region. The Mount Barker sub-branch of the St John's Ambulance Brigade was established in 1939 (Glover 1979). Known today universally as St John's Ambulance Australia, the organization plays an important role as an ambulance/paramedic and first aid service to the town and throughout the district. Representatives serving as volunteer members of the Mount Barker sub-centre of St John's Ambulance Australia participated in this research.

The residents of Mount Barker have played an active role over time in facilitating the delivery of some aspects of health services to the community (Glover 1979). In 1957, the formation of a local branch of the Australian Federation of Business and Professional Women saw this organization lend its support to many projects. One such project, the construction of a Frail Aged Home, was also made possible with the assistance of Rotary, Apex, the Country Women's Association (CWA) and the Lions Clubs (Glover 1979). Representatives of the Country Women's Association Mount Barker and the Lions Club of Mount Barker Inc. participated in this research.

Education is another essential function and service that has proved important in the development of Mount Barker. The town's first school opened 1893 and was operated from a makeshift building for thirty students and one teacher (Glover 1979). By 1960, the population of Mount Barker had grown sufficiently to encourage the town to lobby the government for the establishment of a high school. In 1976, the status of the school was further upgraded to that of a senior high school (Glover 1979).

By comparison, in 2011 the town had access to the Mount Barker Community College, which operates as a fully integrated kindergarten to Year 12 government school, attended by 681 students. A detailed overview of the division of the student population throughout the year categories, and the accompanying allocation of

College teaching and administrative resources is provided at Appendix B-1. The Community College provides stability for families in Mount Barker because students are able to complete their primary and secondary education without being forced to live away from home. The existence of the College also ensures that education is accessible to students from outlying centres such as Rocky Gully.

Mount Barker is well serviced by sporting complexes and recreational facilities which cater for a range of traditional summer and winter sports (Shire of Plantagenet 2011b). These services and facilities provide important lifestyle factors given the numbers that comprise the various age categories of the population of the Mount Barker community especially and throughout the Plantagenet Local Government Area generally. The following data table provides population estimates for the Plantagenet Local Government Area which incorporates the study communities of Mount Barker and Rocky Gully. An overview of the demographic characteristics of the population of Plantagenet during this timeframe is provided at Appendix B-2.

Table 4.3: Estimated Resident Population for Plantagenet (S) (LGA) (1976 to 2006)

Year	Persons	% Growth in Population LGA
1976	4,330	N/A
1981	4,270	-1.39
1986	4,201	-1.62
1990	4,154	-1.12
1991	4,316	3.90
1996	4,117	-4.61
2001	4,329	+5.15
2006	4,288	-0.95

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008b; Government of Western Australia - Department of Local Government 1993a).

Adapted from: AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS 2006 Census of Population and Housing Plantagenet (S) (LGA 57210) T01 SELECTED PERSON CHARACTERISTICS FOR TIME SERIES Government of Western Australia - Department of Local Government 1993 Statistical Profile for Shire of Plantagenet.

This study identified that some elderly residents in the community rely upon the home care services delivered free of charge by volunteer groups such as the local

branch of the Country Women's Association of Western Australia. The presence of such population diversity within the community imposes obligations upon service providers at all levels to provide infrastructure and services in order to meet a range of service needs. This research identified views among participants that funding deficiencies had hampered the delivery of mental health services, aged care services, education facilities and road transport infrastructure to the Mount Barker community.

For economic development purposes, Mount Barker is in the Great Southern Regional Development Commission. The community, for many practical geographical, socio-economic reasons, aligns itself strongly to the regional centre of Albany. This relationship is arguably consistent with the historical factors influencing the development of the region, which provided a significant impetus for the foundation of Mount Barker and its surrounding districts.

4.2.2.3 Rocky Gully

Rocky Gully is the third study community from within the Great Southern Region to have been observed during of this study. The town is situated on the Muirs Highway 65 kilometres east of Mount Barker and 115 kilometres from Albany. Rocky Gully came into existence when the Commonwealth War Service Land Settlement Board determined that it would allocate 200,000 acres 42 miles west of Mount Barker, as farming land for settlement by returned soldiers (Botterill 1987). However, it was not until 1951 that the community was successfully settled, with the first of the farming land leases allotted to returned settler soldiers in subsequent years (Botterill 1987; Glover 1979).

Only a small number of settler famers and their families occupied the first of thirty three allotted leases at settlement, whereas in 2006 the population of Rocky Gully comprised 193 residents within an area of 1441.5 sq km (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008c; Botterill 1987; Glover 1979). Following the 2011 Census by contrast, the population number which the Australian Bureau of Statistics attributed

to Rocky Gully was 369 covering an area of 1980.7 sq km. A comparison of population data for this study community is provided within Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Comparison of Resident Population Counts – Rocky Gully 2006 and 2011

Description	Census Year		%Change +/-
	2006	2011	
People	193	369	+91.19
Male	101	238	+135.64
Female	92	131	+42.39
Median Age	38	40	+5.26

Source: (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008c; 2013c)

In comparing the data for the 2006 and 2011 censuses for Rocky Gully, some important factors that may have contributed to these data should be noted. The 2011 Census was based on a data collection area of 1980.7 square kilometres, which is 539.2 square kilometres more than the area used for the 2006 Census. This would have led to significantly increased numbers of dwellings and persons being counted in 2011 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013c).

This research identified that Rocky Gully was subjected to significant external factors that have impacted upon the resident population. These contemporary issues primarily concerned the shift in emphasis of local industry from traditional mixed agriculture/farming to grape-growing and wine-making and plantation timber activities (Government of Western Australia - Department of Regional Development and Lands 2011). Anecdotal evidence suggests these emerging industries have encouraged a more transient population to the town in search of seasonal employment opportunities. New residents may not necessarily be integrated as fully into the fabric of the Rocky Gully community in the same manner as are longer term inhabitants. The implications of these demographic shifts on the Rocky Gully community, in terms of potential social/cultural factors and the employment-related backgrounds or skills brought by individuals, are shown in the following tables.

Table 4.5: Rocky Gully – Census of Population and Housing: Country of Birth of Person[#] Comparison between the 2006 and 2011 Censuses

Count of persons – Based on place of usual residence			
	2006 Census*		2011 Census**
Australia	149		222
Indonesia	0		39
China (excl. SARs and Taiwan)	0		3
India	3		0
New Zealand	6		13
Netherlands	4		0
South Africa	4		7
United Kindgom	7		14
Vietnam	0		4
Born elsewhere	5		47
Country of birth not stated	13		19
Total	191		368

Source: (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008c, 2013c).

Adapted from: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006; 2011 Censuses – Rocky Gully (WA) (SSC50682) B09 COUNTRY OF BIRTH OF PERSON (a) BY SEX. [#]NB: Includes: Ten Highest Ranked Countries by Population Number.

Table 4.6: Industry of Employment for persons in Rocky Gully: Count of employed persons aged 15 years and over – comparing 2006 and 2011, based on usual place of residence.

Industry Classification (incorporating all occupation categories)	Census 2006	Census 2011	% Change +/-
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	63	90	+42.86
Mining	0	0	0.00
Manufacturing	7	21	+200.00
Electricity, gas, water & waste services	0	0	N/A
Construction	3	3	0.00
Wholesale Trade	0	0	0.00
Retail Trade	3	0	-100.00
Accommodation & food Services	6	3	-50.00
Transport, postal & warehousing	0	3	∞
Information, media & telecomm.	0	0	0.00
Financial & postal services	0	4	∞
Rental, hiring & real estate services	0	0	0.00
Professional, scientific & technical services	3	3	0.00
Administrative & support services	0	5	∞
Public Administration & safety	10	12	+20.00
Education & Training	3	9	+200.00
Health care & social assistance	0	0	0.00
Arts & Recreation services	0	0	0.00
Other services	0	0	0.00
Inadequately described/Not stated			
Total	98	153	+56.12

Source: (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008c; 2013c)

Adapted from Australian Bureau of Statistics Census of Population and Housing 2006; 2011 Rocky Gully (SSC55446) Table B43 Industry of Employment (a) By Occupation (b) Count of Employed Persons aged 15 years and over.

Essential functions and services

Rocky Gully as a community has experienced considerable hardship in delivering essential functions and services to its residents. When it was first settled, the temporary nature of the town's establishment had not been conducive to the provision of infrastructure and basic services (Botterill 1987; Glover 1979).

Education was identified as one essential service which was demanded and established soon after the settlement of Rocky Gully (Botterill 1987). The first

school lessons were provided to the children of settler farmers by the Education Department in 1951. By 1956, the total number of enrolments at the school had reached 131 pupils. Education no longer serves as a mainstay for the community as it did during the 1950s and subsequent decades. This research identified views of participants concerning perceived adverse consequences for the town's population stemming from previous decisions taken to close the primary school. To attend school in the nearby town of Frankland or, even further afield in Mount Barker, the children of families that currently live in Rocky Gully must make daily bus trips (sec. 4.2.2.3). In 2006 the population of Rocky Gully comprised a significant proportion of children of school age despite the long term disincentives to settlement that the community experienced following the loss of its primary school.

Health services are viewed as being important to Rocky Gully, given its circumstances as an isolated rural community. A St John's Ambulance sub-centre and committee were formed in October 1951 and an ambulance was provided to the town in January the following year (Botterill 1987). Prior to that time, settler farmers had to travel to Mount Barker and acquire the services of a nursing sister to conduct regular clinics (Glover 1979). This study identified that the community today relies upon regular visits from the Royal Flying Doctor Service for their health care. This service is not delivered directly to Rocky Gully residents, however, and they must travel to Frankland some 20 kilometres north in order to access it.

Communication with the outside world was difficult for Rocky Gully residents in the initial years after settlement. As Glover (1979) explains, the installation of a telephone line was accomplished in 1954 to service the Rocky Gully and Perillup areas. Patronage of the manually serviced exchange soon increased substantially, commensurate with the growing numbers of settlers on farming properties. This research identified views from among participants which appear to suggest that communications (i.e. telephony, mobile telephone coverage; Internet) are an important contemporary issue in the delivery of essential functions and services.

Rocky Gully is included within the Great Southern Regional Development Commission for economic development purposes. The community, for obvious practical geographical, socio-economic reasons, associates itself closely to the larger neighbouring population centre of Mount Barker. This research identified that, from the perspective of residents of Rocky Gully at least, such a relationship has not always been one of choice, nor has it always been a harmonious one. Rather, it appears that the association reflects the realities of governance arrangements (e.g. State Government policies and local government boundaries), which, in turn, affect the delivery of essential functions and service to the isolated Rocky Gully community.

4.2.2.4 Boyanup

Boyanup was the fourth study community that was examined. Situated within the South West region of the state, the town is located within the Shire of Capel, 18 kilometres from the major town of Capel and 21 kilometres from the regional city of Bunbury. Boyanup (Chase and Krantz (1995)) has its origins dating back to the 1860s, when it served as a convenient stopping place for the timber cutters travelling to plantation areas in the South West. Boyanup was formally declared a town in 1894 and by that time it was a thriving community, supported strongly by dairy farming, fruit orchards and timber mills (Chase and Krantz 1995).

Boyanup comprised a population of 615 residents in 2006 however this number rose to 785 by 2011 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008a; 2013a). A comparison of the population numbers recorded for the 2006 and 2011 censuses indicates an increase of 170 persons or 28 per cent. This rise would be considered consistent with the significant ongoing development and associated population growth that has been experienced throughout the wider Capel local government area. These changes are explained in greater detail within Table 4.7 (over).

Since 1999, dairy farming in Boyanup has been somewhat problematic following the introduction of legislative reforms nationally and across the state jurisdictions relating to the full deregulation of milk production and the resultant structural

adjustments of the dairy industry (Dairy Australia 2011). At the Western Australian level, the conditions for dairy milk production meant that a majority of farmers was concentrated in the south west region of the state. Boyanup is included in this region (Western Dairy Inc 2008).

Table 4.7: Comparison of Resident Population Counts for Boyanup (L) (UCL 501600) 2006 and 2011

Description	Census Year		%Change +/-
	2006	2011	
People	615	785	+27.64
Male	308	389	+26.30
Female	307	396	+28.99
Median Age	42	41	-2.38
Australian Citizenship	571	353	-37.18
People born overseas	93	115	+23.65
Overseas visitors (excluded from people counts)	0	0	0.00
Families	173	230	+32.95
All private dwellings (including unoccupied)	253	304	+20.16
Average people per household	2.6	2.5	-3.85

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008a; 2013a)

The farmers in the Boyanup district who remain in the dairy industry now operate in a competitive environment in which pricing and supply factors are dictated by large milk processors and distributors (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2011a).

Fruit orchard farming within the Boyanup district has also followed a similar path of general decline. A South West Directions Paper released in 2004 did not identify orchard farming or dairy farming as being significant industries within the Boyanup district (South West Development Commission 2004).

By contrast, the sand mining operations first established in the Boyanup and Capel areas in the early 1950s continued to develop and grow well into the new millennium. This activity now occupies an important role in generating economic development throughout the region (South West Development Commission 2004). The mining companies have been active community citizens in Boyanup and they

have contributed financially to important sporting and community facilities (Chase and Krantz 1995).

Essential functions and services

Boyanup was established as a community over a period spanning some three decades (Chase and Krantz 1995). Essential functions and services, however basic, therefore played an important role in supporting the new settlers to the district and in fostering the development of the community.

Health represents one such service. It is reported that, even as late as 1914, Boyanup and its neighbouring town of Capel did not have access to a permanent doctor (Chase and Krantz 1995). A Capel-based nurse was instead engaged to accommodate minor health issues of Boyanup residents. Matters of a major or urgent nature necessitated residents having to travel to Bunbury or Perth (Chase and Krantz 1995).

Boyanup residents are today able to access a range of general medical services in nearby Capel. Facilities are also available in Dalyellup, a relatively new and rapidly growing urban centre situated further north of the town (Shire of Capel 2011). A child health clinic operates from a community centre within Boyanup. This research identified that, as a result of government policies favouring centralization and the specialization of complex medical facilities, Boyanup residents travel to the nearby regional centre of Bunbury for major medical treatment.

Education was identified as another essential function and service which has assisted Boyanup, both during its early years of development and throughout its growth as a community. The first government school in Boyanup was established in 1877, with one teacher and eighteen children in attendance. By the early 1900s, the town had established a Class 1 primary school, at which 43 students were enrolled (Chase and Krantz 1995).

Today Boyanup hosts a modern primary school that is attended by approximately 100 students. The distribution of the student population and the allocation of

teaching and administrative resources within the Boyanup Primary School are reflected in the data provided at Appendix B-2.

Students, after having completed primary school level studies in Boyanup, are required to travel to other external locations in order to further their education. For many Boyanup-based students, the continuation to secondary education requires their attendance at Bunbury Senior High School. This school is a regionally focused campus which draws students from within Bunbury and from outlying towns (Bunbury Senior High School 2011).

Aged care is another essential service which is particularly highlighted by the current Boyanup population demographics.

The 1990s was a period of considerable growth and development for the Boyanup community. This led to increased demands on public infrastructure and services and ultimately contributed to the construction of homes for the aged (Chase and Krantz 1995). The provision of appropriately tailored accommodation to support aged populations within communities is important. But it is equally important that residents living at home have access to the necessary support programs and services (Government of Western Australia – Department of Health 2011; Shire of Capel 2010). This research identified that the Shire of Capel currently makes available from a community centre facility in Boyanup a number of ongoing programs and activities which are designed to promote social interaction between aged persons.

The Boyanup community continues to undergo what appears to be a significant change in character and in its population demographic, brought about by a departure from the community's traditional rural base. This is probably reflected most in the types of industries now supporting the town.

Sections of the business community within Boyanup have recently sought to capitalise on the area's idyllic natural environment, with the aim of developing and promoting tourism as a viable industry for the future (Chase and Krantz 1995; Roberts 2009). Boyanup is situated within the South West Development

Commission boundary for economic development purposes. The community, for practical socio-economic and essential services reasons, aligns itself closely to the larger neighbouring population centre of Capel, which is the hub of the Capel Shire.

This research identified a view that many families had chosen to reside in Boyanup for distinctive lifestyle reasons. At the same time, these residents enjoy the convenience of being able to commute to neighbouring larger population centres for employment. They are also able to participate in the leisure activities and retail opportunities which the nearby centres offer.

4.2.2.5 *Wongan Hills*

Wongan Hills, the fifth study community to be examined as part of this research, is situated within the Central Wheatbelt region of the state, a distance of 184 kilometres north east of Perth.

Wongan Hills has its origins dating back to about 1905 (Ackland 1965). The community has developed around mixed agriculture and serves as the main population, business and service centre of the Shire of Wongan-Ballidu (Shire of Wongan-Ballidu 2011a). Shortly after settlement, Wongan Hills and its surrounding districts became renowned for their performances in agricultural production (Ackland 1965). In 2011, mixed agricultural production and associated service industries were the major contributors to the local economy. The level of contribution of agricultural production is reflected in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Gross Value of Agricultural Production of Wongan-Ballidu (S) – year ended 30 June

Description	Value (\$mill)
Gross value of crops	77.8
Gross value of livestock slaughterings	12.9
Gross value of livestock products	5.2
Total gross value of agricultural production	95.9

Source: (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010c).

Participants emphasized the role which a healthy agricultural sector continues to play in securing both the strength of the local economy and the ongoing viability of the Wongan Hills community. Population data has been compiled for the Wongan-Ballidu Local Government Area, which includes both the Wongan Hills and Ballidu study communities, for the period 1976 to 1991. The data in Table 4.9 indicates that the local government area underwent a sizeable population decline period during that timeframe. Further information regarding the characteristics of the population within the Wongan-Ballidu Local Government Area for 1996 to 2006 is provided at Appendix B-2.

Table 4.9: Estimated Resident Population for Wongan-Ballidu(S) (LGA) (1976 to 2006)

Year	Persons	% Growth in Population
1976	2,260	
1981	2,090	-7.52
1986	1,922	-8.04
1990	1,862	-3.12
1991	1,759	-5.53
1996	1,545	-12.17
2001	1,513	-2.07
2006	1,342	-11.30

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008d; Government of Western Australia - Department of Local Government 1993c.

Adapted from: Australian Bureau of Statistics: 2006 Census of Population and Housing Wongan-Ballidu (S) (LGA 59310) T01 SELECTED PERSON CHARACTERISTICS FOR TIME SERIES Government of Western Australia - Department of Local Government 1993 Statistical Profile for Shire of Wongan-Ballidu.

Essential functions and services

Many new settlers were initially encouraged to the Wongan Hills area to take up land selections by the prospect of the construction of a railway line between Northam and Goomalling (Ackland 1965). The section of railway extending from Goomalling to Wongan Hills was completed and opened in August 1911 (Ackland 1965; Erickson 1971).

Electricity is an essential function and service which has been important to the development of Wongan Hills. In 1929, through the agency of the Roads Board, Wongan Hills was able to engage the services of a contractor to provide community lighting (Ackland 1965). By 1960, the town was connected to a permanent 240 volt power supply operated by the then State Energy Commission of Western Australia (succeeded by Western Power Corporation). Wongan Hills is today included within the Country East Region of the South West Interconnected System (SWIS) of electricity generation maintained by Western Power Corporation (Western Power 2012a).

Health services have played a pivotal role in supporting the Wongan Hills community over many decades. The Wongan Hills Hospital was built in 1930 and commenced operations during that year (Ackland 1965). Since that time, the hospital has proved to be an important medical facility for the Wongan Hills community, and for outlying towns (Erickson 1971). The opening of the hospital also marked the beginning of many contractual arrangements between the Road Board and individual general practitioners to enable the provision of medical services to the community. Today, these arrangements have continued, and involve the local government subsidizing certain capital infrastructure and operating costs incurred by the medical practitioner. The Wongan Hills community, in 2010, was the beneficiary of a new medical centre (Shire of Wongan–Ballidu 2011b).

Education is another essential function and service that has been invaluable to the community throughout its decades of growth and development. This can be seen in the schools which were established in Wongan Hills and surrounding district to cater for the children of settler farmers (Ackland 1965). The first public school, comprising 10 students and one teacher, commenced in Wongan Hills in 1913 after many farming families collaborated to acquire a building for this purpose (Ackland 1965). In 1960 the school, operating out of upgraded premises, catered for an enrolment of 300 students and employed eight teachers (Ackland 1965).

By contrast, in 2011 the Wongan Hills District High School supported an enrolment of 237 students. For suitable students the school also provides additional program opportunities in School Based Traineeships for year 11 and 12 and Distance Education Studies. Detailed information about the enrolment numbers that apply to the school and other associated data are provided at Appendix B-1. This research identified that the local government has adopted and implemented on behalf of its residents, certain strategies for economic and social development with a view to promoting to the community's long term viability.

Soon after its initial settlement, the introduction of essential functions and services, and many other improvements to the town, contributed to the consolidation of Wongan Hills. The Wongan-Ballidu Roads Board, established in 1916, as the representative local governing body, was a driving force behind many of these outcomes.

Likewise, in 2011 the local government had positioned itself within the community to become the focal point for the delivery of many operational services and key longer term strategic priorities. These strategies have involved Wongan Hills being widely promoted as a location for lifestyle change and retirement (Shire of Wongan-Ballidu 2011c). The pursuit of such strategies has implications for the characteristics of the town's population and the factors that influence the delivery of essential functions and services within the community. This research identified that, on behalf of its residents, the local government has adopted and implemented certain strategies for economic and social development with a view to promoting to the community's long-term viability. In the short-to medium-term, the impact of these initiatives may become evident in the make-up of the town's population, among other areas.

Wongan Hills is situated within the Wheatbelt Development Commission boundary for economic development purposes. The community, given the history of its settlement and its subsequent development over time, has maintained a close association administratively and socially with the smaller outlying towns within its local government area. For practical purposes, Wongan Hills is also closely aligned

with the nearby regional centre of Northam, where many government administrative offices and major medical facilities and commercial enterprises are located.

4.2.2.6 *Ballidu*

Ballidu is the sixth and final study community to have been examined as part of this research. Situated within the Central Wheatbelt region of the state, Ballidu had a population of 82 residents in 2006 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007a). The town forms part of the Shire of Wongan–Ballidu and is located 36 kilometres north of the main centre of Wongan Hills.

With Ballidu being a small rural community supporting low population numbers there only is a limited amount of Australian Bureau of Statistics social, economic statistical data which can be obtained relative to other information that is available from other communities. This data is shown in Table 4.10 below.

Table 4.10: 2006 Census QuickStats: Ballidu: all People: usual residents_low count area

Category	No.
People	82
Male	45
Female	37
Families	28
All private dwellings (including unoccupied)	46
Occupied private dwellings	38

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008

The community has its origins as a mixed wheat and sheep farming district dating back to around 1909 (McCullagh 1979). In the decade between 1912 and 1923, a substantial number of land selections were made and farms progressively established. These factors assisted in the development of Ballidu as a community (Hood and Toster 1996; McCullagh 1979).

In 2011, the economy of Ballidu continued to be based principally around agriculture. Evidence of this fact can be seen in the significance to Ballidu's

economy of the local Co-operative Bulk Handling Limited grain receival site. Ballidu is classified as a primary receival site within this organization's statewide grain storage and handling network (Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd 2009). It has rated among the top 20 Australian receival sites by grain type in previous years (Australian Competition & Consumer Commission 2011).

Essential functions and services

For Ballidu, a small farming community established at the beginning of the twentieth century, the task of providing essential functions and services to residents has been rather problematic. Water supplies represent one such service, with both the quantity and quality of supply having presented long-standing issues for Ballidu. A number of government wells were established during the early decades of the twentieth century in an effort to develop a viable water supply to the town (Hood and Toster 1996). A permanent government water supply was brought to the town in November 1962. This research identified views of participants which pointed to ongoing issues concerning the quality of water supplied to residents of Ballidu.

Electricity services, another essential function and service, were found to have encountered similar historical issues. Ballidu townsite, in 1962, was connected to a permanent supply delivering 240 volts of power and operated by the then State Energy Commission of Western Australia (Hood and Toster 1996; McCullagh 1979). Ballidu is today included within the Country East Region of the South West Interconnected System (SWIS) of electricity generation maintained by Western Power Corporation (Western Power 2012a).

Education is an essential function and service which has played an important role in building the foundation of the Ballidu community. The government school in Ballidu commenced in 1922 (McCullagh 1979). This facility was administered by one teacher and consisted of an enrolment of seventeen students. Today, the Ballidu Primary School has 26 students and caters for an enrolment which ranges from kindergarten to year 7. The school's operations are supported from within the community by an active Parents and Citizens Association (Shire of Wongan-Ballidu

2011a). An outline of the distribution of the student population of the Ballidu Primary School and the basis by which teaching and administrative resources are allocated is available and is provided at Appendix B-1.

In December 1913, the future prospects for Ballidu were advanced considerably when the Public Works Department completed construction of a section of railway line to link the town with Wongan Hills (McCullagh 1979). This section formed part of a much wider rail network which had extended through the Mid West of the state to the town of Mullewa (McCullagh 1979). The Department operated the line until early 1915 when it handed responsibility over to the Western Australian Government Railways. The Wongan Hills–Ballidu section of railway was officially opened on 5 March 1915 (McCullagh 1979).

Following the opening up in December 2000 of access to the former Westrail freight network, the government today no longer operates this railway infrastructure (Brookfield Rail 2011; National Competition Council 2001). The state hence cannot directly control the transportation of bulk freight, including grain. This research identified concern among participants about the control of the railway infrastructure and the significance of this issue to Ballidu. These matters arose within the context of the community's reliance on agriculture and the positioning of the Co-operative Bulk Handling Limited Grain Receiving Point within the State Grain Freight Network.

Commercial services are important considerations for the viability of Ballidu. A general store was opened in Ballidu soon after settlement and an official post office was established in the town in 1914 (Hood and Toster 1996; McCullagh 1979). By contrast, today Ballidu is serviced commercially by a General Store and Trading Post. This research identified views of participants which suggested that certain types of products and services provided by businesses to residents of small rural communities could be included within the category of 'essential functions and services'.

Ballidu is situated within the Wheatbelt Development Commission boundary for economic development purposes. For historical and more practical socio-economic and essential services reasons, the community aligns itself closely to the larger neighbouring population centre of Wongan Hills located 36 kilometres to the south.

4.3 Conclusion

To provide a suitable introduction to the six study communities, this chapter has identified and discussed certain descriptive characteristics of each. These characteristics are *geographical, historical, contemporary, demographic, economic, political* and *socio-cultural*. Historically, these characteristics have contributed to building the fabric of the study communities. Discussion ensued within the chapter about the historical origins of some essential functions and services within the communities and the implications for community development. The influence of historical factors and the progression to contemporary essential functions and services were also outlined.

The discussion within this chapter suggests that, for the six study communities, there is an inherent historical link to many of the essential functions and services and issues related to them. From a *contemporary* perspective, these issues are reflected in the discussions concerning the delivery models of provider organizations, customers' expectations of essential functions and services, and the emergence of any gaps between these two areas. These matters will be the focus of the following chapter explaining the findings of the research in relation to the six study communities.

Chapter Five Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out in detail the findings of the research into the delivery of essential functions and services within the six study communities. The findings emphasize commonly recurring customer-based definitions of ‘essential functions and services’ which have emerged from the research.

Some of the participants in the focus groups were also long-term residents of their particular study community. This assisted the discussion process by providing historical context to the questions which sought to identify perceived changes to levels and standards of essential functions and services within the communities over time. The data that emerged was foundational to the definition of ‘essential functions and services’. The focus groups provided the forums for identifying participants’ perceptions regarding levels and standards of delivery (performance of providers) and underlying issues (effectiveness of the community and the responses of elected representatives). Details of the dates on which the focus groups were held are provided at Appendix C-1. Elite interviews were conducted with representatives of the government departments, statutory agencies and government trading enterprises that deliver essential functions and services. Interviews with elected Members of Parliament were also held. Details of the dates of these elite interviews are provided at Appendix C-2.

5.2 Definitions

5.2.1 Participant-generated definitions of ‘essential functions and services’

Chapter Two of this study explained the existence of general definitions regarding essential functions and services within the policy domain and throughout public sector frameworks. This study, consistent with an exploratory research approach, set out to establish what the participants within each study community defined as being ‘essential functions and services’. The development of these community-generated

definitions was considered important given the changes in the delivery of government services which occurred over the period covered by this research. A further study aim involved identifying the perceptions of customers/consumers within communities and the providers regarding the levels and standards of the delivery of essential functions and services and examining any differences between the perceptions of these two groups.

Table 5.1: Focus Groups – Participants’ definitions of ‘essential functions and services’

Focus Group (Study Community)	Essential functions and services perceived
Wagin	<p>Hospitals, water, power, aged care / aged accommodation, doctors, dentists, police, justice system (law courts), recreation services, roads (road funding).</p> <p>Quote: <i>“Basically, anything that the government looks after.”</i></p>
Mount Barker	<p>Health, education, telecommunications, police, transport (roads), electricity, water, welfare, banking (e.g. community banking), schools, sports and recreation, agricultural services, aged care, mental health, State Emergency Service, local fire brigades, St John Ambulance.</p> <p>Quote: <i>“... all go into the government...”</i></p>
Boyanup	<p>Doctors / medical, power, water, roads, construction (infrastructure), telephones / telecentres / telecommunications, education, leisure activities, homes for the elderly, churches (if you are religious).</p>
Rocky Gully	<p>Electricity, telephones / telephony / satellite / Internet (i.e. broadband), roads, water, town amenities, schools, halls, banks / banking facilities, Department of Agriculture, environmental agencies, emergency services (and various government agencies), sporting facilities, doctor, midwife, Royal Flying Doctor Service.</p> <p>Quote: <i>“Essential services, like the maintenance of the little community”</i></p>

Wongan Hills	Health and safety, education, police, power, transport, communications, St John's Ambulance, fire brigade, dentist, Silver Chain nursing, hospital auxiliary, pharmacy, mobile telephones and ADSL to ordinary landlines, food supplies / supermarkets, banking, farmers, fuel, waste disposal, roads, sporting groups / recreation, community groups in general, aged persons' homes / aged care, child care, church.
Ballidu	Power, telephone, water, transport issues, education, doctor, dentists, roads, waste disposal, social infrastructure (i.e. sports), communications (i.e. telephones, mobile telephones), transport system / network, CBH (grain receival / storage facility), fuel, retail outlet, banking, FESA's role (and its implications for the local volunteer fire brigade).

The views expressed by the focus groups led to the emergence of some commonly 'defined' essential functions and services. The functions and services identified were: health, education, policing, housing, transport services, electricity and water supply. The participants of these communities perceived that one aspect of the 'essentiality' of particular functions and services was their delivery having traditionally been the responsibility of governments. Since the mid-1990s, direct responsibility for the supply of electricity and water services and associated infrastructure had passed from governments and this is now the domain of government trading enterprises.

Other services, specifically retailing, banking, and religious services, were mentioned in some of the focus group discussions; however, these services were not mentioned in all or most of study communities. Participants in the focus groups acknowledged that organizations operating within the commercial and non-government sectors are responsible for providing these types of services. Nevertheless, changes to the delivery of these services were perceived as having implications for the economic viability and the social cohesion of the rural communities concerned.

The categorization of essential functions and services according to their delivery by governments is not a new phenomenon. The Australian Government Productivity Commission has, since 1995, evaluated improvements in the effectiveness and efficiency of ‘government services’ that are provided by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments. The items forming the subject of these assessments include: education, justice (e.g. police services, court administration, corrective services), emergency management, health and community services (Australian Government Productivity Commission 2011a, 2011b). In 2009, the Parliament of Australia assessed the delivery of essential functions and services to communities. Consultation and research processes conducted nationally with local governments, business and industry resulted in the concept of ‘essential functions and services’ being categorized as ‘hard and soft infrastructure’ (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure Transport Regional Development and Local Government 2009). The Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy, 2003 sought to identify an integrated, whole-of-government approach to addressing the issues faced by communities, including those relating to the delivery of essential functions and services or ‘community services’ (Government of Western Australia – Department of Premier and Cabinet 2003).

5.3 Presentation of the Findings

To manage the wealth of data obtained from each study community, the research findings are presented using the defined essential functions and services types as the main category headings. This study identified that these essential functions and services were viewed by participants as being important in each of the selected study communities. However, the issues or implications relating to the delivery of these functions and services appeared to resonate differently throughout the communities. In the presentation of the data from focus groups and interviews, extracts of the resulting transcripts are included where relevant to support and strengthen the discussion of the findings; these are shown in *italics*. The separation of quotations with .../ enables multiple sections of like transcript to be included together (McCabe 2002).

PART A: ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS AND SERVICES – GOVERNMENT

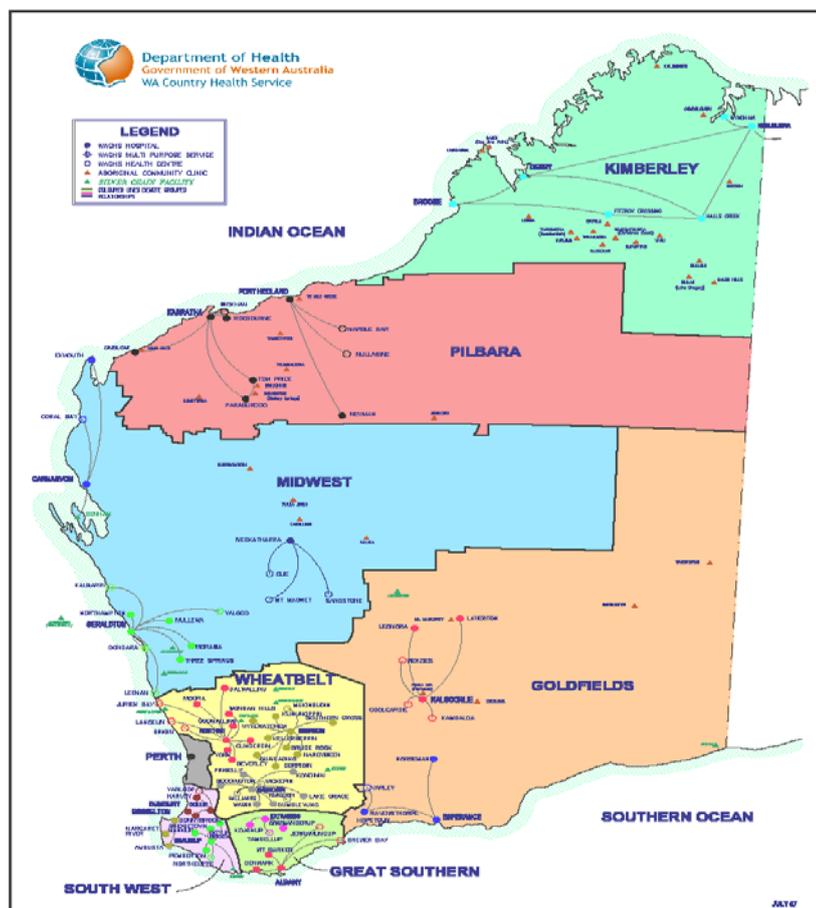
5.4 Health Services

In each of the six study communities health services were deemed by the focus group participants as falling under the definition of an essential function and service. The specific types of services which the six communities indicated in the category of health were broad in scope and included hospitals, general medical practitioners and a number of other ancillary services. The research also identified individual study communities that had experienced their own particular issues relating to the delivery of health services.

5.4.1 Model of health services delivery in rural communities

The Western Australian Government provides health services to rural communities throughout the state using a regional model. Operationally, this is reflected in the WA Country Health Service being divided into the following seven regions covering the rural and remote areas of the state: Kimberley, Pilbara, Midwest, Wheatbelt, Goldfields, South West and Great Southern.

Figure 5.1: The WA Country Health Service Region Map



Source: WA Country Health Service 2011.

A *Foundations* strategy implemented in 2007 by the WA Country Health Service established a ‘role delineation’ or hierarchy for the 71 country hospitals and three multipurpose centres that the Service administered (WA Country Health Service 2007). These were:

- Regional hospitals;
- Integrated district health services; and
- Small hospitals.

Small hospitals

Small hospitals were further classified on the basis of medical activity as follows:

- Level 1: More than 250 acute inpatient discharges a year – 16 hospitals in this group.
- Level 2: More than 100 and less than 250 acute inpatient discharges in a year – 26 hospitals in this group.
- Level 3: Less than 100 acute inpatient discharges in a year – 8 hospitals in this group.

It is the Level 1 and Level 2 small hospitals which were in operation within a number of the study communities at the time of this study and hence these were the primary focus of the research.

5.4.2 The larger study communities

5.4.2.1 Wagin

The Wagin study community is situated within the Wheatbelt Health Region of the WA Country Health Service (Government of Western Australia – Department of Health 2011a). The Wagin District Hospital, which is categorized as a Level 2 Small Hospital (WA Country Health Service 2007: 38) was identified as having served as an important focal point for the delivery of health services to the Wagin community. The participants perceived that there had been a noticeable reduction in the range of services provided through the hospital to the community over a period of time. The process of rationalization of these services – which includes x-ray facilities, operating theatre facilities and obstetrics – was also perceived as having impacted significantly upon all sections of the community.

.../ Yeah. I think – they're reducing their services, say the hospital, we've got a perfectly good hospital up there and we are having to travel further now to get medical treatment because of the reduced services .../

Participants in the Wagin focus group were unambiguous in their views that a fundamental role of government includes ensuring that residents have access to basic levels of health services within rural communities. Governments, in allowing the withdrawal or rationalization of these functions and services, were perceived by

participants as having abrogated these responsibilities. The role of the Shire of Wagin in facilitating general medical practitioner services delivery for the community was not viewed as an altruistic or benevolent act. Rather, it was considered as having been necessary to rectify the failings of other levels of government.

The focus group participants expressed the view that the wider population of Wagin maintains a close interest in the ongoing issues that drive health services delivery within the community. Consequently, where a particular health service had been disrupted or withdrawn, past experience had shown that many residents were committed to contributing some level of voluntary support in order to ensure that the service continues in some form.

.../ I think that the only way it's all working at the moment is because it is a very close-knit community and everybody is...aiming for the same point. I mean everybody in the town realises that these problems are there, so they generally work together.../ If one organisation can't do it, another one seems to pick it up, and everybody looks out for the next person, anyway. If there is any crisis the whole town pulls together.../

The current levels of health services being delivered within Wagin were seen as the result of decisions and bureaucratic structures which had not properly taken account of the issues within the local community and the needs of residents. Some senior health bureaucrats occupying official positions within the town were perceived as having been complicit in some way, by allowing the reduction in services to occur. On the other hand, participants acknowledged the dedication and commitment of many locally-based health professionals in facilitating the delivery of services to the community in the face of these increasing pressures.

.../I think that the people that are providing the services are extremely conscientious, more so than you get in the city. Because they know the situation which we're in .../ [I]t's a disgrace actually, what's occurred at the hospital ... The doctor is very, very overworked .../ The people around who are paid for [providing] services [are] not community based .../

An interview held in Northam with a senior representative of the WA Country Health Service Wheatbelt Health Region, outlined details about the advisory committee structures that were implemented under the *Foundations* strategy. These committee structures aim to ensure that the WA Country Health Service engages with local community representatives in order that local issues may be identified and handled effectively in the delivery of health services. In an interview conducted in Albany with a representative of the WA Country Health Service Great Southern Region, the participant provided comprehensive background information regarding health services' delivery arrangements involving the Wagin District Hospital.

Wagin Hospital is a little bit different because the HACC¹⁰ services are provided by the council there. So, that would be a difficult question to answer, given they're such an essential function in small towns now. But certainly, Wagin still provides acute in-patient, residential aged care, accident emergency, extended care, so, all the basics are without doubt, there, and been built upon.

Representative, WA Country Health Service Great Southern Region

These developments in health services and programs were explained not as reductions, but rather as being the outcome of foreshadowed plans that had been implemented by the WA Country Health Service.

They are definite strategies. In Wagin, there has been some centralization of services, to Narrogin, with some surgical procedures, obstetric services. I think in some communities, the problem with the provision of those specialist services [is] – it's very difficult to maintain skill levels, and attract practitioners to provide those services, when the volume of the service is very low. And because now, on the one hand, we've always had the expectation of providing safe, quality services. It's very difficult to do, unless you have a good quality provision and that was a definite strategic intent, to pull those services over to Narrogin, which incidentally, is only a twenty minute drive.

¹⁰ Home and Community Care (HACC). A program that is coordinated by the Department of Health with significant functions delivered by local governments so that some older people, people with a disability and their carers who assist them to continue living independently at home can receive basic support services (Government of Western Australia – Department of Health 2011b).

But it wasn't actually the loss of service, it was the reinforcement of a service and it's a strategy, and it's in the Foundations document – that there'll be central hubs that will provide these services to the smaller – small hospitals

Representative, WA Country Health Service Great Southern Region

Significantly, the Wagin focus group participants expressed the view that the community has had a very limited influence over policy decisions or provider strategies, which are the main drivers for health functions and services delivery.

.../ Decisions haven't changed .../ We haven't influenced anyone I don't think. We tried a lot of things; we tried different things, the Court House, the medical, the hospital's going backwards, the doctor's surgery. So as far as us succeeding in influencing .../ It is hard to influence someone when you don't know what their purpose [is]; they don't tell you, talk to anyone .../ Until after it has all been done .../ And the fact that they don't put forward, public submissions so you can have a forum on it. It's done; it's all worked out and then, "boom", one day, you find out .../ And there is no dialogue .../ Not unless you cause it; and then they have to let you know sooner .../ And you don't get your chance to dialogue because the decision has been made and they don't come forward to see what your opinions are; it's a fait accompli .../

5.4.2.2 Mount Barker

Mount Barker is positioned within the Great Southern Health Region of the WA Country Health Service (Government of Western Australia – Department of Health 2011a). Participants explained the reductions in certain health services which previously were available from the Plantagenet District Hospital. The hospital has been categorized as a Level 1 Small Hospital according to the criteria (WA Country Health Service 2007: 38). Affected services included all specialized theatre operations and obstetrics services, which now must be performed at the Albany Regional Hospital located 50 kilometres away.

Concern was expressed about the level of the ongoing resourcing provided for the Plantagenet District Hospital under the present operational structure of the WA Country Health Service. The adequacy of this support was questioned given the

circumstances involving ultrasound and x-ray equipment located at the hospital which were unused due to a lack of qualified staff. Some of the equipment had been acquired with the fund-raising assistance of volunteer groups within the community. A perception was conveyed that the policy makers and residents of metropolitan Perth and larger regional centres had failed to fully grasp the broader social implications of travel upon residents of rural communities.

.../ I think basically the problem that Perth or other areas don't have the concept of the travel or the distance that we have to contend with.../ People just aren't aware [of] where Mt Barker is; it's not only Mt Barker, other towns as well and the timeframe. Who is going to take them there? How are they going to get home? And it does fall back on the volunteer again, and there is no funding as far as I know. You have to go by ambulance and that's funded in your own cost if you have no other way of getting to hospital appointments .../

The requirement for ongoing travel from Mount Barker to Albany to access specialist medical services was particularly onerous for vulnerable groups within the community (i.e. seniors and people with mental illness). Aged residents especially were said to rely heavily on the support of volunteers.

The provision of mental health services in Mount Barker emerged from the focus group discussions as being an important health services delivery issue. Over the past two decades the incidence of mental illness, as manifested in depression and suicide, has increased among males working within the rural sector (Judd et al. 2006). For communities such as Mount Barker, participants perceived this deficiency in the provision of critical support as exerting pressure on the already limited services available through non-government organizations. This study identified that the organizations concerned receive only limited government funding and that there are typically no established structures in place to facilitate client referrals from other government agencies.

In general, it was suggested that community members who experience an emotional crisis or who suffer a mental illness may prefer to seek support from a locally-based general medical practitioner or alternatively, a specialist who regularly visits the

local area. Focus group participants identified these options as not necessarily being available to Mount Barker residents, given the limited funding arrangements for mental health programs and the current health services delivery models.

.../ Now, going back to mental health, there is definitely a lack of money being put into mental health. The government is willing to admit that one in five people are affected by mental health.... The Federal and the State budgets had no extra money for mental health this last time, and yet it's growing .../ You know, we do have a visiting psychiatrist come but he only comes once a fortnight. If we could fund him once a week it would help .../

A general perception was identified among the Mount Barker focus group participants that the community had been relatively effective in influencing health services delivery decisions and strategies. Notwithstanding the diminution of services from the Plantagenet District Hospital, participants perceived the overall level of facilities that are available to the Mount Barker community as reflecting the collective lobbying and advocacy efforts of the community organizations. Participants explained that elected representatives in the Parliament had played a crucial role in these processes and had contributed to the achievement of outcomes.

Well I think basically you have to lobby. I mean, even if you have a good idea which is full of merit ... unless you can get to the right person, it's of no value and so unfortunately you really have to be able to get involved in the critical process and to get people that you have elected to actually do things. You can't do them on your own.

Participant, Mount Barker Focus Group

Participants also cited successful outcomes that were achieved in retaining mental health services within Mount Barker following concerns about proposed government funding cuts to these services as illustrating the effectiveness of community lobbying and advocacy efforts.

[It] must be about 18 months ago now that the [Minister] Sheila McHale decided that there was too much money ... going into support groups in the mental health area and they decided they were going to stop that funding ... [B]ut it meant they had to put energy into lobbying parliament to ... point out

to them that if these groups didn't exist then they would have a lot more people in their mental health wards than they did at the moment.

Participant, Mount Barker Focus Group

Some participants perceived that the effectiveness of community lobbying in generating favourable outcomes in the delivery of essential functions and services was limited to 'big budget' areas. On the other hand, it was claimed that lower order priorities in health services, typically associated with the weak and vulnerable members of the community, were often missed.

5.4.2.3 Wongan Hills

The Wongan Hills study community is located within the Wheatbelt Health Region of the WA Country Health Service (Government of Western Australia – Department of Health 2011a). During the focus group proceedings a number of participants were keen to use the discussions involving the delivery of essential functions and services to highlight the reputation of the Wongan Hills community as being extremely resourceful and self-supporting under adverse circumstances. Some examples of this resourcefulness were conveyed in terms of the community responses made to perceived reductions in the level of health services provided by the Wongan Hills District Hospital. The Wongan Hills District Hospital has been categorized as a Level 2 Small Hospital (WA Country Health Service 2007: 38).

.../ An example that came to me [the] first time I read that was Friends of the Hospital, the Hospital Auxiliary – in relation to the health service – and the level of response of the Hospital Auxiliary after it's gone to, depending on level of state government support for the hospital ... / You don't have obstetrics and things like that anymore .../ Straight away they start dropping off some [of] their little items – Hospital Auxiliary "yeah we can pick it up" then decide to provide toothbrushes and everything like that, .../

The Wongan Hills District Hospital itself is an integral part of the wider Wongan Hills District Health Service (Shire of Wongan–Ballidu 2012a). Focus group participants also identified aged care facilities and programs provided under the

Wongan Hills District Health Service structure as being important for a significant proportion of the population of Wongan Hills (Shire of Wongan–Ballidu 2012a). The issues identified extended to a consideration of the merits of the community assuming a leadership role with a view to overcoming gaps in the delivery of essential functions and services.

.../ Doesn't that affect all community groups? Because you have to fundraise to provide the services that the government and other organisations aren't providing. Therefore, your workload as a community group increases .../

The focus group participants were not unanimous in their view about the long-term 'end benefits' to the community of volunteer groups investing significant resources and collaborating with the aim of rectifying gaps in certain services. Focus group participants perceived that the Wongan Hills community had achieved a mixed degree of success in influencing the implementation of the delivery of essential functions and services policy decisions and strategies. Factors suggested by participants as providing possible explanations for such outcomes were the consultative style utilized by particular ministers and their departments, and the political representative arrangements applicable post-2005.

.../ But you know, [with] some ministers and some departments we've been successful, other ones we can't, it depends on the minister a lot .../ And that was through the Shire .../ Well, no to health generally, I think, because we acknowledge that our health service has been severely depleting and [is more] centralised .../ I think the way the "one vote one value's" gone, the community's gone and our numbers have gone over the years, that we don't rate anything with the pollies anymore – so they can just say 'no' every time .../ We don't lobby enough... you don't get out there...as a group,.../ You're a minority – your vote doesn't count .../

5.4.3 The smaller study communities

5.4.3.1 Rocky Gully

The Rocky Gully study community is located within the Great Southern Health Region of the WA Country Health Service (Government of Western Australia -

Department of Health. 2011a). Under the existing health services delivery model applied for the WA Country Health Service, the residents of Rocky Gully can access a range of primary and secondary health services from the Plantagenet District Hospital. The hospital is situated in Mount Barker, approximately 100 kilometres to the east on the Muirs Highway. The variable condition of the highway itself, coupled with the mixture of heavy traffic and regular passenger vehicles on this road, make regular travelling on it problematic. One view expressed was that many residents requiring non-urgent medical services had been encouraged to utilize the weekly Royal Flying Doctor Service clinic provided at Frankland, located 19 kilometres nearby.

Rocky Gully was described by the focus group participants as being an isolated community which has traditionally relied heavily on volunteers to facilitate the delivery of many essential functions and services. Participants identified local bushfire and emergency management as an example of services which had benefited from such volunteer involvement. In the contemporary context, participants perceived that stringent regulatory regimes imposed by the various levels of government had led to excessive compliance burdens being placed upon the community. These factors were deemed to have discouraged volunteers from participating in community-based initiatives aimed at delivering services to residents.

.../ If you've already had the experience of operating the thing, to get people out of wrecked vehicles. Now they send the ambulance or someone from 'Barker, someone who can use it. .../

For Rocky Gully, the convergence of these twin concepts of geography and volunteerism became apparent during the focus group discussion about the delivery of health and emergency services. The role of Mount Barker was not perceived positively. Mount Barker, it was claimed, through its location and size, had assisted the perpetuation of the policies of all levels of government which promote centralization of decision-making.

Focus group participants perceived bureaucratic arrangements as being impediments to the independence of the residents of Rocky Gully. Participants considered that the local knowledge of residents was an important factor for ensuring that some important services were delivered appropriately and immediately in isolated rural communities. The area of volunteer-based emergency services was one that participants specifically identified as having been adversely impacted by unnecessary regulation.

.../ just carrying on with that, like there's the "Jaws of Life" out there .../ So, whenever there's an accident, they need the "Jaws of Life", someone to break them out of it, cuts people out of it – you can't do it now, can you? .../ You've got a 100 mile stretch of road. These are the people that live in this town and have to do everything, or it's not going to happen. You can't afford to wait for them to come out from Mt Barker or Albany, it's too late .../

The limited availability of health services to Rocky Gully residents and the perceived over-regulation that has hindered community level participation in the achievement of local solutions which were adjudged to be important contributing factors in what appear to be community-wide feelings of alienation and powerlessness.

5.4.3.2 Boyanup

The Boyanup study community is situated within the South West Health Region of the WA Country Health Service (Government of Western Australia – Department of Health 2006). Given Boyanup is a comparatively small community, and given its location relative to these other larger urban centres, there appear to be minimal health services and facilities directly available to residents. This observation also appears to be borne out by the information published by the Shire of Capel regarding the types of health services that are available within each of the local government's six main population centres (Shire of Capel 2011).

During the focus group proceedings, participants raised the matter of the provision of health services for aged persons. They also identified what was perceived as being a

lack of community facilities and infrastructure for this population group, especially housing accommodation.

*.../ Well, actually I think more homes for the elderly, should be looked at .../
But I mean we've only got three .../*

It was asserted that a proportion of Boyanup's aged population would invariably be lost to the community should residents choose to move to other centres offering better standards of infrastructure and services. The lack of direct access to medical services was another factor that was said to act as a potential disincentive for many aged persons residing within the Boyanup community.

.../ Especially now, similar as to ... [when] transport goes; you've got to use your car all the time to get you to doctors and hospitals .../

Some focus group participants expressed concern that little consideration, if any, appeared to have been given by relevant agencies to the inevitability of future community growth, when planning is undertaken for community facilities. An alternative view presented was that the local government does not necessarily have the available funds and resources required to address all health service delivery needs that may arise because of the competing pressures of growth throughout the local government area (Shire of Capel 2011).

The requirement for Boyanup residents to travel to access health services is an issue which emerged during an interview held in Bunbury with a senior representative of the WA Country Health Service South West Health Region. The representative believed that the wider Boyanup community would have an understanding of the different levels of health services that are available locally and regionally under the existing delivery model.

Well the Boyanup community would clearly understand it needs to go to Perth for tertiary level services. So, that's the differentiation – we don't provide a lot of health services at the Boyanup community. But the Boyanup community's part of a networked region and state which has the 'step-up' and 'step-down'

in care according to the health needs and our ability to deliver safe and high quality services.

But if [you] aren't in the stream, well then it would be usually through GP referral to again, that step-up and step-down in care type arrangement. Or, where there's an aged care, and community aged care packages, or meals on wheels or whatever– the first point of contact with the primary health provider would then lead you through the maze of options.

Representative, WA Country Health Service, South West Health Region

The representative identified that a number of high standard primary health care services were accessible to Boyanup residents within the urban centre of Bunbury, and they expressed the view that these services were relatively accessible subject to Boyanup residents having the capacity to travel.

I don't think there's a GP in Boyanup. Is that a concern that they've got to travel fifteen kilometres to get to a GP? So, the only answer is "yes", but when you're fifteen kms away from a private hospital like Saint John of God and a public hospital the size and complexity of Bunbury, I think the community of Boyanup is particularly well serviced for hospital services – provided they can travel.

Representative, WA Country Health Service, South West Health Region

The WA Country Health Service will monitor over the longer term the requirements within the Boyanup community for any other services (e.g. aged care facilities). Any decisions about the most optimum location and resourcing of such services would, however, be made within the context of overall health policy.

Some of the participants of the Boyanup focus group questioned the capacity of the community to influence effectively policies and strategies related to the delivery of functions and services. Evidence for this proposition was said to be found in the inadequate community consultation processes conducted by the responsible government agencies and the local government when assessing health services and infrastructure needs. Further, it was claimed that any services and infrastructure outcomes were limited in scope and had not allowed for future growth.

Well...look it seems to me when they are planning things – they don't take into consideration that yes, we are going to grow. I mean, they...[just] appeased us with this community...[A]nything that we really need to do here; the library is too small, but the CWA and the seniors, it was never a place where they could leave anything. The school – they expanded the school and they made it bigger, but they still didn't take into account the growing population. [T]here [are the] young people that [are] coming into the town and with children so it's too small again.

Participant, Boyanup Focus Group

I mean, I'm not being rude or anything, but I just think that one of the main reasons [is] that you do have the people who have been here like for ever and they don't like people coming in from the cities with their ideas, which are good, and they don't like to be told, but do they really?

Participant, Boyanup Focus Group

5.5 Education

Education was perceived as being an essential function and service which is a fundamental responsibility of state governments. Participants of most study communities identified education services as being of comparable value to the attainment of diverse business activities and strong agricultural outcomes. In all cases, it was perceived that the stability and standard of education facilities contributed to the ongoing viability of their communities. Successive state governments had applied a regional model to the delivery of education services to rural communities. The current service delivery framework which the state government operates through its Department of Education is arranged around eight regions: Kimberley, Pilbara, Midwest, Goldfields, Wheatbelt, North Metro, South Metro, and Southwest.

The current regional model of education services delivery introduced the concept of networked schools and has facilitated the establishment of up to 74 networks throughout the regions. This model has enabled individual schools to continue to operate independently while sharing in many benefits of being part of a group. These

regional resourcing arrangements were the result of policy initiatives implemented in 2010 by the state government. These changes also had some minor implications for the data collected during the research in relation to representatives of the former Department of Education and Training and the specific study communities.

Prior to January 2011, the Albany District Education Office had operated out of Albany (Mount Barker and Rocky Gully study communities) and during this research it was part of the South West Region. The former Midlands District Education Office has been renamed the Wheatbelt Education Region.

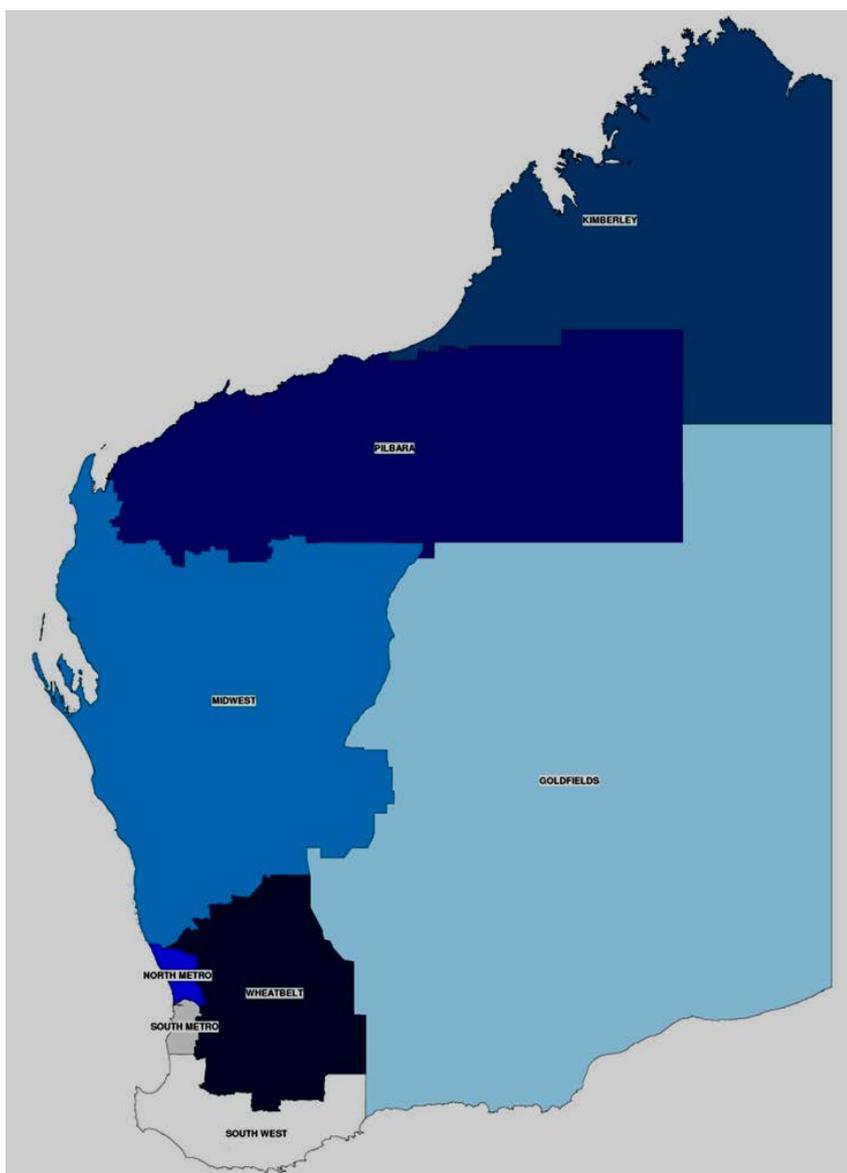
5.5.1 The larger study communities

5.5.1.1 Mount Barker

The participants attending the Mount Barker focus group identified education as an essential function and service which exerts significant social and economic influences upon the community. This perception appeared to be driven by participants' concept of the role that is assumed by education within a comparatively large rural community such as Mount Barker. More recently, the importance of Mount Barker in providing education services to outlying areas can be seen in government initiatives concerning the integrated Kindergarten to Year 12 government school facility, the Mount Barker Community College.

.../ Well I think there is a quantity mismatch between what's actually needed and what's been provided, and I'll give you a top example. Before the State election last year, politicians like Alan Carpenter, said, "I think Mount Barker could do with a new primary school and we got talking about it." We decided it would have a community college to high school so they provided \$7 million which is the price of a basic primary school in the city. It's nowhere near the price of shifting that primary school up to the high school and providing all the infrastructure that is required. There is just no way the Education Department is going to provide the extra funding to do the job that is required up here without pulling teeth .../

Figure 5.2: Education Region Map



Source: (Government of Western Australia – Department of Education 2012a)

Other benefits, which some participants acknowledged, had come in the form of residents being readily able to access the educational services because of Mount Barker’s proximity to the neighbouring regional centre of Albany.

.../ Education-wise I think the situation is fantastic. Our kids keep living in a rural environment such as Mount Barker, can have access to other types of schools. In Albany, transport has improved quite a lot but they can get to

Albany in less than 30 minutes to attend another school, whereas when I was growing up that just simply wasn't an option. It wasn't an option at all and in fact we can now do that .../

Representative, Albany District Education Office

An interview with the District Director of the then Albany Education District highlighted education service delivery strategies and programs about which the Mount Barker Community College and residential and business sections of the community had had ongoing engagement. The creation of the Mount Barker Community College as a Kindergarten to Year 12 facility within a co-located site was considered to have been a noteworthy achievement for the town's primary and secondary schools, both in terms of their current operations and the future direction of education for Mount Barker. The assertion made was that a successful implementation of the Community College concept would have been impossible without substantial collaboration between the current primary and secondary schools. This cooperation had enabled the transition of primary students to secondary levels within the new College structure to be seamless.

[Y]ou talk about Mount Barker and surrounding areas, the whole – local areas coastal planning concept, has brought about significant change, to both schools in their current format, but [also] in terms of, the future. So we've seen – to give you an example – a greater collaboration between the current primary and secondary schools to ensure that we work towards a seamless transition for kids from primary to secondary.

Representative, Albany District Education Office

These effective working relationships on the part of the schools had been assisted by improved community engagement between the schools themselves and Mount Barker residents and businesses to produce better outcomes in the delivery of education services. The representative perceived these processes as having been highly effective in capturing community needs and expectations, and ultimately, that they were important factors driving the changes in education services delivery.

[P]articularly in terms of Mount Barker. I think it was a community desire to bring about change in the way education is delivered, that would capture and meet the needs of the whole community. So, this was a grass roots, community-driven change, it wasn't anything to do with government policy or any particular strategic plan, it had nothing to do with economic or financial concerns – it was community. Community-driven and, uh, a lot of community ownership.

Representative, Albany District Education Office

The participants in the Mount Barker focus group acknowledged that the community benefited from its close proximity to Albany in terms of its residents' opportunities for education services and the standards of these services. By the same token, however, participants also identified the ongoing tendency by governments to concentrate policy mechanisms and resources within the regional centre. These actions were perceived as having hindered the capacity of Mount Barker to influence decisions and strategies in areas such as small community school closures and the awarding of rural school bus route contracts.

5.5.1.2 Wongan Hills

Wongan Hills' participants identified issues involving education services delivery as having fundamental implications for the stability and viability of a rural community. These discussions were from the perspective of whether families with school-aged children would deem the town to be one that placed sufficient importance on the level and standard of education services provided – sufficient, that is, for them to choose to reside in the town.

.../ and, what about disadvantage to people to come here to stay, or remain here, in terms of the education of their children? .../ if you were working here, you knew that you had to save up and send them to a boarding school, or you were actually gonna move to a bigger community when your children needed Year 12 .../ and some see that they want their children to have more opportunities, so they send them off to study .../ I do think if we had more kids stay here then your resources, like teacher staffing, books that you use at the school [would be better].../

This dialogue appeared to revolve around perceptions of the importance of a comparatively large rural community such as Wongan Hills having access to a high level secondary educational institution. The apparent rationale behind this view was that the existence of such a facility would provide students of secondary school age with the option of continuing their education locally and, thereby, possibly eliminating the requirement for them to leave the district.

Notwithstanding this, participants in the Wongan Hills focus groups were not entirely convinced that the standard of education services provided within the community would ultimately prove to be the sole determining factor in education decisions made by parents of high school age students.

.../ I don't think that part of it has ever changed though. We've always thought: "Look, if you have to go on, you've got to go away." It's always been there, we've never had that other choice. You, you always knew in your mind if you worked here or you lived here and had a business that something had to give. .../That impacts too, because the more people that send their children off to school, lessens the ability of the school. So, until you can change that, and get people to keep their kids at school here, the service of the school is never go[ing] [to] change .../

The issues raised here may say as much about the individuals seeking to 'extend out beyond the known boundaries' as it does about the level and standard of education services provided within the community (Stokes, Stafford, and Holdsworth 1999; McSwain 2003).

.../ They don't always send them away for the education – it's also for the other things that they can get, so that opportunity .../ Well, if you've got a child whose got some talent, the perception is – and it's probably true, that they need to go away – if they want to be an AFL footballer, or whatever. .../ But, I don't think that will change .../

The participants attending the focus group appeared to express an overall level of pessimism about the extent to which education services, represented in the form of the district high school, could contribute to community viability. These perceptions

perhaps reflect the fears of participants and the broader community regarding the long-term prospects for the district high school. These concerns, however, appear to conflict with the perceptions of a senior representative of the Midlands District Education Office. The participant expressed a view that the level and standard of education services delivery had “improved incredibly” over time.

These perceived improvements were adjudged as being not necessarily due to any direct strategies or work of the Department. Rather, the schools themselves, by utilizing mechanisms designed to facilitate the effective engagement with their local communities, were considered as having significantly influenced these outcomes. The availability of resources was perceived as being an important factor in determining the extent to which schools were capable of influencing the level and standard of services delivery. Resources are integral to the functions that schools undertake. The participant expressed the view that his own personal experiences had pointed to the fact that many schools were facing diminishing resources as part of the ‘rural decline’.

Yeah. I think the changes in workforce, changes in the fabric and culture of society [from] when I started teaching...it was a widely accepted practice for people to go to the country. It's now more difficult because of the rural decline and other factors, to encourage people to go out to the country.

Representative, Midlands District Education Office

The participant also expressed an interesting view that, what for the rural school might be initiated by a reduction in resourcing, could in fact mark the onset of an inevitable ‘spiral’ of decline in service delivery. School capacity (i.e. viability), in turn, was said to have been influenced by the comparative health of the community.

But I guess, the...standard of the essential functions and services is dictated by other town-based pressures, in terms of lack of numbers [A]nd then the resourcing that school [receives] to provide the services and functions is clearly based upon numbers. [T]herefore, the services, and things the school does, depends on something external to what it can have control over – that is, the numbers of the people in the town.

Representative, Midlands District Education Office

The effectiveness of Wongan Hills in attracting and maintaining a high standard of education services is shown by the ongoing stability of the population in the community over time. It is also reflected in enrolment trends data for the Wongan Hills District High School published by the Department of Education and showing projected student enrolments across designated categories for a five-year period spanning 2009 to 2013. A data table showing 2012 year and trend year student enrolments for Wongan Hills District High School is included together with those of other student communities and is provided at Appendix B-3.

Accordingly, and assuming that the student enrolment trends for Wongan Hills District High School for forthcoming years continue as they have done over past periods, there is nothing to suggest any significant change in the standard of education services provided to the Wongan Hills community.

5.5.2 The smaller study communities

5.5.2.1 Rocky Gully

During the Rocky Gully focus group, participants identified education as an essential function and service of paramount importance to the community and its residents. This was particularly interesting given the absence of a school facility within the community, but it was also highly relevant because of the necessity for the town's school-age children to travel daily in order to access education services. The current circumstances surrounding the delivery of education services to the residents of Rocky Gully illustrate the community's ongoing struggle for viability.

Participants perceived that education service delivery outcomes for Rocky Gully had shown significant reductions over time. Furthermore, these developments had apparently corresponded with the community's changing economic circumstances and its declining population. The economic base and the social fabric of Rocky Gully had changed considerably since the 1970s, which had affected population levels and school enrolment numbers.

.../ Well, to put this into proportion, when J said this was a larger community. To put it in statistical...that 30 years span, we were talking about earlier. At that time there were 55 farming families here; today there are six. So that gives you a proportion of the community .../ And the statistic in that 30 years is certainly borne out by school numbers, which at one stage were 120, and with the demise of the school, the numbers were, a couple here, in the '80s, when the school died .../ In 1984/5 it would have been 56 kids in the school. .../ Now Frankland school has got a 100 or so and this one's got nothing.../

Participants attending the focus group strongly expressed the view that the Rocky Gully primary school should not have been closed at the end of 2003. In this context, some participants perceived that the Rocky Gully community had not been supported by the relevant authorities and individuals in its endeavours to retain the Rocky Gully primary school as a going concern. The focus group was also informed of what some participants alleged to be a lack of support on the part of 'officialdom' towards the status of the Rocky Gully primary school, which had created an atmosphere of uncertainty about the school's future. Many parents of school-age students within Rocky Gully were said to have also contributed to the insecurity by choosing to have their children travel by bus to Mount Barker to attend school in preference to attending Rocky Gully primary school.

.../ A lot of it depends on the headmaster. ...we had somebody that was a bit lethargic and we suddenly realised that we were losing all these kids that weren't coming to Rocky Gully School. And what it was that mums didn't want to throw kids on the bus at half past seven when the high school mob went; it's a damn sight easier to throw all the kids on the bus at half past seven and go to 'Barker than it was to shove some on at half past seven, and some on at a quarter past eight to come to Rocky Gully .../ So a lot of it is their own fault. .../ But some people send their kids from Rocky Gully to Frankland anyway, just so it'll keep the school open .../

The community, through representations made to government at both the political and administrative levels, sought to prevent the closure of the school. These approaches were ultimately to no avail (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2003a, 2003c). Despite extensive community consultation, in October 2003, the then Gallop Labor Government announced that the Rocky Gully primary school would close.

Students who were attending Rock Gully primary school were to be relocated to the school in Frankland, situated 19 kilometres away (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2003b; Government of Western Australia 2003a).

The experience in Rocky Gully, where the loss of the primary school leaves the community without a solid foundation, is common in many similar rural communities. This arguably also highlights the broader phenomena which many writers have described, namely that a direct link exists between services and infrastructure deficiencies and community depopulation, or at the very least, population transience (Collits 1999; Davies 2008; Haslam McKenzie 1999; Sher and Sher 1994; Tonts 2000). From the Australian rural perspective, Brennan (2006) also identifies some significant implications for regional and rural communities associated with the withdrawal of public services. Governments have justified these on the basis of budgetary imperatives. Brennan (2006) asserts the disengagement by government of its delivery obligations for a particular service is often another way of the political decision-makers avoiding their responsibility to constituents. Within these policy and political settings, in withdrawing or reducing many essential services to regional or rural communities, governments have failed to fully appreciate the implications for populations (Brennan 2006).

The populations within many of these rural communities now comprise a mix of permanent and transient residents. The increasing numbers of transient residents are highly mobile and are typically motivated by social and economic factors (e.g. lifestyle choices and employment opportunities). Historically, the population of Rocky Gully has always included a component of permanent (long-term) residents (Botterill 1987). This research identified that this remains the case. The focus group participants asserted that the town now also features a transient population, lured to the district by the seasonal work generated by the grape-picking activities associated with the region's burgeoning viticulture industry. The comments of participants attending the focus group, most of whom appeared to be long-standing residents, conveyed doubt as to whether these new types of residents would be readily accepted within a traditional rural community such as Rocky Gully.

.../ Well, people come in because of the lack of work opportunities and at the same time CES¹¹ have on their boards, you know, at certain times of the year, “grape pickers wanted” But these people seem to be able to get – a fortnight, but claim they can’t get a job. And, they sit in the pub. .../ There has been in the past people who have been quite happy to work for cash payments – but as soon as you want them to fill in a tax file number form or something, they are not concerned .../ Actually, just on what L was saying, that’s quite right. Because quite often, they’ll work two days, they can get that much on the dole; and then they won’t work for the rest of the week. .../

These general statements conveyed by focus group participants concerning the character of new, transient residents in Rocky Gully and their associated impacts upon the fabric of the community are perceptions only. As such, they are impossible to quantify.

In 2008, the Federal Treasury considered the implications of viticulture industries through a comprehensive review of issues associated with the operations of Non-Forestry Managed Investment Systems (MIS) throughout Australia (Australian Government The Treasury 2008). From a Western Australian perspective, particular areas of focus for the inquiry in relation to viticultural issues were the established wine regions, including Margaret River and Mount Barker. Submissions to the review were made by two enterprises having viticultural interests within the Frankland River district. These entities described the economic and social benefits which their wineries had generated for local communities. They also asserted that the communities had directly benefited from their activities through the creation of additional skilled employment and by encouraging the retention of young people within the district. The closure of the Rocky Gully primary school was identified as having been an impediment to the ongoing pursuit of these goals. When compared to the steady consolidation which has occurred in the nearby town of Frankland, the loss of the Rocky Gully primary school has clearly marginalized the town. Importantly, from a viability perspective, it is unlikely that Rocky Gully has the

¹¹ CES refers to the Commonwealth Employment Services department – now known as Centrelink.

capacity to take advantage of any future development opportunities which may emerge.

5.6 Transport Infrastructure

Transport infrastructure, in the form of the extensive road networks provided by governments, is acknowledged as playing a critical role through linking the less populous rural communities with regional centres and the metropolitan area. This connection is considered especially important to the transportation of goods, including agricultural and mining export products, and in enabling communities to access services.

In Western Australia, successive state governments, in collaboration with local governments, have traditionally assumed significant responsibility for functions associated with the state road network (Tonts and Jones 1997; Ozroads 2012). This involvement has been in the form of discrete capital construction projects needed to expand and reinstate the network, and in the performance of ongoing maintenance activities (Australian Government - Department of Transport and Regional Services 2004, 2005; Australian Government Commonwealth Grants Commission 2012).

From a state government perspective especially, the vesting of such roles in a central agency, presently known as Main Roads Western Australia, had enabled the implementation of a coordinated approach between policy and funding priorities. The role of the agency has evolved substantially, leading to an exit from direct involvement in capital projects and maintenance activities and in the employment of workers in substantial numbers in many communities throughout the regions. In recent decades Main Roads Western Australia has been focussed predominantly on negotiating and managing Term Network Contracts with private organizations for construction and maintenance valued at hundreds of millions of dollars (Main Roads Western Australia 2012).

Figure 5.3: The Main Roads Regions and Names



1. Kimberley Region (Derby/Kununurra)
2. Pilbara Region (South Hedland)
3. Gascoyne Region (Carnarvon)
4. Mid West Region (Geraldton)
5. Goldfields–Esperance Region (Kalgoorlie)
6. Wheatbelt North Region (Northam)[∞]
7. Wheatbelt South Region (Narrogin)[°]
8. Great Southern Region (Albany)[±]
9. South West Region (Bunbury)[△]

Notes:

[∞]Wongan Hills and Ballidu are located within the Mid West region.

[°]Wagin is located within the Wheatbelt South region.

[±]Mount Barker and Rocky Gully are located within the Great Southern region.

[△]Boyanup is located within the South West region.

Source: Main Roads Western Australia 2012

This research identified that a safe, reliable, high standard road network was considered by participants as being a significant factor in contributing to the economic viability and the social wellbeing of rural communities (Collits 1999; Tonts 2000; Tonts and Jones 1997). These views are not novel, but rather have been highlighted extensively within political and public policy forums throughout Australia over the past decade (Australian Government - Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. 2008). The issues identified by the researcher within the individual study communities regarding the management of the road network and any wider implications for essential services delivery are now explained.

5.6.1 The larger study communities

5.6.1.1 Mount Barker

The focus group discussion in the Mount Barker community identified as issues certain impacts upon roads arising from the types of commercial enterprise operating in the region and the increased diversity of agricultural activity. Transport

infrastructure-related developments were perceived as having had important wide-ranging economic and social implications throughout the community.

.../ I mean, in light of this I think it's tied up with reduction of people working on the land; changing businesses; things like pine plantations; around here where there is much less labour intensive and which drives reduction in labour; which drives removal of schools; different use of roads, that sort of thing.../ In fact CALM do have funding problems with the roads, I think, and the Department of Agriculture are in the same boat. They can't provide the service they used to do, because they've been stripped off as well .../*

*(NB: In 2008, the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) became known as the Department of the Environment and Conservation (DEC) and in July 2013 DEC was split into two entities: the Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPAW) and the Department of Environmental Regulation (DER)).

The focus group participants identified issues associated with the intensive nature of the plantation timber industry and the consequences of such activities upon the road standards. Potential safety concerns were also identified due to the conflicts between different types of road users travelling on what were effectively categorized as local roads. Some focus group participants expressed the view that metro-centric transport policy priorities had influenced state government road funding allocations, and that these had contributed to a decline in the standard of roads throughout the Mount Barker community.

.../ The CWA is quite concerned about the log trucks and school buses all being on the roads at the same time. .../ a lot of that comes back to inadequate funding for roads .../ They are too busy spending millions on a railway .../

A view was expressed that there has been a particular tendency for incoming state governments to make promises about the implementation of initiatives aimed at improving the condition of certain roads (Government of Western Australia 2002, 2009a, 2009b). This was said to have been the case with respect to the Muirs Highway, which serves as an important road for Mount Barker by connecting the town with the wider Great Southern Region and the South West. The overall

standard and safety of the Muirs Highway had been considerably affected by the rapid expansion of the plantation timber industry and the conflict between logging trucks and general vehicular traffic.

.../ I wonder whether as groups we all complain about the roads. But perhaps one group will write off a letter, it's going to be lost in the system, and they never get back to us, but perhaps should we as a community, if there is a joint problem, come together, sort of a joint lobby group .../

Participant, Mount Barker Focus Group

Participants identified what they had perceived as being the inefficiencies that had been experienced by community organizations when seeking to lobby on behalf of Mount Barker concerning issues of road standards and safety. Typically shortcomings in outcomes were deemed to have occurred because the audience of the lobbying effort was not limited to policy makers, but included officers within government agencies and populations of regional centres and metropolitan Perth. Indeed, according to the focus group participants, residents within the local community itself had sometimes failed to fully recognize the magnitude of the problem.

.../ We live in a rural area, I've got grandchildren who will go on at school but my concern is if my grandchildren get to school without running into a log truck. But people in town, they may travel that road once or twice, but they are not continually on it, so it's not perhaps the major issue to them, but should we make them aware of the implications more strongly so they knew that.../

Participant, Mount Barker Focus Group

From a broader political perspective, the participants expressed a lack of confidence in the community's capacity to improve its effectiveness in conveying its issues, following changes to electoral representational arrangements made by the Parliament of Western Australia. Participants also expressed the view that the implementation of the *One Vote One Value Bill 2005* by the Parliament would lead to the relationship between rural communities and elected representatives being highly problematic (Parliament of Western Australia 2005c).

5.6.1.2 *Wongan Hills*

The Wongan Hills study community perceived that roads are an essential concern of rural communities. This emerged initially from the focus group proceedings and was also supported by the views put forth by elected representatives, as well as the representatives of the providers of essential functions and services. Participants expressed the view that there had been improvements in the overall standard of roads within the local government area during the period relevant to this thesis. However, these assessments regarding the physical condition of the road network were not necessarily shared by the wider community.

.../ Oh, I'd have to say that, yes [roads have improved]. But, a lot of ratepayers tell me they haven't .../ But the converse of that is that the roads have improved, but the volume and type of traffic has increased .../ Of course, our rail system is so bad – worse, it's one of our biggest problems, will be our biggest problem in the future .../ Thirty years ago, everything came on the rail. Now, thirty years later everything's on the truck .../

General agreement was expressed among participants about the important correlation between funding levels and the capacity of communities to address the future challenges arising from the road network. Accordingly, it was seen as imperative for rural communities such as Wongan Hills to be effective in securing adequate ongoing funding for use in maintaining the standard of roads.

.../ Well we were successful in the current lobby to get our money back for the roads weren't we? .../ Correct. Alannah MacTiernan Minister for Transport 'stole' two million dollars from Wheatbelt North Group – which includes this Shire and put it down to the South West. .../

The focus group proceedings heard how a controversy developed in early 2005 when the Shire of Wongan–Ballidu took issue formally with the Hon. Alannah MacTiernan, the Minister for Transport in the Gallop Labor Government, regarding the funding allocations for the Wheatbelt North and Wheatbelt South Regional Road Groups. This matter was also subsequently the subject of a specific question from an elected representative to the then Minister in the Parliament of Western Australia and

provided the Minister with an opportunity to respond to the local government's claims concerning the methodology applied by the government in determining road funding allocations (Parliament of Western Australia 2005d).

5.6.2 The smaller study communities

5.6.2.1 Rocky Gully

Participants in the Rocky Gully study focus group identified as a particular point of concern the Muirs Highway, which serves as the major connecting route to other towns and the region. Certain participants told of the frustrations that apparently existed within the community because of what appeared to be a level of uncertainty between the relevant agencies concerning their responsibilities for roads-related functions. Given this scenario, participants perceived that the community itself would provide the most reliable barometer of the relevant importance of issues within the road network, and in particular, on the Muirs Highway.

.../ And if [it] wasn't for the Shire intervention as well. We're in an area, that it has no control over .../ Main Roads actually said that, within the town boundary, the highway is the Shire's responsibility .../ Basically, the community only know[s] what needs to be done around the place, so .../ What we were just talking about ... on the highway and our determination to get that black spot fixed up .../

Concerns were also raised about the impact upon roads of the blue gum timber plantation operations that had been active within the district. With the emergence of these ventures throughout the Great Southern Region since the late 1980s, encouraged by the popularity of managed investment schemes in agribusiness, major transport routes such as the Muirs Highway had experienced consistently high volumes of traffic in the form of trucks transporting harvested logs. This has required the affected local governments to work with the responsible state government agencies in developing strategies aimed at preserving the road network (Great Southern Development Commission 2012; LG Info Group 2004). The focus group proceedings heard about the limitations that Rocky Gully as a small community had

experienced in effectively capturing issues relating to changes in road standards and in subsequently conveying this information to service providers and policy makers.

.../ Could I just make a little comment over these roads and the Blue Gum companies and all the rest of it? I think as a community, we are going to be too busy with all these other things like spraying and things like that to realise that the roads are going to be used so much. Also the tree companies are.... growing trees and getting all that organized and they don't realise the roads are such a big thing and so..... they probably have no idea the trucks weave all over the road, and bugger up the roads and things like that, so .../

Participant, Rocky Gully Focus Group

The sentiments expressed during these discussions reflect the broader issues regarding the poor standard of certain sections of the Muirs Highway which had been raised publicly over time within political and policy-making forums (Parliament of Western Australia 2005b). Within these forums, the significance of such an infrastructure failure upon the community of Rocky Gully was specifically emphasized (Government of Western Australia – Department of Premier and Cabinet 2003). Nevertheless, debate has seemingly persisted about the suitability of the existing road to accommodate significant volumes of heavy transport vehicles and the associated safety implications for the general traffic (Shire of Plantagenet 2009). An integral component of these ongoing discussions are the types of remedial programs and funding allocations that would be needed in order to raise the affected sections of the Muirs Highway up to a higher standard (Main Roads Western Australia and Western Australian Local Government Association 2007a).

5.6.2.2 *Boyanup*

The composition of Boyanup and its positioning relative to neighbouring towns and larger urban centres within the South West Region means that a high standard of roads is needed to enable residents to access a wide range of functions and services. The demand for high quality roads is not confined to factors that arise from within the local community. External transport pressures are also generated as a result of Boyanup's location on the wider road network. The focus group heard how Boyanup

had been extremely isolated as a community during the early 1970s because of the primitive, and in some cases non-existent, roads. It was further asserted that the conditions of past decades were in stark contrast to the standard of roads which were being provided around the time of this research, and that the community was consequently subject to significantly increased traffic volumes.

.../ When we first came to Bunbury in '73 you couldn't get through .../ Where were the bits about the more trucks that we get on the road now, where would that come in? Because that is really, absolutely disgusting; the amount of trucks that come through this village .../

Issues relating to heavy traffic movements and their impact upon the road network and the South West Region rural communities including Boyanup are significant. They have been canvassed over time within many forums. Government agencies, peak industry organizations and advocacy groups have been informed of these issues, and they have consulted extensively with affected communities in the development of planning proposals and strategies involving the road network (Main Roads Western Australia, and Western Australian Local Government Association 2007b; Western Australian Local Government Association 2012).

The Parliament of Western Australia has been another forum in which concerns about the impacts of transport-related issues upon the Boyanup community have been voiced. These issues have been raised on an ongoing basis during debates between elected representatives involving government road-funding allocation priorities, long-term infrastructure strategies and road safety initiatives (Parliament of Western Australia 2001, 2005c). Some of the participants chose to highlight the condition of certain local roads within Boyanup as perhaps demonstrating the comparatively low strategic focus that had been afforded to the community by the local government.

.../ Where I live my road is actually dis-repaired. I mean, it is just disappearing completely the tarmac..... money they don't spend; none of the roads around my way .../. I think, we've sort of been forgotten up here actually .../ Footpaths have got a terrible feel about it [sic]. Footpaths they're

dangerous actually .../ You can't walk on the footpath when it has been raining. The mud washes on to it .../

A focus group participant representing the local government acknowledged these concerns regarding perceived service delivery deficiencies. This participant expressed the view, however, that any service provider must be prudent and fully accountable with its funds. The effective management of funding and resources was considered to be particularly critical for the Shire of Capel, given the rapid population growth which had been experienced within particular urban centres and the associated demands for services. As a result of these issues, it was claimed that the Shire of Capel had been forced to adjust its approach to funding and resourcing of local government-related services to residents within these growing centres and the established towns. The local government had been required to negotiate with the state government and relevant agencies in developing long-term strategies for the delivery of services which are appropriate to the community's needs.

Some of the participants in the Boyanup focus group placed a particular emphasis on their perceptions of the outcomes of the relationship between the Boyanup community and the Shire of Capel, based in the neighbouring town of Capel, as providing an indicator of effectiveness. Perceived shortcomings were identified in previous community consultation about proposed long-term regional road planning strategies, facilitated by Main Roads Western Australia and the local government. Some participants also expressed the view that the Boyanup community suffered disadvantage in transport infrastructure outcomes. This was as a consequence the Shire of Capel no longer utilizing a ward representation arrangement to determine the representation of its members on the Council.

.../ In other words we are a bit more out of touch with local councillors because we don't know them as our Councillors .../

An alternative view was expressed, however, that despite the absence of the ward system in the Shire of Capel, direct representation was maintained by virtue of

Boyanup residents having direct access to two elected representatives who resided within community.

Two senior representatives of Main Roads Western Australia were interviewed by the researcher at the agency's central Perth offices. This interview sought to obtain an agency-wide perspective on the perceptions of the transport infrastructure issues that had emerged from within the study communities. The Main Roads WA representatives questioned whether the perceptions of participants within the study communities relating to transport infrastructure issues might have been influenced by the level of understanding that exists throughout these communities of the role performed by the organization. Further, they suggested that such perceptions might also have been impacted by the extent of exposure of the residents (i.e. customers) to key statutory functions that the organization undertakes in relation to the road network.

I think they'd know that Main Roads is responsible for looking after roads and heavy vehicles. I don't know that they would necessarily know that Main Roads looks after things like speed limits, and stop signs and that sort of thing.

Different members of your rural communities – a number of them are involved with the rural industries out there, and obviously transport is a really major part of the economics. They could have a reasonably good understanding of the heavy vehicle management. However, you might have people who aren't necessarily involved, or people in the communities who aren't necessarily involved with those industries, [they] wouldn't necessarily have that same understanding. So we're really concentrating on the local governments. We don't necessarily go down and consider specifically what's going to happen at Wagin or Mount Barker, or Rocky Gully, unless there's a bigger issue.

Representative 1, Main Roads Western Australia

Yes. unless there are specific projects, or needs that have been identified, and Mount Barker's a good example that I'm familiar with, you know, the Mount Barker by-pass. Now, we've been active, Main Roads has driven the planning and route definition of all of those, phases of that since the mid-nineties. Now whether the community are satisfied with the timeframe in which this has occurred is another thing, but they would be certainly aware that Main Roads

has been a major player, in terms of trying to improve the amenity of Mount Barker.

[W]e've gone to Rocky Gully as well, for instance – they've had some specific issues to do with Muirs Highway. And are very happy to deal with the community, in fact we welcome the opportunity. And again, through our customer services manager and RoadWise and the like, that's the way that we can hone in on individual communities.

Representative 2, Main Roads Western Australia

The participants conceded that some ongoing knowledge gaps may exist throughout rural communities regarding the operational arrangements that were in place between Main Roads Western Australia and its contractors for maintenance services involving the road network. This misunderstanding about roles seemingly persisted, despite the organization having disseminated a considerable amount of information to rural communities. Main Roads Western Australia had published on its Internet homepage material which further explains these arrangements, and outlines its many statutory roles and responsibilities under the legislation (Main Roads Western Australia 2012). The representatives also did acknowledge that the Department's own legislative framework and its organizational arrangements might have contributed to service delivery perceptions that exist throughout rural communities. The Department's interactions are focused primarily at regional groupings of local governments or with individual local governments.

PART B: ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS AND SERVICES – GOVERNMENT TRADING ENTERPRISES

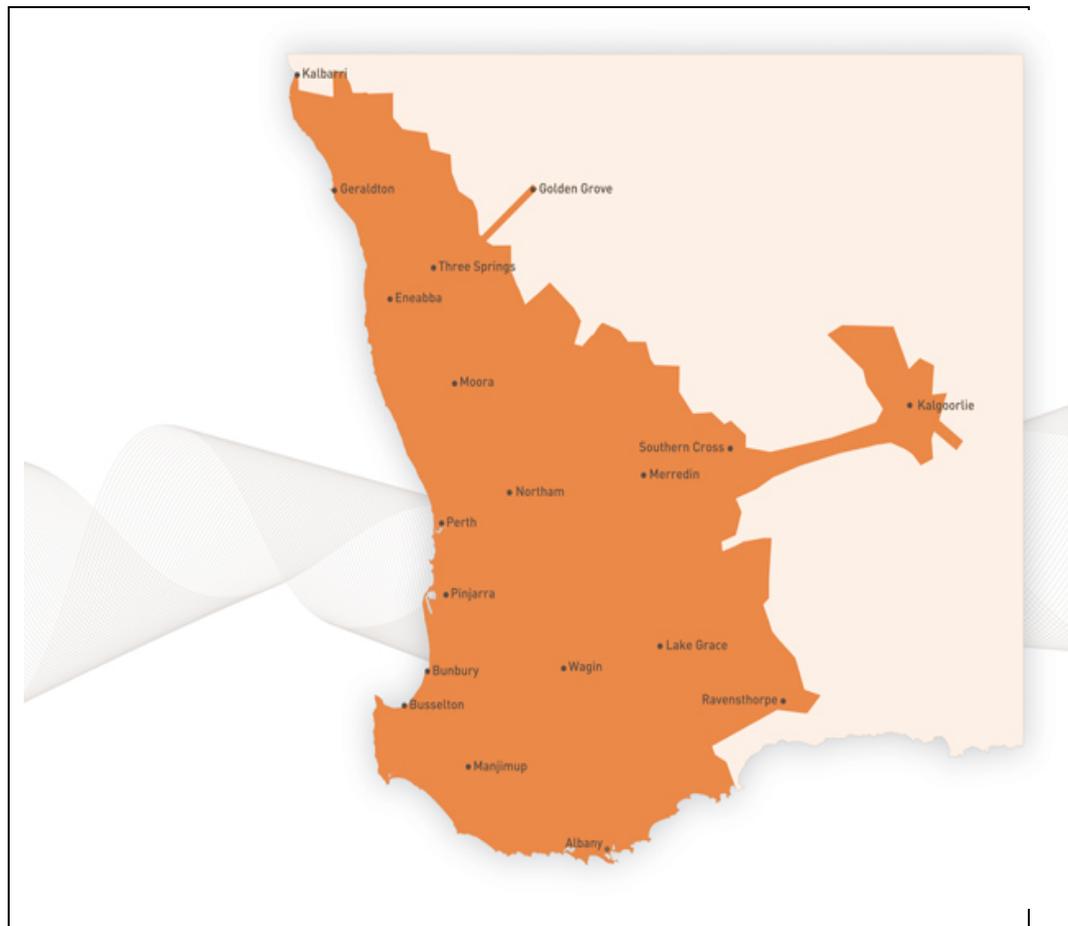
This section of the chapter addresses the outcomes of the research into customer perceptions of essential functions and services that are provided by government trading enterprises to customers within the individual study communities. Over a number of years beginning in the 1990s, and extending through to the mid-2000s, electricity, water and gas utilities were transformed from statutory agencies under direct government control to become government trading enterprises. During this research, significant issues were identified as having emerged in individual case

study rural communities regarding the provision of essential functions and services by government trading enterprises.

5.7 Electricity generation and supply

As Chapter Four described, 2005 marked the most significant transformation of Western Australia's electricity generation regime. Western Power, the monopoly generator and supplier of electricity throughout the state, became one of four government trading enterprises engaged in electricity undertakings. Western Power is currently the corporation with responsibility for maintaining, developing and improving the state's electricity transmission and distribution system, the South West Interconnected System (sections 41 and 43 of the *Electricity Corporations Act 2005*). The regional power generator, Horizon Energy, has the role of servicing the North West rural and remote communities (sections 3(2)(b), 44 and 46 of the *Electricity Corporations Act 2005*).

Figure 5.4: The South West Interconnected System (SWIS) within which the Western Power Network operates



Source: (Western Power 2013a).

The six study communities examined as part of this research fall within the South West Interconnected System area. Within these communities, residential and business customers of electricity are subject to the electricity retail activities of Synergy. In the context of the delivery of essential functions and services, electricity network matters arising within the communities are the responsibility of Western Power. It is the perceptions of these network-related issues and the resultant interactions between customers and Western Power which emerged most frequently from the research involving the communities.

5.7.1 The larger study communities

5.7.1.1 Mount Barker

The issues identified regarding the provision of electricity as an essential function and service appeared to be reflective of the dilemma that now confronts Mount Barker. Participants conveyed some interesting perceptions about the responsiveness of Western Power in its capacity as the corporation having responsibility for maintaining the electricity supply network and its relationship with long-standing customers, particularly those living on farming properties. Some participants raised doubts regarding the capacity of Western Power to maintain a reliable electricity supply network. These reservations were based upon the experiences of past relationships and the changes that now faced Mount Barker and the wider Shire of Plantagenet. Concerns were raised regarding capacity issues for the existing regional electricity supply network, arising from the development by Grange Resources of its mining operations at Wellstead, within the City of Albany.

.../ Because Western Power acknowledge they can't supply enough power to the Grange Resources .../ They need about 40 megawatts power run to mines to push the ore to Albany through a slurry pipe. The environment Synergy people want to put in firstly, a 48 megawatt unit ... there's a lot of input by self interest groups on the way you generate power as well .../

For the Mount Barker community, the issues identified directly indicated a high level of concern regarding the pressures which the Grange Resources mining operation could bring to bear upon the town's electricity sub-substation.

.../ The other thing that we didn't talk too much about is power sparks which have been very questionable at times, but lots of power surges and so on. Probably not as bad as it used to be but it is a problem, and also the availability of enough power for new industries .../

During the Mount Barker focus group proceedings, discussion arose regarding the actual benefits that have been brought to the community as a result of corporatization of the network operator. Some focus group participants expressed the view that despite government policy introducing greater flexibility in the electricity market,

the entry of new service providers to certain components of that market remained impossible.

.../ One of the biggest issues that I think needs to be looked at ... is the fact that our service providers are being privatised ... where another organisation comes along wanting to provide those services .../ The classic one is power generation ... Because Western Power don't think much of their idea; but their approach – they acknowledge they can't supply enough energy. They are putting a fence in the way; it's about 8 ½ million dollars worth – for a private organisation to establish that .../ They are using that monopoly to restrict other parties .../

The focus group proceedings identified work previously undertaken by Western Power in maintaining components within the electricity supply network. The issue of power line replacement was specifically raised within the context of the Tenterden bushfires which had occurred in 2004.

.../ They used to do the power lines; I mean, they replaced the new[lines] – the Tenterden fires which was [sic] caused by power and that's impacted on the community because the community raised a lot of money to help the people in Tenterden and I think most of the community groups supported the Tenterden people .../

The focus group participants, in highlighting this issue, appeared to perceive that a corporatized service provider operating within a rural community context has a broader social responsibility to that community, which extends beyond the attainment of efficiency outcomes (Jerrard 2005).

Issues raised by the participants of the Mount Barker focus group were reflected in a parliamentary debate which occurred during mid-2005 and involved the proposed restructuring of Western Power as part of the introduction of *Electricity Corporations Act 2005* (Parliament of Western Australia 2005a). This debate saw the community's elected representative in the Legislative Assembly specifically highlight concerns over the reliability of electricity supply. The elected representative advocated that a re-structured Western Power must be more effective

in its future communications and interactions with its customers regarding network supply issues.

The public concern about the electricity supply network servicing the Great Southern Region persisted and the issue was reflected in a number of parliamentary proceedings over time (Parliament of Western Australia (Parliament of Western Australia 2007b, 2007c, 2007a, 2006, 2011a). These parliamentary debates also appear to substantiate earlier concerns expressed at a community level regarding electricity network capacity constraints. Such constraints had severely limited the network operator in its options to upgrade some sub-stations that supply electricity to the Southdown project. Mount Barker is one of these sub-stations (Parliament of Western Australia 2011a).

5.7.1.2 *Wongan Hills*

Wongan Hills participants expressed the view that the electricity service supplied to customers throughout the local government area generally was not of an adequate standard. The focus group discussions identified the gradual withdrawal by the network operator of locally-based maintenance resources as being one possible contributing factor to this perceived decline in the standard of electricity supply services.

.../ It's not too bad in Wongan, but the Ballidus, Cadouxs. Well, you don't ask .../ ...but that relates to anything, any service that is provided by government authorities. The level of service is directly, inversely proportional to whether or not there are staff here. People like Western Power, they were here .../ But with Western Power, with power we don't have a good service. And ask the people of Ballidu .../ ...in that Western Power case, we did have two servicemen here and until they retired and they were never replaced. And they quickly fixed up the little problems, and now, they are an hour away before they can even get here, so, you know, they've never replaced their men .../

By contrast, other participants had favourable perceptions of the performance of Western Power in providing a reliable electricity supply to customers within Wongan Hills.

.../ We pretty well have a continuous power supply in town, except for especially the new line .../ ...[P]ower outages now are less than they used to be ten, twenty or thirty years ago...it used to be out three or four days at a time then. But, the four lines in the town, they can switch around better so that a few hours is a lot better than a few days..../

The focus group discussions reflected a clear acknowledgement by participants that service delivery improvements had occurred over time in comparative terms. Concerns remained, however, regarding the adequacy of resources allocated to ongoing network maintenance support and the potential implications of any deficiencies for network performance outcomes. The focus group participants discussed the performance of the electricity supply network from the perspective of the constraints which existing infrastructure had placed upon development within Wongan Hills. This issue was particularly important given its inherent link to the strategy pursued by the Shire of Wongan–Ballidu of promoting Wongan Hills as a viable rural community for re-settlement by new residents (Shire of Wongan–Ballidu 2012b) Such a strategy could not succeed without the community being in a position to provide any additional population with sufficient essential services, including electricity. Specifically, the focus group proceedings heard how the expansion of the town’s light industrial area was being hindered because a major component of electricity supply infrastructure servicing the town had reached its capacity.

.../ We had a big new power line installed from Moora .../ Two years ago .../ Before that, the popular myth was that business could not expand in Wongan, because there wasn’t enough power to support secondary industry. .../ We went to Western Power and they had it in their budget that they were going to put the line from Moora into here in a certain year. So we went to them and said: “If you put that in a year or two earlier, we’ll allow your substation to go a year or two out to help their budget, then it gets that main line into here, a couple of years earlier. ... They were going to bring it in, but it also needed a three million dollar substation, that they didn’t have money for .../

The perceptions of participants in the Wongan Hills focus group regarding electricity supply service standards and infrastructure constraints appear to have some foundation. Elected representatives of the Parliament of Western Australia had

earlier conveyed similar concerns during debates about the performance of Western Power (Parliament of Western Australia 2003, 2004).

5.7.2 The smaller study communities

5.7.2.1 Rocky Gully

Rocky Gully focus group participants identified the provision of electricity services to the community as being an important issue for discussion, and participants were particularly concerned about the adequacy of the resources which Western Power allocates to the maintenance task. They highlighted some perceived difficulties that employees and contractors of Western Power have experienced in performing their functions as a result of the isolation of Rocky Gully.

.../ There was a bloke in town from Western Power last week, and he was actually standing on the roof of his vehicle in the middle of town trying to talk on his phone .../ You know, it's a joke. This is a 100-mile stretch of highway and you've got to do that to get communication, come on .../

General agreement was expressed that blame should not necessarily be levelled at individual workers for any deficiencies in service delivery experienced by the community. Rather, the insufficient allocation of resources to maintenance activities by the responsible entity was perceived as perhaps being a more direct cause.

.../ We shouldn't really generalise about the deficiencies of the workers on the spot, but by and large, the workers on the spot are devoted .../ Oh yes, but there's not enough of them .../ They're just doing what the parameters of their job description [sic]. .../ They are needing more people employed .../

The Rocky Gully focus group also highlighted perceived frustrations with the automated telecommunications mechanisms that are being utilized by Western Power for managing customer enquiries. Such arrangements are commonplace in Australia among contemporary commercial service provider organizations and within public sector agencies (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2011b; Centrelink 1999; National Australia Bank 2005; Ombudsman Western Australia 2010). Notwithstanding this, the participants perceived these as being impediments

to customers of rural communities in their efforts to report electricity supply issues. These arrangements were reported as a source of frustration.

.../ one of the things I find, the new idea of telephone waiting. You ring a number to talk to somebody, and you get put in a – line .../ Your call is important. Western Power, the telephone, and I find really now I just say it is too – hard and I don't do it.You get put in a queue, and you also find that you are talking to somebody in – India or somewhere anyway. But you know if you do find a human being at Western Power at the moment, most telephones now, [depend on] electricity going into them; when the power fails you haven't got a bloody telephone and you've got to press buttons, like you've got to press 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 but if you haven't got a telephone .../ So and they are telling you to keep press[ing], of course, it doesn't – work .../

Western Power, being a prominent service provider organization, places considerable emphasis on the telecommunications component of its operations. These systems are utilized for the purposes of handling customer enquiries, reporting faults and managing complaints. Western Power operates according to a Customer Charter which explains the values of the corporation. The Charter outlines the performance standards and outcomes that customers can expect from Western Power; importantly, these also apply to contractors. The complaints handling process of the corporation is also set out in the document (Western Power 2012b). On its website, the organization provides an extensive suite of information describing its diverse areas of operations for residential and business customers.

For service organizations such as Western Power the public portrayal of an extensive communication framework and clear operating protocols is important. It conveys the organization's confidence and efficiency in interacting with customers and the wider community. For rural communities, the value of the organization's communication strategies might be better measured by the effectiveness with which customers are engaged. Equally important is the extent to which customers in rural communities understand and acknowledge the organizational performance standards for the services that are provided (Auditor General Western Australia 2001). The Rocky Gully focus group participants identified the issue of conflict between vegetation and

power lines on rural properties as being at least partially caused by a perceived failure of communication between Western Power and landowners. Some participants suggested that a level of community cynicism existed about the obligations imposed on landowners by Western Power, prohibiting interference with network distribution infrastructure. The corporation's own prior performance in infrastructure management was cited as the rationale for this perception.

A 'disconnect' seemingly existed between the message that Western Power endeavours to communicate to customers through its policies concerning vegetation management and power lines, and the organization's own actions. A specific example given was the Tenterden bushfires which occurred on 27 December 2003.

.../ It's another community, a good example of this buck passing ... Western Power's tangle with the disastrous Tenterden fires. I mean that's a classic case study in duck shoving of a community function; the provision of electricity and how the bureaucrats do it.../ Western Power, ...Now, with this Tenterden Fire they are right on ever – ything .../ ...but that is not correct. The politicians are the other side – it's the office side that stuff things up for politicians .../ I don't know whether the situation has been resolved but Western Power put[s] its power lines everywhere it fancies ...even though they are knocking down bush to do it. And from what I'm gathering and this may or may not have been agreed to – that now farmers are being made responsible for keeping it clear under those power lines .../

These views concerning landowner responsibility were not universally shared among focus group participants, which might suggest the existence of some confusion regarding policy application on the part of some rural landowners. This research did not seek to investigate whether or not such dissatisfaction with the Western Power policy was widespread.

A senior customer service executive of Western Power was interviewed to better understand the findings arising from the study. The officer had direct management responsibility and operational knowledge of the electricity distribution network issues affecting the study communities examined within this research. The representative of Western Power expressed misgivings about the level of the

awareness throughout the community about the services that the restructured organization provides.

The reason I say that is because, since the split we still get very much involved with shire CEOs, local members and others and it still surprises me the number that still question as to how the split evolved, what the split means to them, and what in fact it is that Western Power will actually be doing. So it's clear that a lot of people don't actually pay attention to what's out there in the news media and other forums. But as far as the general public area is concerned, their only contact in the main is through their power bills. The majority of the population have no dealings with Western Power which is the networks wires business, except on an occasional basis, like [if they] want to cut trees, if they want to shift mains, they've got a complaint about power problems, reliability issues, or in fact they want to subdivide. But that still only takes quite a small proportion of the total population.

Representative, Western Power

The representative explained that the introduction by Western Power of the Country Services section was designed to raise awareness among rural customers of the services provided by Western Power and to inform customers of certain obligations expected of them by the organization. This information was disseminated to customers at events and exhibits conducted throughout rural communities and it was published in corporate publications.

Our role is to try and deliver to the country, a reliable and efficient supply of electricity. And what that means is that you do all that you can in your powers under the Act and the Regulations that allow us to do, is to do whatever we can to ensure that capacity and reliability of supply is available to country customers. We don't necessarily always meet their expectations, try as we might. Because again, it is known that the country regions, particularly when you get right outside the fringes of the network, are very uneconomical in terms of revenue returns for expense laid out, and expense made in the form of replacement of infrastructure and maintaining existing infrastructure.

Representative, Western Power

The representative explained that Western Power's role as the electricity distributor for the South West Interconnected System necessarily led to the organization's interactions with customers being focused upon the resolution of issues and complaints.

And Western Power itself – for the mums and dads of the business – Western Power is always transparent. They're more concerned at the power bill level and the reliability of supply issues. And the reliability of supply issues and what we finish up dealing with if the complaint goes through – if they complain or, want further action on that.

Representative, Western Power

Coinciding with the introduction of the Country Services initiative were significant improvements in the mechanisms available to customers from rural areas of the state to contact Western Power. The participant asserted that these arrangements for the capture and resolution of customer-generated issues required a pro-active, holistic approach on the part of the organization. This was in contrast to former mechanisms where the effectiveness in resolving a matter was perhaps overly dependent upon the corporate knowledge base and commitment of particular individuals within the organization.

The participant explained that it had previously been commonplace for issues regarding electricity supply network to be referred to Western Power from local governments or the offices of local members of parliament. Enquiries from stakeholders within the community had typically necessitated that Western Power take specific actions. These may have involved the organization being required to provide to the responsible minister a full account of the issues giving rise to the matter and its resultant outcome. Members of Parliament, in referring certain matters directly to the office of the minister, also place a resultant obligation of accountability upon Western Power. The organization at a community level had also considered it necessary to communicate directly with the local Member of Parliament to ensure that outstanding matters had been resolved effectively.

Western Power is constrained in its capacity to influence extensive long-term planning and to undertake projections for expansion of the electricity distribution network, primarily because of limited budgets and the requirement that it operate according to commercial principles. The representative expressed a view that these operational constraints were not always clearly understood by the statutory agencies and commercial enterprises throughout the community that comprised Western Power's stakeholders.

Now, that's fine, and don't get me wrong, I'm not saying we should live in the past. The new economic environment says that you don't spend your money that way, you spend it differently. And that's what we've got to work to, and that's moving back to what I said [it] was, because we have to work to these new rules and we've got to now be very conscious of it, I suppose those are the sorts of things that are clearly on our minds when we are doing our planning and our development within the organization.

Representative, Western Power

With Western Power, being structured under the relevant legislation as a government trading enterprise, the organization's Board and Chief Executive have the independence to make strategic decisions. The organization, however, is ultimately accountable for its decisions to the responsible Minister (Western Power 2012a).

5.8 Water supply

During the focus group sessions the provision of water services emerged as an essential function and service of critical importance for rural communities. Since 1996, a government trading enterprise known as the Water Corporation has been carrying out these water supply functions. The corporation is established pursuant to the *Water Corporation Act 1995* and is required to operate according to commercial principles (Water Corporation 2013b).

5.8.1 The larger study communities

5.8.1.1 Wongan Hills

The focus group at Wongan Hills identified water supply services as being a matter of importance to the community and its residents. Participants perceived that a clear relationship can be found between ongoing improvements in the standards of water supply infrastructure and the delivery of other essential functions and services throughout the community. Conversely, and from a contemporary perspective, focus group participants perceived that proposals for future residential growth and commercial development within Wongan Hills have been hindered by water supply infrastructure limitations. Some concerns were also raised about the perceived low level of responsiveness on the part of the provider to the demands that are currently being exerted upon this infrastructure.

.../ The water is pretty damn good, that's what I'm saying .../ You know, our businesses were strangled by our services that covered the town. You know, we had a little water pipe and that's why the hospital ran out of water at the top of the hill .../ But you go back 25 years, and the hospital wouldn't get water of an evening. So we don't have them situations anymore where we run out of water in town. So the service level has increased. The infrastructure out there has aged, and that's our concern. That's where their problem is now .../ Yeah, they are reactive instead of proactive. Instead of going out there and spending the money putting in the new lines, so they don't have these problems. They're just reacting to the bursts all the time .../

Focus group participants identified the importance of a rural community such as Wongan Hills being pro-active in pursuing initiatives aimed at minimizing the burden on this infrastructure. One such program sought to achieve a more efficient use of scarce water services to maintain recreational areas and thereby promote a greater sense of environmental sustainability throughout the community.

.../ Another example is with waste water, and the absence of water, with the community's desire to green itself up, and remove itself from the blight of not having water. The community went to the Water Corporation, and said: "You've got water going down, going down the gurgler – down the creek, and into the Avon River actually. How about you pay us to provide a dam for

you?” So, that’s an example of, of the Water Corp came to the party, and the community are now using the water. .../ But now we’re drought proof, so we’ll always have a green oval .../

The Shire of Wongan–Ballidu is the custodian of the facilities concerned and implications arising from these strategies were absorbed as part of its ongoing operations. This approach enabled the local government to identify a funding strategy and associated capital expenditure requirements into a discernible project, thereby allowing the community to pursue appropriate funding opportunities accordingly (Shire of Wongan–Ballidu 2012b; Water Corporation 2004).

5.8.2 The smaller study communities

5.8.2.1 Rocky Gully

In Rocky Gully the participants identified concerns in relation to the water supply services that are provided to the community. The Rocky Gully community water supply service is provided to residents from a local Water Corporation dam, which was constructed in 1978 (Shire of Plantagenet 2010; Water Corporation 2012c).

.../ It took a lot of lobbying to get those town water supplies.... At least we did it. –The town water supply can be improved .../ The water might be poor but actually getting a dam was a good result for us .../ We did get a dam. It’s just that what comes out of it, it’s not the reticulated water supply.../ The water quality has not improved .../

Foremost among the specific matters raised by participants during the proceedings were concerns about water quality and the potential health implications for residents. It was apparent, from the tenor of the discussions, that this matter had been one of long-standing concern.

.../ Just getting back to the water issue, just on that point... When you want to have a cup of tea; when you boil it now – you get a brown film.... We complained about that – we were outspoken ... all of a sudden there was a hive of activity .../ Well we have to use filter our water with a jug; A filter lasts about a month. .../

Earlier in this chapter it was asserted that the Rocky Gully community has proven itself to be particularly effective in highlighting service delivery deficiencies in relation to road safety issue and transport infrastructure concerns. Similar ongoing activities had been undertaken by residents with respect to issues involving the community's water services. Significantly, in 2011 following serious health concerns being identified among some residents, the Rocky Gully community was again highly vocal in its complaints about the water quality emanating from its town water supply. These grievances received prominent media coverage (Golden West Network 2012), and the actions of the residents led to the Water Corporation temporarily suspending water services in Rocky Gully and replacing these with water transported by tanker trucks from Albany. The Corporation also conducted an investigation into the quality of the water emanating from the Rocky Gully dam (Golden West Network 2012).

5.8.2.2 *Ballidu*

Ballidu community participants identified the quality of water supply services provided to the town as a significant issue. This matter was raised primarily from the perspective of water quality and the potential health implications that it has for residents.

.../ A lot of people will not drink the water in our town .../ Since they put this station in the area, some parents don't even let their kids shower, because the chlorines [are] that strong .../

Ballidu is serviced by the Water Corporation with water supplied from the Mundaring Weir as part of the Goldfields and Agricultural Water Supply Region network (Water Corporation 2012b). During the Ballidu focus group discussions, the participants generally acknowledged the significant advancements that had been made in the infrastructure used to deliver water supply services to the community. Conversely, however, a lack of investment in that same infrastructure was perceived as having contributed to a noticeable decline in the standard of water supply services provided to the community over the period of this research.

.../ I would suggest that the power and the water delivery of thirty years ago was far superior to what we've got now, because that infrastructure was all brand new thirty years ago. Now we're suffering the problem of the age of the infrastructure .../... you know when I went to school, we didn't even have water – or electricity, you know. So, going back to 1975, I don't know if we had water then – we got electricity a bit before that .../ ...it's just brown water coming out...not what I would say drinkable no, but clear .../ You can actually smell the chlorine a lot of times .../

Such was the extent of the community concern regarding this matter that the Ballidu Progress Group had initiated a lobbying effort with a view to bringing about improvements in the quality of water supplied to the town.

.../ Well, I actually, did a petition in our shop on the quality of the water. I even ended up getting the LPT – and because though sometimes you can't even put your whites through the washing machine first, unless you put the water through. They've been messing around up here or, with the pipes somewhere in the town – from [which the affected water is sourced and which ideally should be replaced].../*

*NB: Details withheld by researcher to protect identity of third party not directly involved in this research.

Likewise, and with respect to advocacy on a wider scale, this research identified that in 2009 a Parliamentary Question was asked in the Legislative Council relating to the status of government proposals for the upgrade of water supply services in Ballidu (Parliament of Western Australia 2009a). The Water Corporation has publicly acknowledged the unique infrastructure that comprises the Goldfields and Agricultural Water Supply Scheme. The system presents the Corporation with considerable challenges in delivering its services and has required the implementation of programs to ensure that the water provided to customers complies with the appropriate health standards (Water Corporation 2012e). The Water Corporation advises that:

The combination of long distances and high temperatures experienced in the G&AWS Scheme can still result in the progressive loss of the protection the chloramine disinfectant gives to the water supply. To overcome this problem we undertake additional dosing with chlorine. While this ensures the water*

remains safe to drink, it can sometimes give rise to a strong chlorine taste and odour.

(Water Corporation 2012e)

*Goldfields and Agricultural Water Supply Scheme

In February 2012, the Water Corporation advised that it was continuing to progress further water quality trials involving the Goldfields and Agricultural Water Supply Scheme and, specifically, towns and farms located along the CK Extension to the Scheme shown in Figure 5.6. Ballidu is included within the CK Extension area and is participating in the trial (Water Corporation 2012e).

Figure 5.5: Map of the Goldfields & Agricultural Water Supply Scheme (incorporating the CK Extension area)



Source: (Water Corporation 2012)

During this research the views of the Water Corporation were also sought. The Corporation subsequently provided a whole-of-organization formal written response

to a series of questions submitted by the researcher. The questions provided to the Corporation were identical to those used during the elite interview sessions involving representatives of other government trading enterprises and government departments or agencies. In its response, the Water Corporation explained the communication mechanisms that are utilized to interact with its customers about service delivery issues. The Corporation also provided key performance indicators indicating its outcomes in delivering water supply services to the six study communities.

5.9 The effectiveness of rural communities in influencing the outcomes of the delivery of essential functions and services

The question of whether or not communities are effective in influencing the strategies of essential functions and services’ providers and the decisions of policy makers is an interesting one. For this study, the concept of effective community influence denotes the existence of a possible relationship between the level and standard of the delivery of essential functions and services and community feedback to service deliverers and efforts to communicate and lobby for change. During the focus group phase the researcher therefore specifically sought to gauge community perceptions about these two things. The outcomes were as follows:

Table 5.2: Study communities: Perceived effectiveness in influencing the delivery of essential functions and services

Has your community succeeded in influencing the essential functions and services’ provision strategies of government agencies and corporatized government entities and the delivery model considerations of policy makers?

Case study rural community	Response (Summarized)
Wagin	Difficult to exert influence when decisions already made
Mount Barker	Influence exerted by groups on an issue-by-issue basis
Rocky Gully	Influence sought by community on an issue-by-issue basis
Boyanup	Influence limited by representatives’ mix and local apathy
Wongan Hills	Influence has been mixed depending upon the issue
Ballidu	Scope of community to exert influence is limited (localized)

Chapter Three of this study described that the confirmatory surveys were conducted using stratified populations of residential and business customers within each study community. Response rates for the six communities ranged from 21 per cent to 28 per cent, representing an overall rate of 25 per cent. The confirmatory surveys sought feedback on these issues of community effectiveness and influence, and the results of this are indicated in Table 5.7 as follows:

Table 5.3: Study communities: Confirmatory survey outcomes of community perceived effectiveness in influencing the delivery of essential functions and services

Has your community succeeded in influencing the essential functions and services' provision strategies of government agencies and corporatized government entities and the delivery model considerations of policy makers?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Totals
Wagin	0 (0.00%)	7 (31.82%)	7 (31.82%)	5 (22.72%)	3 (13.64%)	22 (100.00%)
Mount Barker	0 (0.00%)	8 (30.77%)	8 (30.77%)	6 (23.08%)	4 (15.38%)	26 (100.00%)
Rocky Gully	0 (0.00%)	2 (22.22%)	2 (22.22%)	4 (44.44%)	1 (11.12%)	9 (100.00%)
Boyanup	0 (0.00%)	4 (25.00%)	5 (31.25%)	7 (43.75%)	0 (0.00%)	16 (100.00%)
Wongan Hills	3 (15.00%)	4 (20.00%)	9 (45.00%)	3 (15.00%)	1 (5.00%)	20 (100.00%)
Ballidu	0 (0.00%)	1 (9.10%)	3 (27.26%)	6 (54.54%)	1 (9.10%)	11 (100.00%)
Totals	3	26	34	31	10	104¹²

¹² The number of responses to this question (104) differs to the total number of responses to the survey (105) because one respondent did not complete this question.

The data shown in Table 5.7 indicates a degree of ambivalence among survey respondents about the question posed within the survey instrument specifically about the effectiveness or otherwise of the study communities in achieving influence. A total of 29 respondents representing 27 per cent of respondents across all six study communities did agree their communities succeeded in influencing the strategies of providers and decisions of elected policy makers. However, 76 participants representing 73 per cent of the total participants throughout the study communities responded that they were either undecided or that they disagreed.

5.10 Elected representatives' perceptions of issues in the delivery of essential functions & services within the study communities

This research examined customer perceptions of the standards of essential functions and services within selected case study rural communities. An objective of the study was to identify any evidence of 'empowerment' within these communities. Aspects of such 'empowerment' have been examined in this research in its discussion of the mechanisms and protocols that exist between the study rural communities and certain government departments, statutory agencies and particular government trading enterprises responsible for providing essential functions and services. It is asserted, however, that the activities of government departments and statutory agencies, or indeed of government trading enterprises, cannot be neatly separated from the main policy and political environment within which elected representatives also operate (Parliament of Western Australia 2012b, 2012a, 2012c; Water Corporation 2013b; Western Power 2012a). Communities have an opportunity to lobby their elected representatives about issues of concern involving the delivery of essential functions and services, with a view to achieving a resolution.

5.10.1.1 Elected representatives' perceptions of their role

Elected representatives, in carrying out their functions, have ongoing interaction with government departments, statutory agencies and government trading enterprises. This interface necessarily generates for the elected representative a

personal knowledge of the communication processes and customer service mechanisms utilized by the service providers. Moreover, the fundamental role of representation and advocacy requires that the elected representative be capable of scrutinizing any inadequacies in the mechanisms that service providers use. The consequent advocacy task of an elected representative, having perceived a failure by government departments, statutory agencies and government trading enterprises to effectively address service delivery issues of their customers, is to pursue alternative practical or political resolutions.

This research sought views from participating elected representatives about the effectiveness or otherwise of the study communities in influencing the strategies and plans relating to the delivery of essential functions and services. These perceptions are now explained. In presenting this information no reference has been made either to the name or to the electorate of each elected representative so as to preserve the anonymity of each participant. For the purposes of delineation, however, each participant has been assigned a numerical reference corresponding to the chronological order in which they were interviewed.

5.10.1.2 Customer awareness of essential functions and services

Significant among the outcomes to have emerged from discussions with the elected representatives was a divergence in the perceived level of customer awareness of essential functions and services within communities. One of the elected representatives expressed the view that residents of rural communities generally have a high level of awareness about the functions and services which should be delivered. It was also suggested that, in the main, these rural communities are 'vocal' in highlighting issues involving service delivery deficiencies.

The 'history' of a particular community and other factors (e.g. predominant industry) were viewed as influencing demographics and social character. Differing 'histories' were also perceived as possibly explaining the varying degree of protest that arises from different rural communities regarding delivery deficiencies.

You come out to the country and no-one takes any of those things for granted at all, which I think actually heightens their awareness of “what have we got”, “what haven’t we got”, and “how could this be done better”, and, a lot of it too is fighting to retain it as governments become more rationalistic in their approach. There’s a lot of pressure to look at smaller communities and say: “Well, centralise services in your bigger towns rather than the small ones.” and so that’s a constant fight for country people and that’s why I say that I think that different areas are different.”

Elected Representative 1

The two remaining elected representatives, by contrast, conveyed the perception that constituents within these electorates generally did not have strong knowledge or understanding of the essential functions and services that are provided. Particular circumstances were identified, however, in which those newly relocated into a community were well informed about ‘basic’ service delivery standards. Accordingly, these customers brought with them certain expectations concerning the levels of functions and services delivery that should be provided. By contrast, residents from the more ‘traditional’ and established areas of the electorate were perceived as possibly having lower expectations. Therefore, it was considered that these constituents might be less inclined to actively agitate on issues related to the delivery of functions and services.

So I think that you have two groups of people – the very rapidly growing group tends to be much more urban, – they’re probably people who have moved there, they have a much greater grasp of what sort of facilities and services that are available in the metropolitan area.

But some of the leadership will, and in particular in those areas, the local governments and the development industry are in there agitating for better services to allow those towns to expand.

Elected Representative 2

Another factor identified as possibly contributing to an individual’s understanding of essential functions and services’ issues was the extent of their own direct exposure to the activities of provider organizations.

However, the general public, I think, get very confused about who does what, and who is responsible for departments. They get very confused between what's federal government and state government, and what is local government and which agency provide[s] which service.

Elected Representative 3

5.10.1.3 Communication processes

The elected representatives each conveyed their detailed understanding of the processes and mechanisms utilized by government departments, statutory agencies and government trading enterprises in seeking to communicate with customers. The representatives expressed reservations about the efficacy of these arrangements in addressing customer-generated issues or concerns relating to the delivery of essential functions and services. In some cases, members expressed scepticism as to the providers' and customers' motives and had questioned the objectivity behind such mechanisms.

The research identified that there is a varying level of awareness among rural communities about the relationship that exists between the local Member of Parliament and the lobbying process. In one circumstance, the perception was conveyed that this 'awareness' factor is also, to some extent, a function of the pro-activity and leadership that emanates from within the community.

So I would say I spend seventy percent of my time working for four or five communities who are quite proactive in keeping me aware of what's going on. And other communities don't do any of that, which I find quite strange.

Elected Representative 1

The personality traits of a particular local member of parliament and the engagement processes employed by the member also influence community understanding of representation mechanisms or potential solutions to issues.

I know that for some of my colleagues – every waking minute is spent out in their electorate, talking to people and finding out what the next issue; depends what sort of parliamentarian you like to be.

You know, I like to be a bit more strategic, looking at the big picture. There's other MPs that like to be at the local CWA meeting of six people, everyone's different. But normally if there's a serious problem, we find out about it pretty quick.

Elected Representative 1

One elected representative explained that the role of a member of parliament involves the handling of constituent complaints which are received in both written form and orally. The elected representative also expressed the view that a constituent making persistent and direct enquiries on a matter could almost be assured of eliciting action on the part of their Member of Parliament. Another representative explained that the communication mechanisms utilized by constituents of the study communities primarily involved direct lobbying (i.e. telephone calls or personal representation).

A close working relationship was maintained by elected representatives with local governments throughout their electorate. As such, regular meetings were conducted and ongoing communications made.

And I think in my area, I play quite a strong role in that area, in that I'm very accessible and I think that my communities utilize me as a conduit a lot. But that's good I think that's what my role is.

Elected Representative 3

One elected representative contended that “a few wins” had been achieved on behalf of constituents of certain communities within their electorate. These achievements had been made following actions taken in response to community concerns relating to infrastructure and service delivery proposals that were having significant negative implications. The second elected representative, by contrast, asserted that customer-generated issues exert a very limited influence upon the long-term plans and

strategies of the government departments, statutory agencies and government trading enterprises.

They get constant feedback on that process. Most of those things are at a government level where there's a lack of commitment, at a government level to allow the investment in infrastructure required. It's a real infrastructure question. Until there's a great crying and gnashing of teeth, there's only a very limited influence.

Elected Representative 2

Similarly, the third elected representative expressed the view that the extent of influence upon the functions and services' delivery plans of government departments, statutory agencies and government trading enterprises generated by business and residential customers of rural communities varied. They perceived these community-based pressures as being reflected most typically through the local governments and local community groups.

[U]nfortunately, in some parts of my country electorate, the need [for providers] to depart from their adopted strategies is simply for economic or financial reasons, or numbers of people versus money invested, not for the benefit of the communities. Now, in saying that, [it's] a negative, but I've also seen where those [providers] identified a need to depart from their adopted strategies in agree[ment] with and at [the] direction of local communities where they've seen a need to do something in a different way... [B]ut I think ... in a lot of cases, it gets down to numbers versus economics and essential services are lost – e.g. the loss of health services simply because the number of people doesn't justify them having that service, which to me is, in small country towns, not good – you can't do that. There's a community service obligation that I think sometimes isn't met.

Elected Representative 3

But, so what I'm trying to say is I think that the people who do try and influence decisions, influence things, and lobby to get better services, etcetera, but sometimes because of the situation in inland country WA, strategically sometimes it can fall on deaf ears.

Elected Representative 3

Broadly speaking, the Members of Parliament did not view existing customer service systems and communications mechanisms as being entirely effective in addressing customer-generated issues about essential functions and services. The policies and protocols and, importantly, the strategic planning mechanisms of the organizations providing these services – which are intended to provide consistency of decision-making and serve as stabilizing forces – were the things that elected representatives sometimes perceived to be acting as impediments to the issues of constituents being solved. Elected representatives, by making written representations to the responsible Minister, or by asking questions of the Minister in the Parliament, were seen to be seeking direct ministerial intervention as a ‘circuit-breaker’ to these rigid structural processes.

Oh, I think it's important, [that] we have a few wins – we don't win all the time – but we have of a few wins. And that's normally generated by concern. [T]he current example we've got, [the] in-fill sewerage problems in some of these small towns, and putting in deep sewerage like you or I have probably got, is very expensive in a small country town. The, government's about to release a report saying they can no longer afford to do that, and so, we were made aware of this by myself and one of my colleagues from small communities in our electorates. We're now working with the Minister for Water Resources on [finding] a more innovative program, [be]cause we can no longer afford deep sewerage as everyone knows it, [So]what's the next solution? [I]s it a little processing plant recycling that water onto town ovals and so forth, because there's a problem that needs to be fixed, that the standard solution is in-fill sewerage, which doesn't work.

Elected Representative 1

I mean individually, [the influence of] customers is very small and it's reflected very poorly – it has no reflection basically, it has no influence. [A]t a mass level is the only way that generally the customers can expect to have any sort of satisfaction.

[A]t that point, it depends upon the political will as ... much as [it does] the corporate will. If you have both the positive corporate and political will in the government and the government-run enterprise, you'll actually get a very, very

good outcome. It's just that only tends to happen in marginal seats where the government demands it.

Elected Representative 2

I really think that where we've seen changes in the level and standards of essential functions and services, it's been very much driven from local lobbying via local government in association with the local Member of Parliament ... and also local business, community and focus groups. Because what I really find is that as a local member of parliament...I really am a conduit between ... what my region requires, needs and wants, and that, and those government departments. However, ... I think strategic plans have contributed and there's no doubt that economic and financial issues that arise also contribute. Government policy can be an advantage, but it can also be great hind[rance]. The other drivers in change in level have been key local people working within government departments. Now I find that ... sometimes you can get a key person who will drive the department ... and actually cause that change to happen.

Elected Representative 3

5.11 Community advocacy and the influence on service delivery strategies and policy

Earlier in Chapter Two of this study contemporary definitions of the “customer/consumer” and the “citizen” were introduced. Within the neoliberal public policy context, clear parallels can be drawn between democratic aspirations of the citizenry and the expectations of these same populations when they act in their role as customers/consumers and interact with public sector providers of essential functions and services. Customers/consumers within communities seek empowerment through the opportunities which are afforded to them by governments and their public sector organizations. The research identified that community advocacy of customer/community-generated issues as being important to influencing the strategies of essential functions and services’ providers and the decisions of policy makers. As earlier discussion within this chapter identified, the importance of making this differentiation between *strategy* and *policy* is itself further contextualized by the mixed environment within which essential and services are

presently being delivered to communities. Government trading enterprises, whilst established by legislative instruments, operate pursuant to commercial principles.

Government departments and statutory agencies, on the other hand, are also established by legislative instruments, but have their activities (i.e. functions and service delivery) closely guided by their legislation. These legislative mechanisms typically require statutory compliance, accountability of the relevant agencies (e.g. program efficiency) and the fulfilment of government policy directives. Such differences in the dynamics of the delivery of essential functions and services by government business enterprises compared with government departments and statutory agencies leads to the development of two discrete models of community advocacy. These are shown as follows in Figure 5.7 and Figure 5.8:

Figure 5.6: Statutory organization model

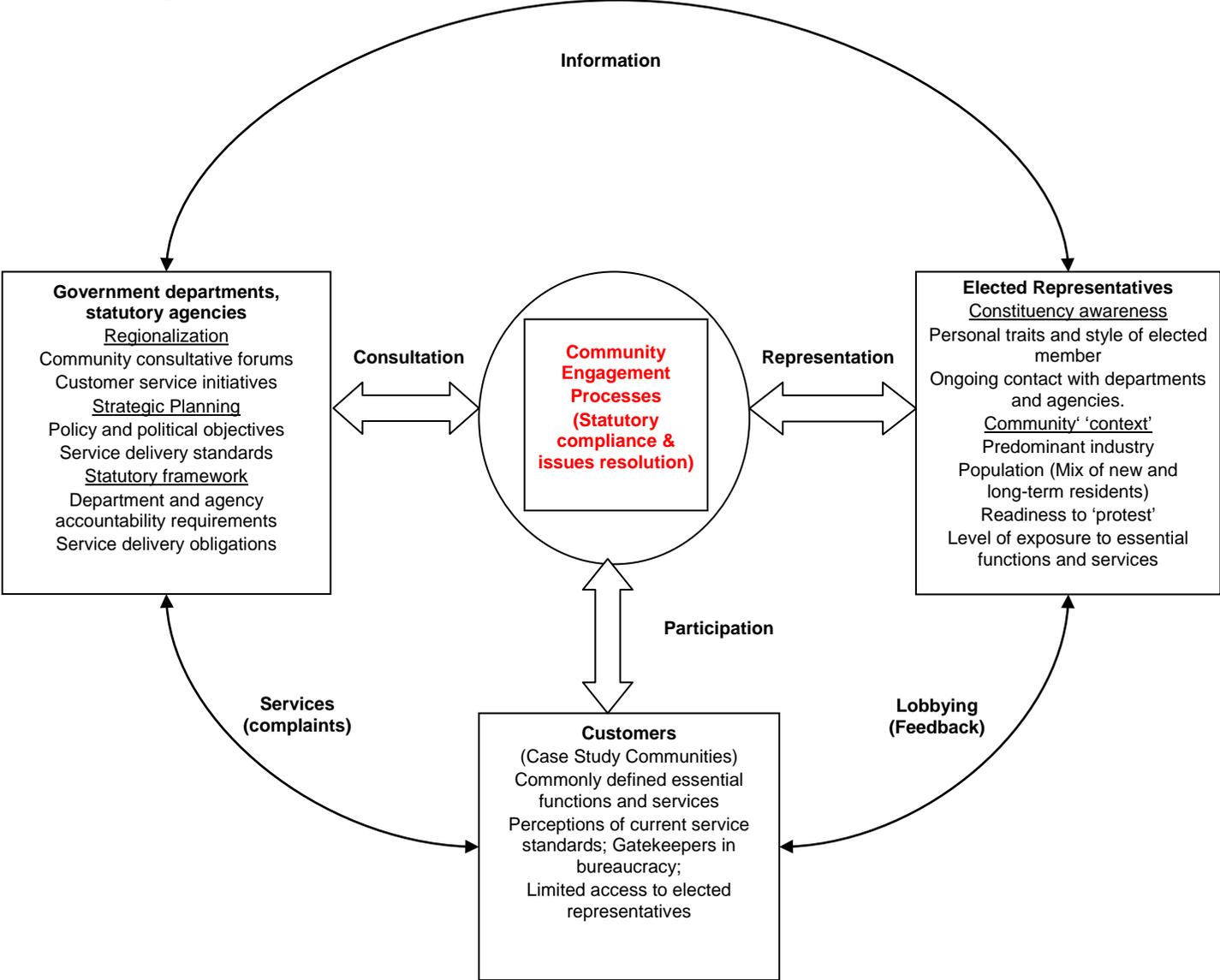
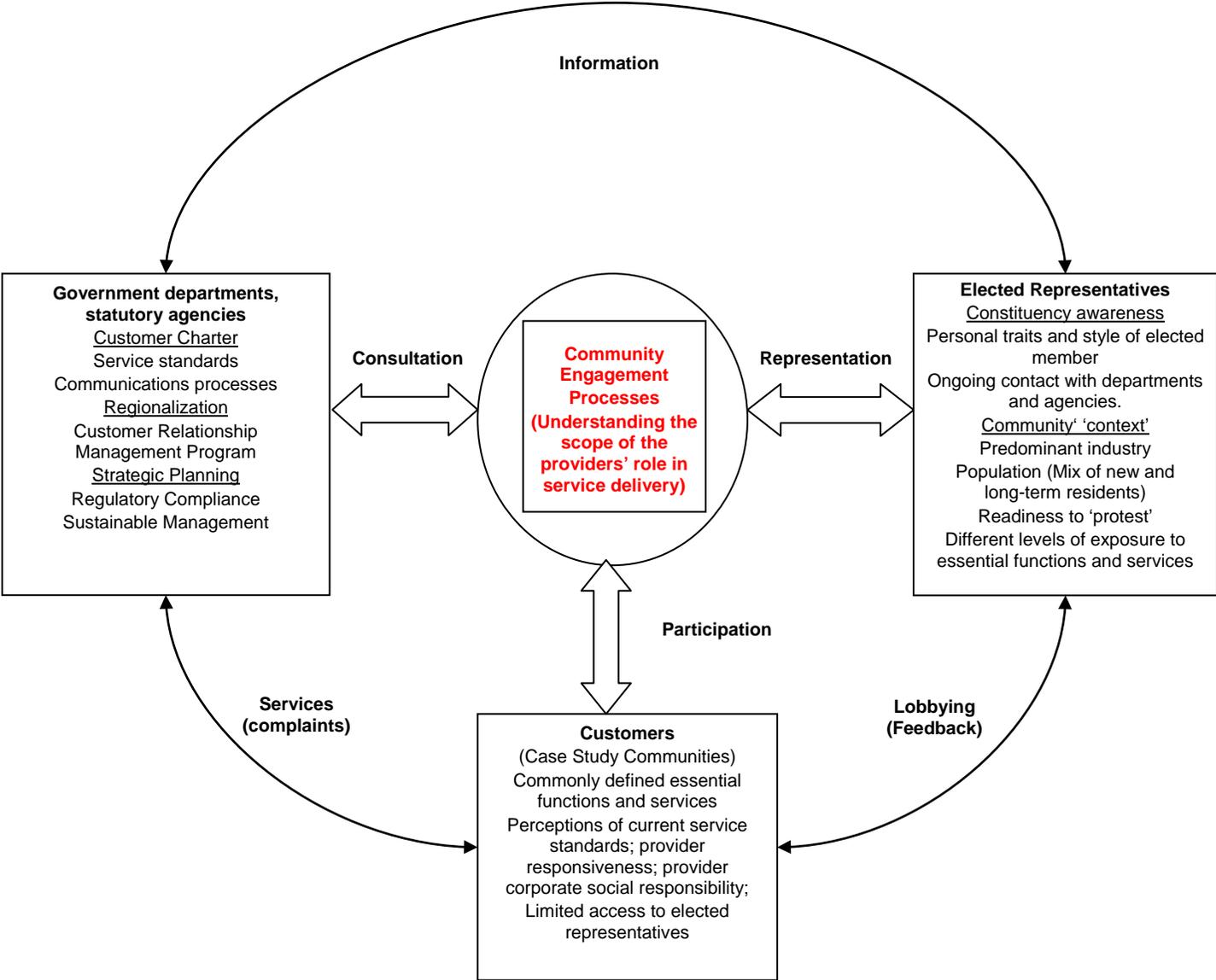


Figure 5.7: Government enterprise model



For the study communities involved in this research, a prerequisite for sound community advocacy appears to be centred on effective *community relationships*. This research asserts that the fundamental principles that drive community relationships in the case of the statutory agency model are different to those that operate in the case of the government enterprise model.

5.12 Broad findings

5.12.1 Focus Groups

The focus group participants were in general agreement regarding the issues related to essential service delivery. Participants attending focus groups held in study communities generally perceived that:

- The ongoing decline/withdrawal of the essential functions and services examined by the research was attributable to deliberate policies of rationalization and centralization on the part of governments.
- Bureaucrats occupying senior positions at the local or regional office level in some cases were portrayed as having impeded communities in their endeavours to stem the decline/withdrawal of the essential functions and services.
- The efforts of local officers of government departments and statutory agencies ‘working on the ground’ within communities were acknowledged. Any shortcomings in the delivery of essential functions and services were attributed not to failings on the part of these officers, but rather to the strategic decisions of provider organizations.
- Populations and decision-makers in metropolitan Perth and in regional centres do not understand the impediments to the delivery of essential functions and services that geographical factors impose upon residents of rural communities.
- Communities had experienced mixed outcomes in effectively identifying customer-generated issues relating to the delivery of essential functions and

services and in conveying these to essential functions and services' providers and policy makers.

- Communities had experienced mixed outcomes in influencing the strategies of government departments, statutory agencies and government trading enterprises and policy makers relating to their delivery of essential functions and services.
- The operation of contemporary electoral arrangements (i.e. *One Vote One Value*) and the presence of 'gatekeepers' are factors which have combined to significantly curb the level of direct access to political representatives.

5.12.2 Representatives of provider organizations

In the elite interviews, participants representing government departments and statutory agencies delivering health, education and transport services generally perceived that:

- The regional model of departmental or agency structure had promoted the efficient delivery of functions and services through the placement of senior, experienced officers in regional areas.
- Ongoing changes made to the standards of health, education and transport services delivered within the study communities have been the result of strategies aimed at generating efficiencies in the delivery of functions and services. These strategies have been manifested by the regionalization of programs, the co-location of high-level resources, and in clients being required to travel in order to access certain programs and services.

In the elite interviews, participants representing government trading enterprises that are responsible for the state's electricity generation network and the water supply services and infrastructure perceived that:

- There was need to raise awareness among customers throughout rural areas about the scope (and limitations) of functions and services that the entities provided as part of the commercial environments within which these entities now operate.
- The effective communication by providers of customer service standards and key performance indicators assists in addressing customer-generated issues and complaints, as does information about the obligations that provider organizations envisage customers as being under.

Participants in the elite interviews representing government departments, statutory agencies and government trading enterprises perceived that:

- Their organizations applied appropriate communications mechanisms to inform residential and business customers, elected representatives, and the wider publics throughout the study communities of strategies and developments relating to the delivery of functions and services.
- The outcomes of customer-generated issues identified from within study communities relating to delivery of functions and services were conveyed to customers, stakeholders and elected policy makers.

5.12.3 Elected representatives

Members of the Legislative Assembly in the Parliament of Western Australia interviewed perceived that:

- The communications mechanisms utilized by government departments, statutory agencies and government trading enterprises to inform residential and business customers, elected representatives, and the general publics of the study communities of strategies and developments relating to functions and services delivery were largely ineffective.

- Elected representatives are requested by communities to pursue matters when the communications mechanisms and customer services mechanisms of providers are deemed by constituents to be unsatisfactory
- Elected representatives play an important role as an intermediary between constituents (customers), providers of essential functions and services, local community stakeholders and higher level policy makers (i.e. the executive and the Parliament).
- Leadership and pro-activity within rural communities are important factors in determining whether or not a community succeeds in influencing the strategies of the providers of essential functions and services and the decisions of policy makers.

5.13 Conclusion

A description of the findings derived from engagement between the researcher and participants within the study communities, officials of organizations undertaking the delivery of essential functions and services, as outlined in Chapter Two, and elected representatives has been provided. The discussions in this chapter concerning the findings and the issues contributing to the standards of essential functions and services within the study communities provided the foundation for two discrete models of community relationships. The following Chapter Six further describes the key components of these models and will explain their application to the customers/citizens of the study communities, the provider organizations, and elected representatives. As discussed in Chapter Two, the economic developments that occurred internationally and within Australia over the period covered by this study beginning in the mid-1970s have had an impact in the study communities examined by this research. Consequently, they have experienced significant changes in government policy approaches in line with the neoliberal public policy context that have resulted in the withdrawal or rationalization of essential functions and services. The re-defining of the role of government in rural area services is the result of an ongoing competition and regulatory reform agenda being applied to public sector

structures. Requirements for public sector organizations to fulfil efficiency/effectiveness priorities in the delivery of functions and services also give the impression that government's role continues to be heavily scrutinized, if not diminished.

Contemporary highly commercialized and efficiency-driven public sector frameworks support particular models of relationships between provider organizations and customers/consumers. The existing models rely heavily on community-based mobilization and advocacy of commonly-occurring issues relating to functions and services in order to influence provider organizations and elected policy makers. With regard to particular issues relating to functions and services' delivery, the study communities experienced only limited success in and influencing these provider organizations and elected policy makers. Contemporary electoral arrangements, a lack of direct access to local political representatives and the presence of 'gatekeepers' within public sector organizations are all factors that the communities perceive as having contributed to this lack of influence.

Government departments and statutory agency providers in health, education and transport services perceive that essential functions and services are being delivered efficiently and effectively. The establishment of regional structures, together with the assignment throughout the regions of senior offices with extensive corporate knowledge of departmental activities, has assisted organizations with service delivery, relationship building and issues management. Public sector provider organizations that were engaged as part of this research also included government trading enterprises that are responsible for electricity generation networks, and water supply services and infrastructure. These providers highlighted that ongoing initiatives were needed to raise customers' awareness of the importance of commercial principles of business activity. The providers emphasized that whilst adherence by the organization to commercial obligations is important, the effective communication to customers of governance mechanisms (i.e. customer service charters and complaints mechanisms) assists in delineating roles and addressing service-related issues. The government trading enterprise providers also identified

that these statutory/corporate mechanisms also provide opportunities for communicating effectively with customers, elected representatives, and the wider publics throughout the study communities.

Elected representatives of the Legislative Assembly in the Parliament of Western Australia, on the other hand, perceived that the communication mechanisms used by government departments, statutory agencies and government trading enterprises were largely ineffective. When initial responses received by community organizations/constituents are deemed to be unsatisfactory, the elected representatives regularly assist in resolving with providers issues related to the delivery of essential functions and services. Elected representatives identified that not all communities within their constituencies have been effective in exerting influence, and that those communities with the leadership/capacity and the pro-activity needed to utilize their local member effectively would succeed in influencing the strategies of provider organizations and the decisions of elected policy makers.

Chapter Six Discussion

6.1 Introduction

Chapter Five has outlined the findings that have emerged from the research concerning the six study communities and issues related to the delivery of essential functions and services, the provider organizations and the influential stakeholders. This chapter will elaborate upon those findings that have been identified as being the most significant in terms of their relationship to the research questions and the research objectives. The chapter outlines many significant problems which providers of essential functions and services incur in meeting the demands of customers and in operating within particular policy frameworks. The discussion exposes alternative approaches to service delivery within a rural community context and reasons how these developments reconcile with the concepts of citizenship and democracy. The chapter then describes community effectiveness, and subsequently presents two models of community relationships in the delivery of essential functions and services.

Participants' perceptions of delivery standards within the communities are described in relation to customers/consumers' capacity to influence the providers and the elected representatives who make policy decisions. Community engagement mechanisms are reviewed and found to centre on responsiveness, accountability and transparency obligations that are imposed upon governments and the providers of essential functions and services. The chapter also addresses the connection that exists between engagement and customers/consumers' and citizens' expectation of having more empowerment. These theoretical discussions allow the study's findings and their implications to be explained.

6.2 Overview

The research has examined significant issues and trends that have influenced the delivery of essential functions and services throughout the study communities. The community concerns that were expressed about this delivery are not recent, but

rather have developed over time. Changes to the delivery of these essential functions and services over time can be linked to rationalization or the withdrawal of essential functions and services, both of which were influenced by the transition from Fordist/Keynesian doctrines to Economic Rationalism and ultimately to Neoliberalism (Tonts 1996; Tonts and Jones 1997; Tonts 2000; Tonts and Haslam McKenzie 2005; Tonts 2005).

This study has been focussed primarily on the circumstances faced by communities within a Western Australian rural context. The research has also examined the approaches that have been adopted by providers of essential functions and services, customers and policy makers to the issues that have arisen at the local level. These factors reflect similar developments that have occurred nationally and globally (Tonts and Jones 1997; Gray and Lawrence 2001; Davies and Tonts 2007; Tonts 1996).

6.3 Research Questions and Objectives

The two research questions used to examine the perceptions of participants in the study communities and to inform the findings of this study were:

- What are the perceptions of businesses and residents in rural communities regarding essential functions and services provided by government and corporatized government entities?
- How do these customer groups assess their ability to identify and to convey service-related issues and needs?

The objectives of the study were:

- To identify what rural communities define as being publicly provided 'essential functions and services', within the Western Australian context.

- To identify and examine businesses' and residents' assessments of the level and standard of essential functions and services as a basis for achieving and maintaining viability in rural communities.
- To identify whether rural communities are exerting any influence upon the political, policy and economic factors driving changes in the provision of essential functions and services.
- To identify and investigate businesses' and residents' perceptions of the responsiveness of government and corporatized entities to service-related needs and issues in rural communities.

6.4 Significant Findings

The broad findings presented within Chapter Five of this study were developed as an outcome of the perceptions that were identified among the different categories of research participants. Residents of the study communities, representatives of provider organizations and elected representatives serving these communities in the Parliament of Western Australia expressed a range of views relating to issues associated with the delivery of essential functions and services. A closer examination of these significant research findings is now provided.

Definitions

One significant outcome of this research is the establishment of a participant-generated definition of essential functions and services. The definition was developed during the data collection phase of the research and was a crucial component of the exploratory research methodology and the grounded research approach upon which the study was based (Whiteley 2004; Glaser and Strauss 1967). This definition was subsequently used to identify perceptions of the various participants regarding the issues that were associated with the delivery of essential functions and services throughout the individual study communities.

6.4.1.1 Common 'definition' of essential functions and services

Chapter Five (Figure 5.1) described that the participants across all focus groups had arrived at similar views about certain functions and services as being 'essential' to their communities. The commonly identified essential functions and services were: health, education, policing, housing, transport services, electricity and water supply. The participants perceived the traditional delivery by governments of each of these functions and services to be the fundamental characteristic behind the 'essentiality' definition. It was noted that participants attending some focus groups had identified retailing, banking, and religious activities as being 'essential' functions and services. Whilst these were not identified within each of the six communities, they were deemed to have significant economic viability and social implications within those affected communities. In particular, banking warrants consideration in a broader study of the ongoing viability of Australia's rural communities, because banks enable public sector organizations and commercial enterprises within communities to operate effectively. Further examination of banking and of religious and retail services and their implications for rural communities could be the subject of future research. This study, however, has focussed solely upon the activities of government departments, statutory agencies and government trading enterprises.

Notwithstanding the issues raised for communities by the withdrawal of private sector services, government remains very much at the forefront in delivering essential functions and services to residents throughout Western Australia, and to rural communities especially. Information obtained during the course of this study suggested a significant, detrimental decline in the delivery by governments of health services, education services and transport infrastructure to many Western Australian rural communities (Tonts and Jones 1997; Tonts 2005, 2000; Haslam McKenzie 1999, 2000). Numerous studies address issues of government-related functions and services and their intrinsic relationship to Australian rural community wellbeing and viability (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001; Alston 2002b, 2002a; Davies 2008; Collits 1999; Onyx and Bullen 2000). This research also identified the perceptions of many participants that government, through its delivery of functions and services,

plays a critical role in the economic wellbeing and long-term viability of the study communities.

6.4.1.2 A proposed 'definition' of effectiveness

The next significant finding involves a working definition of 'effectiveness'. It derives from participants' perceptions of provider–community relationships in the activity of the delivery of essential functions and services. The extent to which the ongoing delivery of functions and services is maintained reflects the influence that the study communities have upon the strategies of essential functions and services providers and the decisions of policy makers. What emerges as a point of discussion is the relationship that exists between community engagement and empowerment. The empowerment of individuals and organizations at multiple levels within communities is demonstrated by their capacity to influence significant events and outcomes (Checkoway 1995; Laverick and Wallerstein 2001; Fawcett et al. 1995).

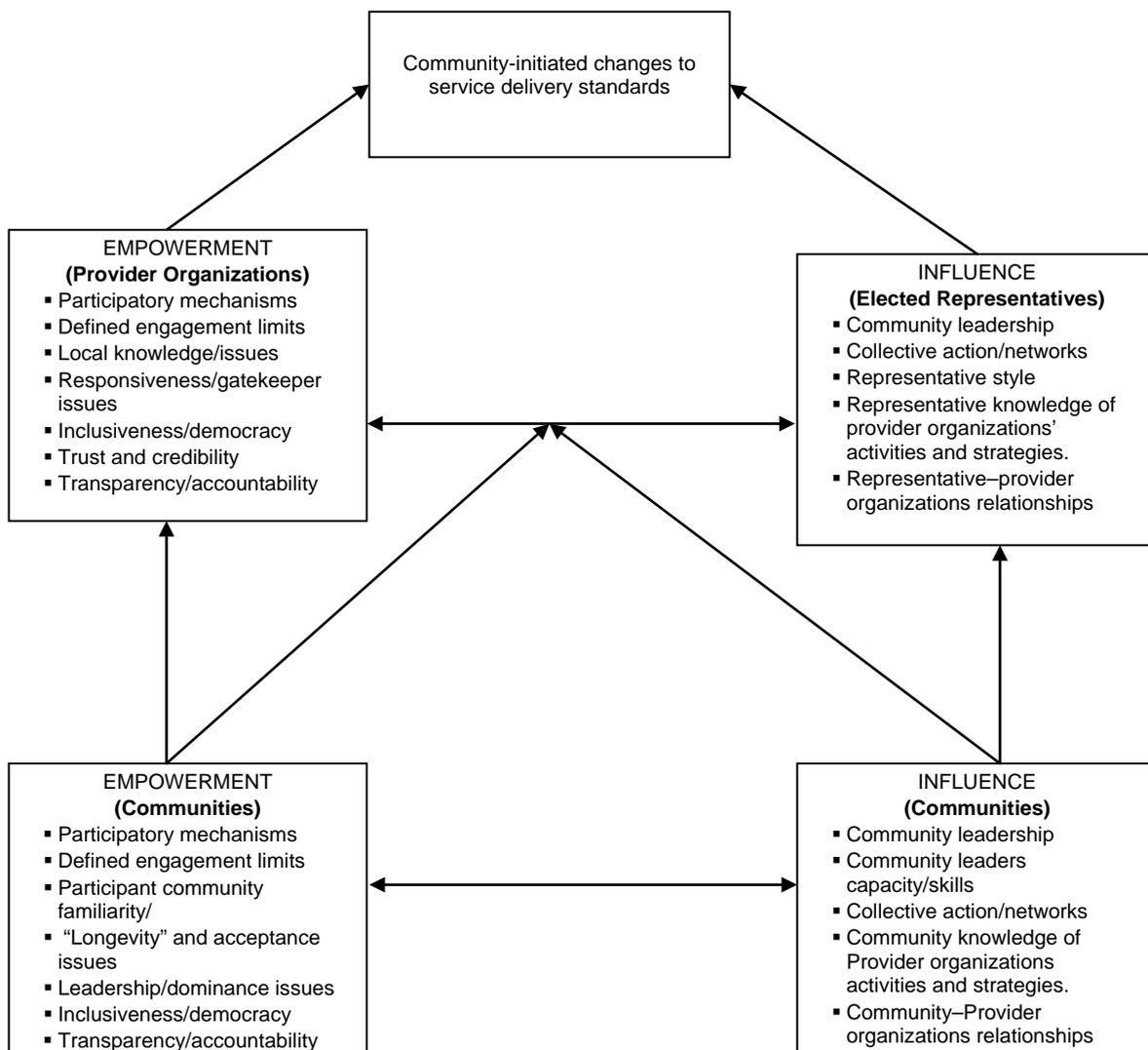
This research investigated the concepts of empowerment and influence as part of its consideration of the overall question of the effectiveness of the study communities in influencing the strategies of essential functions and services providers and the decisions of policy makers. A logical link was said to exist between community influence as a process or driver and the achievement of change as an outcome. The effectiveness of the rural communities was determined as having been reflected in the extent of their capacity to change the strategies of providers or the policies of elected decision-makers. Sufficient and visible change to the community engagement processes, towards a greater empowerment of customers and communities, must first be achieved in order that these communities can be said to demonstrate effectiveness.

Community empowerment is broadly defined as the process of gaining influence over conditions that matter to people who share neighbourhoods, workplaces, experiences or concerns (Fawcett et al. 1995). Writers in this field (Fawcett et al. 1995; Putnam 2000; Rappaport 1995; Zimmerman and Rappaport 1988; Zimmerman, Rappaport, and Seidman 2000) have established, at the community

level, a link between the pursuit of empowerment and influence and the achievement of change (Cavaye 2000, 2004; Checkoway 1995; Kelly 2000; Kelly and Steed 2004). The proposed definition of community effectiveness is represented by a model shown at Figure 6.1 below. The model demonstrates the importance to the communities of their relationships or interactions with (a) provider organizations (one aspect of empowerment) and with (b) elected representatives (one aspect of influence). As described by the model, the levels of empowerment and influence that communities experience in their relationships with providers may differ. These outcomes will depend upon the extent to which communities identify themselves as having been exposed to the individual components that are contained within the empowerment and influence categories. An empowered community is one that is able to act independently to resolve a service delivery issue (Cavaye 2001; Davies 2009; Herbert-Cheshire and Higgins 2004). Alternatively, the community is able to exercise influence in the relationships that underpin the providers' strategies or the process of policy making. Such influence leads ultimately to the achievement of community-initiated delivery outcomes.

The proposed definition of community effectiveness is represented by a model shown at Figure 6.1 below. The model demonstrates the importance to the communities of their relationships or interactions with (a) provider organizations as part of the empowerment area and with (b) elected representatives within the context of the influence area. As described by the model, the levels of empowerment and influence that the communities experience in their relationships with providers are different and they are subject to the extent to which communities are able to successfully access the components of empowerment and influence. An empowered community is one that is able act independently to resolve a service delivery issue. Alternatively, the community is able to exercise influence in the relationships that underpin provider strategy building or policy making which leads ultimately to the achievement of community-initiated delivery outcomes.

Figure 6.1 Model of Community Effectiveness



6.5 Good Samaritans and Gatekeepers

In the community-based focus groups, participants conveyed mixed and, at times, negative perceptions about the roles undertaken by representatives of government departments and statutory agencies. These perceptions typically were the result of participants having been exposed, in some form, to government policies and strategies which were deemed as having contributed to the rationalization of services and infrastructure. Participants attending some of the community-based focus groups recounted instances in which government officials were seen as having demonstrated a divided loyalty between their roles and the needs of communities in deliberations

regarding the future of functions and services. Participants cited particular instances in which communities perceived locally-based representatives of government-based providers as having failed to fully support them in their efforts to prevent the rationalization or the withdrawal of health and education services. A number of the participants working with voluntary organizations in the delivery of government-funded programs in the study communities expressed concerns about what they perceived as the centralized views of service delivery held by particular government departments and statutory agencies. These participants explained that issues raised by the community organizations about programs did not always proceed beyond the locally-based representatives of departments and agencies who acted as ‘gatekeepers’. These communities were therefore often unable to influence either the program’s content or its delivery.

6.5.1 ‘Statewide’ services and community empowerment and influence

During the study period, successive state governments introduced policies preferencing the centralization or regionalization of particular essential functions and services (e.g. health and education). Governments, in implementing these policy reforms, justified the new delivery frameworks as having been made in response to growing public demand for scarce and highly specialized resources. These priorities have, in turn, required the achievement of greater efficiency and effectiveness outcomes by the departments and agencies responsible for delivering these functions and services.

6.5.1.1 Perceptions from participants in the study communities

For the participants in the study communities, these government decisions – particularly in the area of health services resourcing and delivery – were perceived as being metro-centric as well as detrimental to the services within the communities. Participants cited the significant expenditures allocated by government towards the construction of the Perth–Mandurah railway line as providing a case-in-point to demonstrate the extent to which such discrimination has occurred. The perception among participants in some of the study communities was that rural areas generally

had suffered from disproportionately low allocations of road funding relative to metropolitan Perth and the urban and regional centres. Consequently, according to these participants, the study communities have been faced with road infrastructure networks which are of an inferior standard and have at times been unsafe.

.../ [I]n the Shire we find the same things with roads. We got this vast network of roads; some of which have been very badly damaged with floods ... and we have to battle government departments to provide a basic service for the people in the eastern part of the Shire, many of whom rely on it for their livelihood .../ Well, where I live – my road is actually [in] disrepair. I mean – it is just disappearing completely the tarmac and (while) in 2006 they've put – money – they don't spend [any] [on] the roads around my way.../ One of the worst roads in the whole of WA is the one from Ballidu up to Pithara. [I]t's only one vehicle wide, and there are road trains running up and down there all the time. And it's been on the books to be upgraded for, must be thirty five years, and it's never ever been upgraded. [I]t's a Main Roads thing, but it's ... a terrible bit of road .../

The communities' perceptions of a lack of community empowerment contrasted with the views of the representatives of the government departments and statutory agencies undertaking the delivery of health services, education services and road transport infrastructure. These representatives did not identify any direct policy agenda against rural communities. They did, however, readily concede that provider organizations pursue statewide policy approaches in their delivery of essential functions and services. Representatives also stated that the strategy implementation process involved providers consulting with key stakeholders (e.g. local governments, health advisory groups, parents and citizens' committees) to ensure that the particular needs and issues of communities were addressed and accommodated. These perceptions are expressed in the following excerpts of elite interviews.

There is a forum called District Health Advisory Committee, and it's the western one that covers Wongan Hills. So, there will be a representative from Wongan Hills – a shire representative into [sic] that committee. So there's a discussion at that kind of level with the various communities about transport and opportunities that there might be how we develop and improve services. ... Those communities like Wongan Hills go and actually then network with their

colleagues and that's one vehicle. WA Country Health Service has also published a document called Foundations.

Representative, WA Country Health Service, Wheatbelt Region

Yes, I think our belief is that through their own experiences, – either students themselves, or as parents – they have a very clear understanding of the basics of the service we provide. But within that, we constantly are asking schools to monitor that level of understanding of their schools and the sense of their shared vision.... While we have a school council system where we run structured parent groups, to enable it to have decision-making in the broader policy and budget decisions on the school – the closer managerial [matters] ... are left pretty much to the school.

Representative, WA Department of Education and Training, South West Region

6.5.2 Elected representatives as channels of influence

The elected representatives interviewed during this study conveyed perceptions of a general inadequacy in the levels and standards of essential functions and services throughout the study communities. They perceived that the impacts of these shortcomings were more pronounced within rural communities that had been experiencing growth or had been subject to activities which impose considerable demands upon essential functions and services. Likewise, these representatives identified gaps in the delivery of services such as health and education as being significant factors contributing to depopulation and economic and social disadvantage within established, 'traditional' rural communities. Constituency-wide knowledge, awareness and expectations of highly mobile populations were also identified as being important factors that have influenced community assessments of the performance of provider organizations in the delivery of essential functions and services.

Elected representatives of the Parliament of Western Australia who participated in this study readily acknowledged the important role that government plays in delivering essential functions and services to the study communities. The three participants generally perceived this importance as being reflected through:

- The availability of functions and services and the extent to which residents and businesses are prepared to invest socially and financially within the community;
- The representations made to them by organizations and individual electors within their electorates about services delivery issues and concerns (e.g. the 'squeaky wheel'); and
- The implications for the study communities within their electorates of government decisions leading to the withdrawal or reduction of essential functions and services (implications such as depopulation, the weakening of the social fabric, and negative impacts on community viability).

During this study, elected representatives expressed their opinions about their roles in advocating for the continued delivery of essential functions and services throughout their electorates. The nature of the elected representatives' role, coupled with the general expectations of the wider community, has created imperatives for these representatives to be effective in resolving issues and addressing concerns they have with the delivery of essential functions and services. Each of the elected representatives acknowledged the importance of maintaining open communication networks and effective working relationships with local representatives of government departments, statutory agencies and government business enterprises. They identified that, as elected representatives, they needed to pursue local context resolutions to functions and services delivery issues. The effects of broader government policy decisions and provider strategies on delivery outcomes were also acknowledged. As this study identified, these circumstances have required the elected representatives to adopt appropriate approaches in advocating issues and concerns on behalf of their electorates (Parliament of Western Australia 2008a, 2008b).

These elected representatives are uniquely positioned given that their roles afford them firsthand exposure to the study communities and to the legislative and public sector environments. Generally, these representatives perceived that the study

communities had experienced some difficulties in sufficiently raising the profile of the essential functions and services delivery issues/concerns that they faced. The reason for this was deemed to be that the study communities typically have relatively small populations and generally they lack capacity and resources that are needed to convey an effective message. These community-level shortcomings impact the effectiveness of elected representatives in highlighting to government, fellow elected members and provider organizations the significance of the issues that communities face and the concerns they have.

Strategically, the problems involving functions and services which confront metro/urban centres appear to attract greater attention politically and economically, and therefore are given greater priority by governments.

6.5.2.1 Perceptions of influence and the implications for the delivery of essential functions and services

This study sought to identify whether a relationship may exist between community influence and essential functions and services delivery outcomes. Study community participants, representatives of the provider organizations and elected representatives were invited to provide their views as to whether the communities had been effective in influencing essential functions and services.

Chapter Five of this study explained how participants within the study communities perceived that influence was either: non-existent, limited in scope, or effective on an issue-by-issue basis. The representatives of the government departments, statutory agencies and government trading enterprises, on the other hand, generally expressed confidence in the consultative mechanisms utilized by their organizations. These representatives perceived consultation as having provided opportunities for customers/consumers in the study communities to contribute to decisions affecting the delivery of essential functions and services.

Each of the elected representatives pointed to leadership and advocacy issues operating at the local level and wider policy/political factors as having impacted the

level of influence of the study communities. Chapter Five described how one of the elected representatives had perceived the existence of leadership within communities as being a prerequisite for effective advocacy and, ultimately, community effectiveness. The representative claimed that communities and people who are vocal in conveying issues and concerns would result in the representative devoting a substantial proportion of their resources to addressing constituency matters in these communities. For another elected representative the maintenance of effective working relationships with local representatives of provider organizations was deemed to be crucial, so that issues and concerns regarding services delivery were able to be effectively pursued. Findings concerning the importance of local community leadership and the roles played by elected representatives in contributing to community effectiveness were reinforced by literature supporting this study (Checkoway 1995; Gray and Lawrence 2000; Kelly 2000; Kelly and Steed 2004; Kilpatrick and Abbott-Chapman 2005; Norris 2004; Wanna 1991).

This study identified participants' perceptions of the ways in which access to political representation impacted their communities' influence over the delivery of essential functions and services (Davies and Tonts 2007; Tonts and Jones 1997; Marsh 1983; Adams and Hess 2001). Participants explained that long-standing rural electoral arrangements had empowered these communities by promoting direct relationships between constituents, community groups and the elected representatives. They also described that they perceived their influence in communicating issues or concerns to elected representatives had diminished following the passage through Parliament of the *One Vote One Value* legislation in 2005 (Parliament of Western Australia 2013). Davies and Tonts (2007) examined how these long-standing electoral representation arrangements throughout rural communities (centered on generous vote weighting) compared to those afforded to voters in metropolitan electorates.

These arrangements were associated with the value-laden notion of 'country-mindedness' and sought to secure rural input into government decision-making where population factors and urban-related issues might otherwise have dominated policy outcomes. The presence of this uneven electoral landscape brought into focus

the role of the state in pursuing social welfare and equity outcomes for all citizens, and consequently had allowed rural communities to secure leverage from successive governments in the delivery of essential functions and services (Fairbrother, Svenson, and Teicher 1997; Aberbach and Christensen 2005; Tonts and Jones 1997; Tonts 2000).

.../See another aspect of this is this one vote one value business which [is] well and good in the city, but here, in the country, you had real access to your member of parliament who could go around the gatekeeper[s] .../ It may well be why they changed it. But I mean everyone knows their local member of parliament, or if they don't, they should, and if they have got a problem they go there and they get it fixed .../ That's right, governments will be 'one vote one person' .../I mean, we as a community put a thousand dollars in for that? We put in a thousand bucks for the state representation vote against 'one vote one value' and that was unsuccessful .../

Participants in the study communities viewed that they lacked the same strength of representative voice that is afforded to the citizens of metropolitan Perth and those who reside in the larger regional centres. From the perspective of the delivery of essential functions and services and the specific opportunities that exist for the study communities to effectively convey their issues and concerns, moves to redress these perceived 'iniquitous' power/influence arrangements have contributed to disenfranchisement. With regard to the political sphere, it was claimed that access to elected representatives does not equate to influence.

In short, the research participants perceived that rural communities had become generally ineffective in influencing the decisions made by elected policy makers. In the area of services, participants perceived that they could not influence the strategy direction of provider organizations and could not always succeed in maintaining the delivery of essential functions and services to their communities. They foreshadowed that these electoral reforms would translate into a noticeable shift in the urban–regional political dynamic throughout the state. Significantly, in the aftermath of the then government's success in securing statewide equity in electoral representation, rural community advocates challenged the government to pursue, with similar

commitment, objectives of: “broader socio-spatial equity, ensuring that rural people had similar levels of access to health, education, justice and social services” (Davies and Tonts 2007: 224).

6.5.3 Empowerment and Community Engagement

In Australia, governments at all levels and across the jurisdictions have long recognized that the engagement of elected representatives and officials with citizens is vital for effective policy making and the fulfilment of democratic obligations (Bishop and Davis 2002; Reddel and Woolcock 2004; Johnston 2010). This research identified that community engagement forms an integral component of stakeholder consultation, issues identification and strategy formulation within the contemporary public sector framework (Auditor General Western Australia 2007; Head 2007). Furthermore, community engagement processes are utilized by the government departments, statutory agencies and government trading enterprises that deliver essential functions and services throughout the study communities (Water Corporation 2005; Water Corporation 2013b; Western Power 2012a; Government of Western Australia - Department of Health: Public Health 2009a; Government of Western Australia - Department of Education and Training 2008).

Participants from the study communities perceived that the communities themselves were not sufficiently empowered in the community engagement processes undertaken by the provider organizations. Examples of such perceived deficiencies in consultation included consultations undertaken in:

- Mount Barker and Wongan Hills, regarding electricity infrastructure requirements and supply-related issues;
- Ballidu, Mount Barker and Wongan Hills, regarding specific roads projects and funding arrangements and the associated implications for road network standards;
- Balidu, in regard to the inadequacies in water supply infrastructure and the associated water quality issues; and

- Rocky Gully, in regard to the accessibility and associated costs of water supply infrastructure and the implications of these factors as disincentives for development within the community.

Participants' perceptions of disempowerment appeared to stem primarily from the fact that provider organizations had failed to fully apprise communities about the scope of their involvement within the community engagement processes and the associated outcomes (Bishop and Davis 2002; Johnston 2010; Cavaye 2004). These procedural and policy issues also have implications for the perspectives from which different categories of participants viewed the effectiveness of community engagement scenarios, as per Figure 6.1 (i.e. responsiveness to issues; inclusiveness/democracy; trust and credibility; transparency/accountability).

6.5.3.1 Responsiveness to issues

For the government departments and statutory agencies that provide essential functions and services, community engagement represents a growing area of government policy making and implementation (Government of Western Australia - Department of Health: Public Health 2009b; Government of Western Australia - Department of Education and Training 2008; Main Roads Western Australia 2013a). Government trading enterprises that service these rural communities are required under their legislative instruments and governance frameworks to conduct community engagement activities (Water Corporation 2013b; Western Power 2012c). Governments, by requiring public sector organizations to implement these consultative approaches, reflect heightened customer/community expectations of greater democracy/voice and participation in public policy outcomes (Cavaye 2004; Head 2007; Reddel 2002).

At the same time government departments and statutory agencies are also required to fulfil various efficiency-driven and performance-based outcomes (Barrett 2000). Similarly the government trading enterprises are compelled under their legislative frameworks to provide returns to government for investment in infrastructure. Such priorities necessitate that these entities adhere to commercial principles in the

delivery of functions and services (Water Corporation 2013b; Western Power 2012a). There are now acknowledged constraints on what can be achieved in the provision of functions and services within rural communities and throughout regions more generally (Collits 1999; Tonts 2004). This mindset has contributed significantly to the adoption of rural governance approaches whereby communities are encouraged to identify leaders with the capacity to identify local solutions to issues related to the delivery of functions and services. Within this rural governance framework, community engagement is also viewed as an important function of public sector organizations alongside their delivery of functions and services (Cavaye 1999, 2000; Falk and Kilpatrick 2000; Reddel 2002). Changes in relationships between public sector organizations and customers/communities have occurred as a consequence of these developments. Community engagement forums, in the same manner as customer service feedback mechanisms, enable customers/communities to convey their perceptions of the responsiveness of government departments, statutory agencies and government trading enterprises (Auditor General Western Australia 2007, 2001).

Study community participants were aware of the consultative processes that generally applied, but questions and criticisms were raised about how effective these consultative mechanisms were for communities. Some also highlighted concerns regarding the appropriateness of consultative mechanisms that were used by the providers of infrastructure and services. Participants perceived, for example, that their community had failed to convince the provider organization of the merits of funding submissions made for road projects. In another example, participants cited a perceived lack of consultation prior to the removal of a health program/facility from the local hospital. Chapter Five explained the community engagement mechanisms that both the Water Corporation and Western Power have utilized. This engagement is used to support the entities in strategic planning and in their ongoing operations (Water Corporation 2013b; Western Power 2012a). Activities illustrative of the Water Corporation's responsiveness include:

- on-site meetings

- presentations to community and interest groups
- one-on-one meetings with shire CEOs and local business managers
- media statements
- direct mail outs (Water Corporation (2005)).

The Water Corporation identified that its Customer Advisory Council makes a significant contribution to community engagement. Western Power indicated that it undertakes public consultation on proposals with local governments, developers, affected landowners and with the wider communities. Such community engagement activities also serve to identify issues and concerns regarding these various projects. As government-owned corporations, the providers ultimately operate according to commercial imperatives and must discharge accountability obligations that are imposed by the Minister in their capacity as sole shareholder (Western Power 2012a).

Elected representatives expressed varying perceptions about the responsiveness of government departments, statutory agencies and government trading enterprises to community engagement activities. Two of the three elected representatives perceived these provider organizations as having generally been ineffective in their endeavours to engage effectively and responsively with customers/communities. The elected representatives suggested that ongoing complaints that they had received from constituents about issues related to the delivery of functions and services reflected provider organizations' ineffectiveness, and they perceived these complaints demonstrated a lack of responsiveness by the provider organizations. Literature supports the research participants' perceptions of the lack of responsiveness of providers of essential functions and services (Alford 2002a; Du Gay and Salaman 1992; Clarke 2004, 2007; Norris 2004; Pollitt 1995a; Potter 1988).

6.5.3.2 *Inclusiveness/democracy*

In the neoliberal public policy environment, community engagement has seemingly become crucial to governments, both in managing their political agenda and as a mechanism for resolving complex policy issues (Holmes 2011). Engagement and specifically customer/community consultation is therefore now part of public sector orthodoxy (Adams and Hess 2001; Bishop and Davis 2002; Cavaye 2004; Head 2007). Within the public sector today, the health of these relationships is defined by the extent to which public sector organizations attain key performance measures (McGuire 2003). In this focus on 'community consultation' there is a trend on the part of government that is supportive of inclusiveness and democracy (Adams and Hess 2001; Reddel 2002). In many programs and initiatives that federal and state governments now provide throughout rural communities there are indications of a convergence between the inclusiveness and participatory objectives of community engagement processes and public sector efficiency/effectiveness imperatives (Morrison and Lane 2006; Adams and Hess 2001; Australian Government - Productivity Commission 1999). As efficiency/effectiveness regimes figure heavily in public sector decision-making and strategic planning processes, community engagement represents governments' attempts to alleviate the negative ramifications that have emerged in several rural communities (Adams and Hess 2001; Hess and Adams 2007).

The pursuit of these efficiency/effectiveness imperatives has also resulted in a new public sector – rural community relationship being manifested in a shift from 'government to governance' (O'Toole and Burdess 2005). Within the contemporary rural governance landscape there has been a substantial transfer of federal and state government functions and responsibilities to local governments and their communities (McIntosh et al. 2008). Governments, at both federal and state levels, have invested significantly in capacity-building and local leadership development programs with the communities being required to assume a greater role in the delivery of functions and services.

.../[F]rom a Shire perspective, the way it is structured now with administering, particular requests from government departments – I think most ratepayers are concerned about the number of staff increases due to administering different requests from departments, such as the Emergency Service levy.../ people working on that full time just to resolve all those issues. Those particular compliances were previously done by volunteers.../Absolutely. Devolution of responsibilities without financial recompense. So the ratepayers are happy to shoulder the benefits, or shoulder the costs of a whole bunch of stuff that they never had to do in the past.../

Under these circumstances, the promotion of inclusiveness and democracy by government through community engagement is considered to be crucial. As Cavaye (2004:10) describes, community diversity, equity of opportunity, the extent of participatory processes and information and awareness of participants are all factors which have a bearing upon inclusiveness.

In this research, however, participants from within each of the study communities identified circumstances in which communities had been denied opportunities for consultation on policy matters and on issues relating to the delivery of functions and services. These perceived failures of community engagement had included:

- Government policy processes and determinations associated with proposed reforms to electoral representation arrangements.
- Government policy processes and determinations having an inherent regionalization focus, which has had consequences for the delivery of essential functions and services.
- The processes and decisions of government organizations and government trading enterprises that have impacted upon the delivery of essential functions and services.

The focus groups identified significant and recurring participant issues of perceived exclusion and disempowerment.

.../Yeah, well governments are always talking about decentralisation – but they've never done anything about it .../I mean all the decisions are made in the city and you can't find anyone to come and have a look. They don't find out. It's all made over there. It's money-based .../And personnel in government departments, people making policy can affect things greatly .../

Participants representing the government departments, statutory agencies and government trading enterprises had contrary perceptions to those of the communities concerning the inclusiveness and effectiveness of their organizations' community engagement processes. For example, representatives of the WA Country Health Service uniformly but independently described how the District Health Advisory Council structure exists to encourage public participation in strategic planning and the delivery of rural health functions and services, as well to foster inclusiveness. Each of the other representatives of department, statutory agencies and trading enterprises told a similar story.

6.5.3.3 Trust and Credibility

The effectiveness of community engagement relies heavily upon participants having an unambiguous understanding of their roles and a realistic expectations of outcomes (Bishop and Davis 2002; Cavaye 2004; Head 2007; Murphy 2009; Reddel 2002). Governments and their public sector organizations have identified these issues as justifying the investment of significant resources for the establishment of trust, confidence and credibility in community engagement processes (Head 2007; Brown and Keast 2003).

Government departments and statutory agencies

Participants from the study communities explained that their perceptions of the trustworthiness and credibility of government had been influenced by the changing roles of government departments and statutory agencies. These developments were identified as having extended throughout many traditional areas of government activity (e.g. agriculture, environmental management, health, emergency services). Participants described the changes as having led to service reductions (e.g.

rationalization or withdrawal of corporate knowledge, organizational support, funding resources) and thereby significantly impacting rural community lifestyles. These organizational and structural changes had adversely affected participants' perceptions of government.

.../The general perception through communities and in the city [is] that, yes, we need to protect our natural resources and, it's all happening in the bush and then it comes back to farmers and landowners – to shoulder that .../What the city gets supplied we've got to supply volunteers for .../I think there has been a deterioration in the attitude of governments, federal and state, to what they now call rural and regional activities, because the great god of development stopped in Western Australia in this time period you're talking about. At the beginning of this period, when development was the name of the game, it was the flavour of the month. And there was a mantra of decentralisation in the beginning of that period .../It's gone the other way. It's a "feel good concept" in governments, federal and state, you know, decentralisation, but [now it's] lip service .../

The perceptions of disaffection and helplessness identified during this research accord closely with the notion of the shift from 'government to governance' within the rural community context. The responsibilities for the delivery of many essential functions and services have substantially shifted away from federal and state governments to rural communities, placing a greater burden upon local governments (Cavaye 1999; Gray and Lawrence 2000; Daly 2000).

Government trading enterprises

Uhrig (2003) argues that Government trading enterprises, by establishing relationships through engagement mechanisms, seek to develop trust and credibility with stakeholders and to be well-placed to identify potential political and policy issues (Uhrig 2003). The Water Corporation advised that it placed significant emphasis on community engagement as an ongoing operational and strategic activity (Water Corporation 2005). The Corporation explained that Regional Business Managers occupy an 'integrator' role, and are responsible for building and maintaining trust and credibility between the Corporation and stakeholder/customer

communities (Water Corporation 2005). This research found that participants from throughout the study communities did not necessarily share the same perceptions as those held by provider organizations regarding the effectiveness of these structures in building relationships.

6.5.3.4 Transparency/accountability

The post-neoliberal era has been characterised by heightened demands for citizen participation and democracy in government. At a public sector level these developments have further driven customer/community expectations for greater transparency and accountability by provider organizations in the delivery of functions and services (Adams and Hess 2001; Reddel 2002; Holmes 2011). The ascendancy of the concept of 'community' in the area of participatory/democratic relationships between governments and citizen has also contributed to expectations of transparency and accountability.

In their delivery of functions and services government departments and statutory agencies, under corporate management frameworks, are accountable for the achievement of defined performance outcomes (Government of Western Australia – Department of Health 2012; Government of Western Australia – Department of Education 2013). Government trading enterprises similarly have an accountability obligation under enabling legislation or related instruments (e.g. operating licences), and customer service charters to achieve performance targets and maintain compliance (Water Corporation 2013b; Western Power 2012a). For all government departments, statutory agencies and government trading enterprises the publishing within reports of details of organizational performance outcomes against performance measures reflects the organization's official fulfilment of its transparency obligations (i.e. to ministers, parliaments, and communities).

Community engagement involving customers/communities is now also being used increasingly as a mechanism by which governments and their public sector organizations can pursue the fulfilment of transparency and accountability obligations (Auditor General of Western Australia 2007; Bottomley 2001; Holmes

2011). From a community perspective, adherence to these transparency objectives is facilitated when the participants have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities (Holmes 2011).

6.5.3.5 *Government departments and statutory agencies*

Participants from the study communities raised concerns about the effectiveness and relevance of the community engagement mechanisms. These participants perceived that government organizations had typically conducted consultation processes within their communities on the basis of predetermined outcomes, and that community views and issues were perceived as being irrelevant. Some participants perceived this lack of accountability and transparency on the part of government as being a reflection of rural communities' lack of political influence. Likewise, the inequality of the relationship between governments and rural communities was acknowledged.

.../On accountability: there is more reporting for us to do. So there is much more paperwork; probably for the counsellors but also for this committee of volunteers, [of] which there seems ... more things ... that are required .../And personnel in government departments, people making policy can affect things greatly .../ There [needs] to be some empath[y]; [There needs to be] control of people that are under you. So these are the bean counters and the decision makers on, on the shop floor, because I think they are a bit out of touch. You know, it's all very well to say: "We'll do this, that and the other", and some minion in some department just makes another decision .../ But getting back to this gatekeeper, you know, when I was a young lad the gatekeeper was a real person with a social conscience .../ The gatekeeper now is an accountant or a lawyer with no social conscience .../

Representatives of the government departments and statutory agencies who participated in this study, by contrast, were generally confident that the community engagement mechanisms used by their organizations had incorporated appropriate accountability and transparency attributes.

For example participants from the WA Country Health Service considered it has assisted in fulfilling its accountability and transparency obligations through its

representation on the Human Resources Committee inter-agency policy/planning mechanism that operated at a regional level. They perceived that this body, comprising senior regional representatives of ‘community service-related’ government departments and statutory agencies, provided opportunities within which health consumer/community issues and concerns could be considered from a whole-of-government perspective. Throughout the regions, ongoing community engagement also involves Regional Directors being accessible within their communities and engaging with elected representatives, local governments and consumers on issues and concerns that arise. The assumption seems to be that such interactions and the ongoing processes of engagement afford these participants opportunities to gauge the accountability and transparency issues that exist within communities concerning the delivery of health functions and services.

The Department of Education’s promotion of accountability and transparency similarly required the schools to engage with their local communities on the performance outcomes of primary and secondary schools. Stakeholders specifically included parents and citizens’ committees and school boards as well as the broader community. Depending upon its purpose and target audience, information on school outcomes is presented in formal departmental review documents, local public media and newsletters, and is discussed during community public forums.

For Main Roads Western Australia, the consultation mechanisms and information and awareness-raising strategies that the agency uses to pursue these outcomes are generally comparable to those of government organizations (Main Roads WA 2013b, 2013c). Particular accountability and transparency requirements in Main Roads WA were identified that appeared to be associated with its role as a statutory agency that is subject to contractualization influences.

Government trading enterprises

The community engagement processes which government trading enterprises undertake reflect the continuing impacts which customer influences and regulatory factors have had on their accountability and transparency obligations. The Water

Corporation's Customer Service Charter is instructive in demonstrating the manner in which the Corporation complies with these accountability and transparency obligations (Water Corporation 2013a). The Charter clearly defines the services that are provided by the Corporation, while it also explains the reciprocal obligations of customers. The internal processes used by the Corporation in resolving customer complaints about services are subject to maximum timeframes and in the case of unresolved complaints there is a commitment to assist customers in referring matters to the Department of Water. The Customer Service Charter therefore promotes accountability and transparency by establishing performance benchmarks against which the Corporation's service delivery outcomes may be measured. The Corporation also publishes information describing its operating environment, which demonstrates the relationship between community engagement mechanisms and accountability and transparency outcomes.

6.5.3.6 Summary of community engagement mechanisms and perceptions of empowerment

The preceding section of this chapter described the significance which is being attributed to community engagement from a public policy perspective. The discussion highlighted how governments view engagement with citizens at the community level as being consistent with the characteristics and the aims of contemporary democracy (Head 2007). These attitudes and values are reflected in consultation processes that governments and elected policy makers undertake with citizens and communities as part of policymaking activities and in the responses they provide to issues that communities raise (Bishop and Davis 2002). For those public sector organizations that operate both within statutory frameworks and in the corporatized business environment, community engagement processes and emergent issues are also subject to political/public policy influences. Parliamentary scrutiny of Western Power and the Water Corporation has assumed greater prominence as customer dissatisfaction and constituency discontent with policy makers' oversight of public utilities become entwined (Legislative Council of Western Australia 2012; Western Power 2012e; Parliament of Western Australia 2008c, 2011b; Water Corporation 2013c; Legislative Assembly of Western Australia 2000; Mercer 2013).

Heightened customer/consumer expectations of empowerment through participation and consultation places pressure on providers to deliver better services or, otherwise, to more effectively address the issues and concerns that are conveyed (Holmes 2011; Bishop and Davis 2002; Reddel 2002; Head 2007). The prevalence of community engagement activity by public sector organizations also emphasizes the need for these entities to be accountable and transparent in such processes. As the preceding discussion identified, public sector organizations are seen as demonstrating their commitment to accountability and transparency through proper reporting to customers/consumers on the status or outcome of issues raised (Holmes 2011). Additional performance outcomes and accountability/transparency obligations are imposed upon public sector organizations as elected policy makers and governments seek to placate citizen and/or community disquiet (Australian Associated Press 2013; Phillips 2013b, 2013a).

In this study, representatives of government departments, statutory agencies and government trading enterprises perceived that customers/consumers within the communities were empowered by the community engagement processes that provider organizations used. Consultation conducted by government statutory organizations in the delivery of health, education and roads network services was perceived to have given customers/consumers opportunities to influence strategies for the delivery of functions and services. Representatives of government trading enterprises explained that they view community engagement as providing a framework through which customers/communities can be apprised of important projects and any issues that have been addressed. As the discussion identified, governments have also used community engagement in promoting new governance models that focus upon building the capacity of rural communities to identify and implement local solutions.

While such approaches have seen a significant increase in the onus of responsibility placed upon local communities, government still plays a role in promoting effective relationships and innovation by, among other things, investing in technology, capital and resources. It is here participants of the study communities perceived that the

community engagement processes reflected disempowerment and failure to influence. Such perceptions were based upon the fact that the communities as a whole had seen few opportunities to be consulted and to consult. Against this background, participants of the communities perceived ongoing pressures on the delivery of essential functions and services as having been reflected in declines or restrictions in availability. The efficiency and effectiveness demands placed on the deliverers of these services were seen to be indicative of the contemporary public sector environment – that is, of the realities of accountability and transparency. For smaller communities, the victims of long-term depopulation and relative economic social hardship, they have meant the ongoing withdrawal of essential functions and services, and for larger communities, which are also affected by government policy decisions, they have led to the rationalization of services.

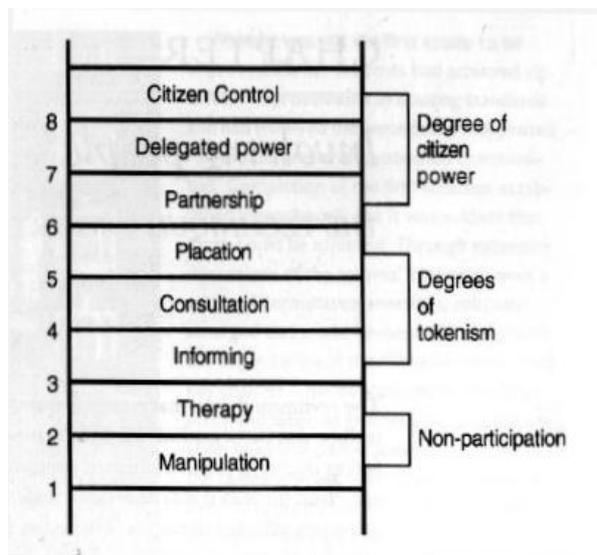
6.6 Policy making and participatory approaches

Customers/citizens now expect that they will be afforded participation in decision-making processes by governments and the public sector entities that act as their instruments in policy making and services delivery (Bishop and Davis 2002; Cavaye 2004; Head 2007). In Australia, contemporary engagement practices which favour significant public level involvement in policy choice and services design and implementation also reflect government responses to increased expectations for accountability and transparency (Holmes 2011). Public sector entities seek to utilize participatory mechanisms with a view to accommodating the emergence of new democratic demands, notably those that surround the citizen/customer concept. Participation mechanisms take many forms (e.g. community meetings, citizen advisory committees, administrative law and citizen/customer relationships) (Bishop and Davis 2002; Head 2007). During this research, some of these instruments were identified by various participants as being factors that affect the delivery of essential functions and services in the study communities.

6.6.1 Participatory approaches

Bishop and Davis (2002) categorise the voice and power-sharing opportunities that public sector organizations afford to their customers/citizens under four particular approaches. These participative approaches incorporate the concepts of *community*, *empowerment* and *citizenship* and are therefore relevant to many issues that were identified during this study. Community engagement and participatory approaches have been viewed within the context of citizen democracy and power (empowerment) as a continuum (Arnstein 1969). Within public policy contexts, the level of power or control that is afforded to customer/citizens in participative processes is relative, and it depends upon the scope of involvement that is determined by the public sector organization. In this study, it was clear that the selection of the consultation mechanism and the involvement of participants were decisions for the public sector organization (e.g. WA Country Health Service and Main Roads WA). Arnstein's framework, having its origins in citizen activism, considers consultation, information and appeasement strategies that are undertaken with customers/citizens as being tokenistic (Bishop and Davis 2002). A greater level of citizen empowerment (i.e. democracy) is instead achieved in circumstances where direct citizen control or power-sharing is allowed. Figure 6.2 below depicts graphically Arnstein's (1969) view of the varying levels of citizen democracy that are attained during different phases of participation.

Figure 6.2: The Arnstein Ladder of Citizen Participation



Source: Arnstein (1969) p. 217.

6.6.2 Policy mechanisms

Policy participation, however, is a concept that may be examined without necessarily having to be described within the context of a continuum. Given the unpredictability of policy issues and the role of local factors in determining participation strategies and community engagement mechanisms, effective participation requires flexibility rather than standard approaches (Bishop and Davis 2002). Consequently, Bishop and Davis (2002) argue that no single approach exists for participation but it is instead influenced by the nature of the policy problem at hand, and the availability of skills and resources. Determination of the issues that are sufficiently important to require public consultation is often subject to political judgment, as are decisions on participation arrangements and the determination of participant categories (Bishop and Davis 2002).

Within the contemporary context, public sector organizations internationally and throughout Australia apply community engagement activities which are multi-faceted. Providing public sector organizations with access to diversity in consultation approaches facilitates compliance with statutory and governance obligations and

affords them the necessary flexibility with which to accommodate different issues and stakeholder needs (Cavaye 2001). What has been identified in public policy perspectives and in this study of the outcomes of services delivery, however, is that there is a difference between customers/citizens' expectations of their role in the consultation and the roles that they are actually allotted by the public sector agencies (Holmes 2011).

In an operational sense, within public sector organizations the responsibility for choosing the consultation instrument devolves to local officials. The instrument that is chosen depends on the nature of the policy issue at hand. Public sector organizations, by applying this approach, provide flexibility for public officials to pursue policy issues with customers/citizens in multiple environments and using multiple mechanisms. These frameworks include: key contacts, citizen surveys, public meetings (unorganised or complex), meetings/negotiations with groups, and citizen advisory committees (Bishop and Davis 2002).

6.7 Factors affecting community perceptions of standards of service delivery for rural communities

6.7.1 Models of service delivery

The origins and structure of the provider organizations were found to have implications for the relationships that exist between these entities and their customers and key stakeholders within their communities. Government organizations and government trading enterprises providing essential functions and services operate within environments which are substantially different. Government departments and statutory agencies are established under a legislative framework; government policy and the prevailing government political agenda influence the manner in which these organizations develop strategic plans and deliver essential functions and services. Government trading enterprises are also established under a legislative framework. However, these enterprises, unlike government departments and statutory agencies, are not directly subject to government policy imperatives but operate under a corporate charter (Western Power 2012a; Water Corporation 2013a).

This commercially-focused framework acts as a significant influence in the development of organizational strategic plans, which in turn drive the delivery of essential functions and services.

...our biggest challenges [are] to put over the message that we are a commercial entity and the sort of work that they want done, does need to be accounted for and in the scheme of things, you can't shift that cost onto other parts of the community.

Representative, Western Power

6.7.2 Impact of corporatization or contractualization upon services

Participants in the study communities perceived that they had experienced significant differences in the standards of electricity and water services since the responsibility for electricity infrastructure and water supply services had been transferred from the government statutory agencies to the government trading enterprises. The perceptions were that the standards of essential functions and services to communities had generally suffered because the decisions made by government trading enterprises affecting delivery and resourcing are based purely upon commercial principles.

6.7.3 Departments, statutory organisations & New Public Management (NPM) reforms

Overall, participants in the study communities claimed that, under previous 'paternalistic' regimes, the direct delivery by governments of services in health, education and roads infrastructure had been of a higher standard and more 'reliable' than was the case under arrangements at the time of the study. Participants acknowledged that the 'uneconomic' nature of these essential functions and services leads to government being the only viable entity to provide them to rural communities. Nevertheless, participants throughout the study communities also suggested that the perceived gradual 'decline' in the standards of delivery was associated with prevailing public policy trends affecting government organizational structures. Examples of changes in the delivery of functions and services cited by

participants included reforms in the areas of health and education centred upon economic rationalism.

Another example cited and discussed in Chapter Five was roads. From 1998 onwards, Main Roads Western Australia retained its statutory compliance responsibilities and assumed a contract oversight and network management role, having no direct involvement in construction and maintenance activities. Representatives of Main Roads Western Australia expressed the view that the organization was delivering a high quality of road network throughout Western Australia. Rural community participants asserted that these outcomes had previously been achieved through the effective application at a regional level of valuable corporate knowledge and skills in identifying issues and in dealing with stakeholders. Rural community participants also noted that under the pre-1998 arrangements, Main Roads had operated as a major employer of labour throughout regional Western Australia and that, accordingly, the department's activities had provided a significant economic boost to the regional areas of the state. These participants perceived that rural communities had suffered as a consequence of the policy changes which led to Main Roads Western Australia no longer being directly involved in such activities.

I think decisions are made basically in Perth without actually visually seeing the implications. Just for example I know when there [were] discussions about the Southern Bypass for the government etc., ... they put this road through which was just meant to be this gorgeous one, but when they actually came down and actually saw other than what was on their computer was just absolutely quite impractical. So it put a lot of stress on people in the country that was really unnecessary and a lot of expense.

Participant, Mount Barker Focus Group

6.7.4 Communities' views of contemporary essential functions & services requirements

Many participants in the communities perceived a country/city disparity in the delivery of functions and services, and further identified themselves as having been abandoned by providers and policy makers. The participants cited ignorance on the part of urban populations of the context of the problems faced by residents throughout rural communities as being among the significant reasons for their plight. The commonly held views were that policy makers needed to make greater efforts to familiarize themselves with rural community issues. This study also identified an overwhelming view among participants that the study communities, by virtue of the contributions which they make to state coffers through production and taxes, have an entitlement to a high standard of essential functions and services.

.../We wouldn't be here if it wasn't for this ... it's a farming community .../Well, what we produce, and how important it is, but it doesn't seem to be important to the politicians .../Rural communities are being starved of services. So I'd ask the government that they assess the impact on rural communities of every decision involving centralisation or decommissioning, and determine their community service obligation in relation to that service .../ I would say that the country is different from the city. That, there are less of us, but we still require all the services and functions that people in the city require. It's going to cost a bit more but also we are highly productive people and, we need to be listened to and taken notice of.../

The participants perceived that policy decisions taken by government to reduce or withdraw education services from a rural community inevitably weaken the very foundations of the community itself. Education was considered as being of such significance as to influence the economic conditions and commercial activities that are critical to a community's long-term viability.

.../The high school is definitely linked to numbers .../They'd go to Narrogin Senior High School .../ But then a lot of the farmers' children go away to school because they've got no buses to get them in to go to Narrogin so they need to board elsewhere.../ We've always thought: "Look, if you have to go on, you've got to go away." .../(W)here a school closes, all of a sudden, not only

will the students go somewhere else [but] then the parents of those children shop somewhere else .../ The biggest concern I can see for Ballidu is the diminishing population and then some of the essential services are withdrawn. And one of the worst ones that could happen from this lack of population is, the school closing, or even diminishing further .../

6.7.5 Elected representatives' view of contemporary essential functions and services

The elected representatives interviewed during this study conveyed perceptions of a general inadequacy in the levels and standards of essential functions and services throughout the study communities. They suggested that the impacts of these shortcomings were more pronounced within rural communities that had been experiencing growth or had been subject to activities which impose considerable demands upon essential functions and services. Likewise, these participants identified gaps in the delivery of services such as health and education as being significant influencing factors within established, 'traditional' rural communities. The elected representatives also identified constituency-wide knowledge, awareness and expectations of highly mobile populations as being important factors that have influenced community assessments of the performance of provider organizations in the delivery of essential functions and services. They perceived, for example, government funding and resourcing of education services throughout rural communities to be inadequate compared to that received in urban areas. One participant strongly asserted that the actions of successive governments in rationalizing the delivery of education services throughout rural Western Australia had been a major causal factor in the depopulation of a number of communities within their electorate.

Why [have] they moved away? They have a sick child that wasn't close enough to help, they had a child that was moving from primary school to senior school education and that wasn't going to work. So, you know that, even though we always talk about agriculture being tough – I don't know too many people that have walked off the land, I don't know too many people even that have been forced off the land – they make a decision to leave for their family, and their reason for leaving is normally: education, eight times out of ten; health, every now and then, you know – and even roads and stuff – like no one leaves town

because of rough roads. If you go to every community and ask them what they want to spend money on: “Oh, fix the roads, fix the roads.” What did the last ten people leave town for: “Oh, education.”

Elected Representative 1

These outcomes are consistent with the other researchers’ findings about Western Australian rural communities (Haslam McKenzie 1999; Tonts 2004; Collits 1999).

6.8 Models of the community–provider relationship in the delivery of essential functions and services

This study presents two discrete models of the relationship between communities and service providers in the delivery of essential functions and services. The models are differentiated on the basis of public sector organization types and the impacts upon the manner in which these entities deliver services and respond to associated issues. The discussion in the foregoing sections of this chapter has described how the pursuit by governments of participation is integral to the contemporary democratic landscape (Bishop and Davis 2002). These models invoke consultation and information provision and recognize the policy choice issues.

The study communities aspire to be effective in exerting influence to maintain the delivery of essential functions and services. The achievement of this outcome, however, is often highly dependent upon the leadership shown by particular individuals within communities (Davies 2009). Leadership has been identified as being increasingly important in generating the capacity and resources that communities need to exercise influence on the strategies and activities of provider organizations (Haslam McKenzie 2000; Kelly 2000; Kilpatrick and Abbott-Chapman 2005; Flora et al. 1997; Falk and Kilpatrick 2000; Davies 2007). At the same time provider organizations within the contemporary environment are increasingly utilizing community engagement and consultation in strategy and policy development and as part of best practice programs (Government of Victoria – eGovernment Resource Centre 2010; NSW Government - Division of Local Government: Department of Premier and Cabinet 2012). The existence of these

related objectives on the part of the study communities and the provider organizations presents an opportunity for communities to seek to exercise influence through relationships.

6.8.1 Community–provider relationships and the implications for engagement

Johnston (2010) has put forward a relational framework of community engagement. The principles and concepts which underpin Johnston’s framework have relevance for this research. Within a relational framework of community engagement, connecting with an individual member of a community invokes conditions for individual interest, trust, knowledge and, importantly, a feeling of community belonging and support (Johnston 2010). Participants within a number of the study communities conveyed perceptions about the circumstances of the relationships that existed between the customers, residents and stakeholders of these communities and the statutory organization and government enterprise providers of essential functions and services. Participants throughout the rural communities and those of the provider organizations identified issues of *trust*, *knowledge* (information), and *responsiveness* (e.g. support) as impacting upon the effectiveness of the relationships that existed between providers of essential functions and services and their customers/communities.

As Johnston (2010: 8) explains, the development of a relational model of community engagement draws upon established systems theory, in which the communications strategies and processes utilized by organizations allow them “to create or negotiate shared understandings”. Effective communications are also integral to organizational objectives of informing and raising awareness among customers, key stakeholders and the wider community. They can facilitate involvement, generate opinions and provide feedback, and can create a collaborative approach to addressing conflicts and issues that arise within communities. Figure 6.3 below outlines, in broad terms, a ‘typology’ of community engagement under the relational model (Johnston 2010). The components within this typology have been applied to inform the development

of the Statutory Agency Model and the Government Enterprise Model of the delivery of essential functions and services (Figures 6.4 and 6.5 in the following discussion).

Figure 6.3: A typology for community engagement under a relational approach to consultation and collaborative practice in Australia

Community Engagement Component	Description or Characteristic
Community information	<p>Successful community engagement is contingent upon effective, appropriate, and timely information provided to community members.</p> <p>Engagement defined as the one-way dissemination of concepts (information) relating to a topic or problem to a pre-defined community group.</p>
Community consultation	<p>Recognizes that community members may exert influence, but that the organization retains the right to make the decision.</p> <p>Purpose is to capture a diverse range of opinions from interested community members, rather than capturing the views of every community member.</p>
Community participation	<p>Participation suggests an active role by community members in the creation of meaning and developing solutions to complex social problems or proposed solutions that affect a specific community.</p> <p>Participation involves an expectation by community members that they have a voice in the power-sharing process.</p>
Community publics	<p>Community is commonly characterised as either stakeholders or publics (general or community).</p> <p>Communication between an organization and its publics is necessary to achieve a dialogue to empower communities and increase trust between all parties</p>

Source: Adapted from Johnston, K. A. (2010)

6.8.1.1 *Community Engagement*

Complexities and ambiguities surround the concept of communities, the acknowledgement of which is crucial to the successful application of engagement approaches (McMillan and Chavis 1986). Communities have traditionally been defined as: communities of place, meaning people within a defined geographical area, or otherwise aligned around areas of some common interest, or influence (Heller 1989; Putnam 2000; City of Charles Sturt 2009; Chavis and Newbrough 1986). More recently, the definition of communities has also been applied to advance discussions around communities providing a foundation for capacity building, the development of the notion of ‘capitals’ (Craig 2007; Emery and Flora 2006).

From an operational context, community engagement or public participation is defined by the International Association of Public Participation as:

... any process that involves the public in problem-solving or decision making and uses the public input to make more informed decisions.

(The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)
Australasian Affiliate 2012)

At its simplest, community engagement is a framework that exists to facilitate consultation. However, over and above this, it is a complex participatory framework that has its origins in principles developed by the International Association for Public Participation (Head 2007; IAP2). As Head (2007: 444) describes: “The IAPP spectrum of public participation distils five main types of process: informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and empowering citizens.” These principles and processes assist in better delineating the scope and nature of the participation. Community engagement, in the form of communication campaigns utilized by private sector bodies and the participatory or consultative processes of government organizations and enterprises, has been identified as the mechanism by which communities may potentially exercise empowerment and influence (see Figure 6.1). It has been argued that the implementation of community engagement will often depend upon the readiness of government departments and statutory agencies to

overcome the traditional risk-averse bureaucratic philosophies (Cavaye 2000, 2004; Stewart 2009).

Participants in this study perceived that the community engagement activities undertaken by government departments and statutory agencies are typically centred upon issues resolution and legislative compliance. The research with respect to government trading enterprises identified that community engagement and consultation was primarily concerned with raising awareness among customers/communities of the scope of the organization's roles.

One of the big issues that I very strongly emphasize to my people is, when we deal with customers, they don't want vagueness – they don't want what you're going to do in fifty years time, or things like that. They want to know, what's in it for them – what's in it for them now – how soon you can deliver on it. And you've got to translate all the plans and the projects ... that goes [sic] on within the business ...into a language that the customer clearly understands That makes it difficult sometimes, because, we're just going through this exercise now, we're actually going into South country – tomorrow in fact, and we've got to talk to a whole range of customers down there to tell them: "Look, we're going to have to build a transmission line through your turf", if you like, spoiling some people's views in some cases ...and their asking: "What's in it for us?" and we say: "Well, basically, there's nothing for you in the short term".

Representative, Western Power

Significantly, for the study communities, participants perceived community engagement as ideally providing the mechanisms by which influence can be exercised, though their perception was that generally this expectation has not been fulfilled. Effectiveness, through the continued delivery of essential functions and services, represents the ultimate aim. The relationships between government departments, statutory agencies and government trading enterprises and communities in the delivery of essential functions and services, as identified in this research, are encapsulated in the Statutory Organization Model (Figure 6.4) and the Government Enterprise Model (Figure 6.5) below.

Even though the two models are identically constructed, and they comprise common core operating components (i.e. Consultation, Participation and Representation centred upon Community Engagement), they are differentiated by the arrangements under which essential functions and services are delivered. Differences between the models extend back to circumstances which impact upon the provider organizations

(e.g. objectives enshrined within enabling legislative instruments, the commerciality of operations, and the capacity or otherwise for the responsible Minister to intervene directly). These factors were deemed to have different implications for the operation of government department and statutory agencies when compared to the activities undertaken by government trading enterprises. Importantly, consequences for the relationships between the key stakeholders – namely provider organizations, the study communities and the elected representatives – were also identified.

Figure 6.4: Statutory Organization Model

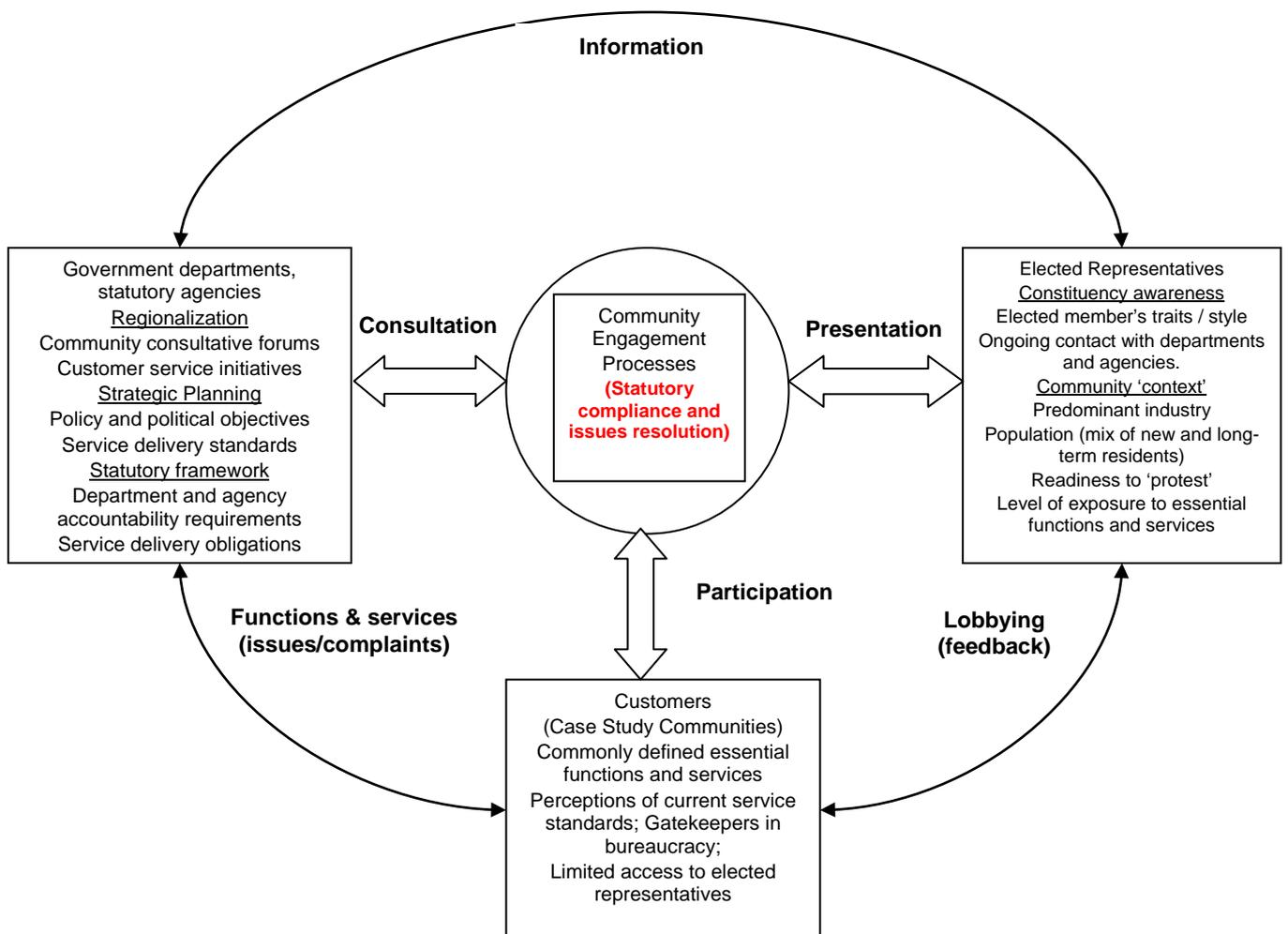
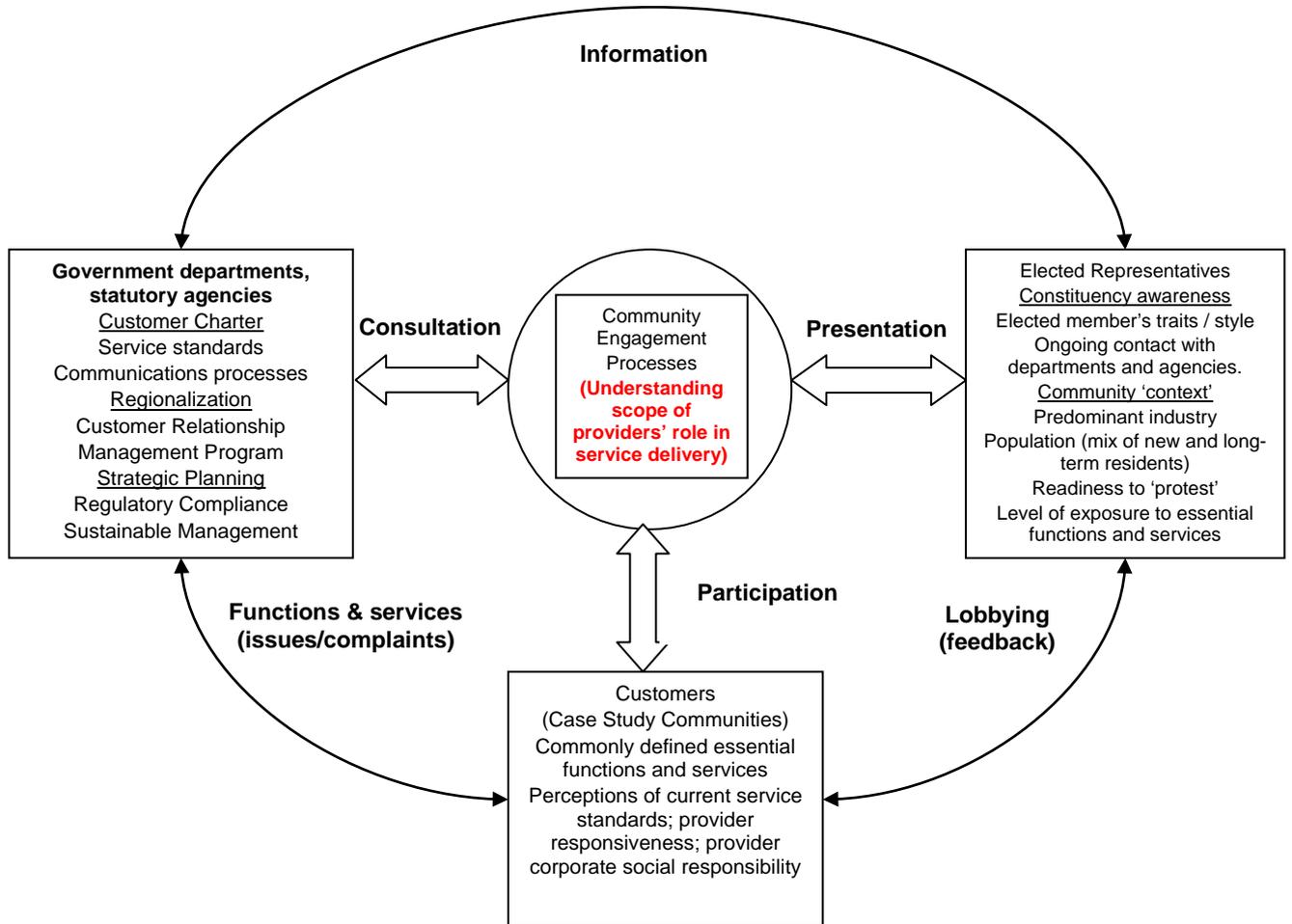


Figure 6.5: Government Enterprise Model



The preceding discussion and the graphical representations of the Statutory Organization Model and the Government Enterprise Model have identified that *community engagement* processes necessarily exist as central components of both models.

6.8.1.2 Statutory Organization Model

During this research, participants cited as an example of community engagement undertaken by a government department or statutory agency the Main Roads WA forums involving its *Roads 2020* for the development of regional road networks. The WA Country Health Service consultations surrounding its *Foundations* strategy for a proposed hierarchical hospital and health services delivery network could be cited as another example.

Within the government department and statutory agency context, it appears that the provider organization's role in contributing to the overall government policy agenda is inseparable from its role in the implementation of strategic plans or reforms. When these policy contextual factors are further considered against the particular experiences identified from this research, the Statutory Organization Model suggests that the provider organizations undertake consultation processes for the principal purposes of ensuring statutory compliance and facilitating the resolution of any issues that may impinge upon outcomes (Government of Western Australia – Department of Education and Training 2008; Government of Western Australia 2012; Government of Western Australia – Department of Health: Public Health 2009b; WA Country Health Service 2012a; Main Roads Western Australia 2013a, 2013b).

The community engagement processes that are currently in place within government departments and statutory agencies undoubtedly have been adapted to reflect particular services, programs and client groups' needs. These mechanisms nevertheless also reflect common whole-of-government objectives which seek to deliver greater efficiency/effectiveness, accountability, and transparency. An example of such mechanisms identified during this research is the District Health Advisory Council structure operated by the WA Country Health Service under which the membership of the councils currently operating throughout the regions includes 'community' and 'consumer' representatives (WA Country Health Service 2012b). Similarly, the Parents and Citizens' Committee was highlighted as being one permanent process used by the Department of Education to ensure local community-level involvement in the delivery of education services.

6.8.1.3 Government Enterprise Model

Under the Government Enterprise Model, consultation is an integral part of the process by which essential functions and services are delivered and it directly affects the customers within the study communities and the elected representatives as stakeholders. This research examined the activities of Western Power and the Water

Corporation. Both of these provider organizations are required to undertake their activities according to commercial principles. This study identified that Western Power had engaged at a local level with elected members and officials of local governments, with influential groups operating within these communities and with representatives of other government agencies. These processes had enabled Western Power to discover issues related to its services and they had also assisted it in conveying to customers and communities a better understanding of its role.

[O]ur role is to try and deliver to the country, a reliable and efficient supply of electricity. And what that means is that you do all that you can in your powers under the Act and the Regulations that allow us to do whatever we can to ensure that capacity and reliability of supply is available to country customers. We don't necessarily always meet their expectations, try as we might. Because again, it is known that the country regions, particularly when you get right outside the fringes of the network, are very uneconomical in terms of revenue returns for expense laid out, and expense made in the form of replacement of infrastructure and maintaining existing infrastructure.

Representative, Western Power

The information provided by Western Power suggested that the organization was also acutely aware of the importance of engaging directly with property owners who were going to be impacted by network-related activities

(W)e've got to talk to a whole range of customers down there to tell them: "Look, we're going to have to build a transmission line through your turf", if you like, spoiling some people's views.

(W)e do have influence, but not as much as we'd like - and, it's not because those sections within Western Power don't want to do it. It's again back to what we talked about earlier, it's this whole concept of working as a commercial organization and coming to grips as to how you do that, with limited budgets very tight constraints on where you can spend your money, and a huge need out there for as much as you can possibly spend.

Representative, Western Power

From a contemporary strategic planning perspective, the community engagement practices utilized by Western Power are centred on including communities affected by network infrastructure proposals into decision-making processes to obtain input and feedback, with a view to achieving positive and sustainable outcomes (Western Power 2012c). These community engagement processes incorporate the spectrum of engagement components endorsed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2; see also Head (2007)).

Network infrastructure proposals are subjected to extensive regulatory scrutiny for compliance with environmental legislation prior to approval. Any approved projects must be implemented in accordance with environmental management plans which set out the provider organization's responsibilities and which ideally also accommodate community concerns on environmental matters (Western Power 2012a, 2012b). A review of the published outcomes of a number of community engagement processes undertaken by Western Power in metropolitan Perth and in regional locations between 2010 and 2012 suggests that the organization's principal focus was to *inform* and *consult* with communities and stakeholders about the impending implementation of strategically planned network projects. Western Power, during the community engagement process conducted in 2012 regarding a specific network project, acknowledged the desirability, where possible, of the community and its stakeholders having opportunities to influence strategic projects. The organization, however, also conceded that legislative and commercial obstacles exist to these expectations being met (Western Power 2012c; Murphy 2009).

The Water Corporation also undertakes substantial community engagement as part of its overall service delivery and implementation of its strategic projects. An organizational review and re-structure of service delivery responsibilities conducted during 2004–2005 resulted in Regional Business Managers being given an increased capacity to undertake community and stakeholder engagement. The Corporation described the principal role of these managers as being one of working as “integrators” who seek to build and maintain trust and credibility between the Corporation and stakeholder/customer communities (Water Corporation 2005).

Additionally, each region employs a Communications Officer who is responsible for promoting the Corporation and its business activities throughout the region (Water Corporation 2005).

Elected Representatives

Elected representatives undertake a significant and wide-ranging role in both the Statutory Organization Model and the Government Enterprise Model outlined above. The role of the representative impacts differently the interactions that take place between the elected representative and constituents and the government departments and statutory agencies operating within these communities.

This research found that the impact of representation upon the activities of provider organizations is seen when the elected representative has interacted directly with senior officers of government departments or statutory agencies based locally or within the region. Such intervention on the part of the elected representative may be constructive in highlighting issues related to the delivery of services conveyed to them by constituents and key community organizations and interest groups (e.g. local governments). Subject to the outcome of these discussions and any assurances that the departmental or agency officials might be in a position to offer, the issues may be considered resolved. Alternatively, the elected representative may direct the issues to the office of the responsible minister to address, or they may perhaps seek to raise these issues formally within the Parliament.

The elected representatives interviewed as part of this research differed in their assessments of the effectiveness with which government departments and statutory agencies had engaged with the various communities about the issues related to the delivery of essential functions and services. One elected representative perceived pre-conditions as limiting the capacity of provider organizations to engage with rural communities in a meaningful way.

Oh well, I would contend that it doesn't happen. (T)hey would say that they do surveys and so forth but, you know I think they've got government policy, the

government policy revolves around a balanced budget and, so therefore, they're constantly looking to save money – which, in the business system is pretty good. In the government system, when you're a small community that probably doesn't have the population growth you would like, that becomes a big fight. I'm sure that the government does engage in this stuff, I wouldn't say that I'm not aware of it, but I would say that its effectiveness and what they're actually seeking to achieve, is marginal at best. You don't need to poll the people in a country town about what they want when they're taking away a service. "Oh, we're not going to offer manual arts at school any more, we're not going to have the, you know, doctor doing, you know, specialist surgery," so forth. Well, of course people want that – people always want that. People want brain surgery in their local town

Elected Representative 1

Another representative questioned the overall effectiveness of the communication strategies which some provider organizations had implemented and perceived that resources would be better allocated towards improving delivery outcomes.

Well, there certainly are advertising campaigns. There are a number of brochures and mail outs, et cetera – I have to say that I think that very few of those are effective. Effective service is going to be a better advertisement than anything else they're putting in place, and I don't think that they're particularly valuable. They may appeal in terms of being seen to be doing something, but they don't really have a good outcome. So, I think that they're not of great value. The things that are of good value, some of those community service representatives that those (service providers) put in are excellent. But of course, they're not advertised, and I suspect that if they were advertised, they would be completely swamped. My impression is that those various service providers should take some of that budget that they're throwing into advertising and promotion and put it into service delivery and they would get a much better outcome.

Elected Representative 2

A third elected representative perceived the overall level of public knowledge of communication and engagement strategies as being low and expressed the view that

their effectiveness ultimately depended upon the skills or commitment of government officials operating at the local level.

Yes, I think there are strategies. One I think, at times they will use the local media to make the public aware, particularly of new practices or products, or changes that may be happening ... and they will hold information seminars – e.g., we've have them for things such [as] ... changes to road haulage regulations. We've also had them in the provision of education services. I think generally, the government departments have got better in that area. But probably it's very much they do that for new initiatives, and perhaps at times there needs to be (more) general information about what a department does.

In some areas I think the communication processes and customer service mechanisms have improved, but in others I think they're still ad hoc and could be improved.

Elected Representative 3

Representation also exists as an important component of the Government Enterprise Model, with the contemporary environment in which essential functions and services are delivered having led to government trading enterprises interacting closely with elected representatives. Representatives of the government trading enterprise providers who participated in this research explained how, for instance, Western Power had pro-actively engaged with elected representatives in order to address customer-related issues.

We're improving that. My group, we have a bit more of a stronger approach to it – a more pragmatic approach, we actually go in there and – we get the questions first, and we're starting to get more and more directed towards us, we'll get out and get the questions now through local councils, we get them mostly through local members of parliament, ... the local members then wrote formal requests for information to the Minister which became ministerials and they had to be dealt with in the fullness of time to use polly-speak – The reality is now that since my section was started – I've met with politicians, the local members, I've got (my guys) to liaise very closely with them, they liaise very closely with the research officers of these politicians and the local members –

to the point now that the majority of issues and cases brought before those people come straight to my guys.

Representative, Western Power

The Western Power representative explained that the organization, by introducing more direct customer-based information-gathering initiatives, had been able to more effectively identify service-related issues. These mechanisms had apparently enabled Western Power to implement appropriate and timely resolutions to the concerns of customers.

So we've dramatically reduced the turnaround time of a complaint as well. Where customers once would come into their local member and complain and if they were lucky they got a resolution and possibly an answer within five or six months, they now get an answer and resolution – it may not be the resolution they desire – but they get a resolution and a response, usually within five working days of actually lodging the complaint. So, that's pretty good.

Representative, Western Power

The Water Corporation advised of research that it had conducted which indicated that there is a high level of public awareness of the organization's role. The Corporation advised, notwithstanding that it had no data specifically relating to these communities: "...it is not unreasonable to expect that they would have a similar level of awareness" (Water Corporation 2005). This study identified a high level of awareness of the Water Corporation's functions. For the residents of some of these communities, it appears that this level of understanding was further heightened through direct experiences involving issues relating to the delivery of essential functions and services.

.../A shocking little example; arrogance of the Water Authority, was when we started mentioning the possibility of extending community activity like having extra lifestyle blocks – five acres. And in between it all, possibly sitting in that very chair, the Water Authority spokesperson stunned everybody by saying: "Oh water is available." And the DOLA representative was sitting there and he was going, "No, no, no." And what the Water Authority man meant was:

“Well we’ve got a dam full of water; the block sits 5 kilometres away, you work out how to get it there .../I would actually think that the Water Authority has been the most pro-active of the groups. They actually respond to the customers effectively. Water Authority, give them their due, it does respond to what they have to do immediately. But their infrastructure is starting to fail .../

These are perceptions conveyed by participants in the smallest of the six study communities in relation to water and electricity – arguably the most essential functions and services for any rural community. The participants were dissatisfied with the level of service delivery and felt disaffection with the direction in which this customer–provider relationship had progressed. This is suggestive of a community engagement process which is central to the model, yet which is nevertheless ineffective. In this case the participants appear to be ‘talking past’ each other rather than developing mutual understanding. This particular circumstance of community ineffectiveness in the delivery of essential functions and services is illustrative of many issues and concerns that have been identified in all study communities.

Concluding comments

This study examined particular essential functions and services that had previously been under the direct responsibility of government, but which had subsequently been subject to corporatization or contractualization. Participants in the study communities perceived the standards of electricity and water services had generally suffered since the responsibility for electricity infrastructure and water supply services had been transferred from the government statutory agencies to the government trading enterprises. This was attributed to these decisions to transfer being based purely upon commercial principles.

In general, participants in the study communities perceived the direct delivery by governments of health, education and transport services as being of a higher standard and more ‘reliable’ under previous paternalistic regimes than was the case under their current arrangements. Participants acknowledged that the ‘uneconomic’ or ‘public goods’ nature of these essential functions and services leads to government being the only viable vehicle for their delivery to rural communities. Nevertheless,

participants throughout the study communities also conveyed shared perceptions of a gradual decline in the standards of these essential functions, associated with prevailing public policy trends such as reforms in the areas of health and education that centred upon economic rationalism.

Participants perceived that there was a disparity in the standard of functions and services delivered throughout their communities compared to those that were afforded to residents living within regional and urban centres. They felt abandoned by both providers and policy makers and cited ignorance on the part of urban populations of the plight of rural communities as being uppermost among the contributing reasons. Typically, participants expressed the view that elected policy makers needed to do more to familiarize themselves with rural community issues. It was a commonly held view among participants that the study communities, by virtue of their economic and social contributions, have an entitlement to a high standard of essential functions and services.

.../I think some of the politicians need to come out to some of these country towns and spend a bit of time and just see what the country people do and how well they work together. They are completely out of touch with reality as far as country towns are concerned .../If they want people to move into the country or, not move from the country into the city, they should provide adequate services for them to remain where they are. .../I would say that the country is different from the city. That, there are less of us, but we still require all the services and functions that people in the city require. It's going to cost a bit more but also we are highly productive people and, we need to be listened to and taken notice of .../

The withdrawal of services from a rural community was perceived as inevitably weakening the foundations of the community, because it also impacts upon economic conditions and commercial activities that are critical to a community's long-term viability.

.../[W]here a school closes, all of a sudden, not only will the students go somewhere else, [but] then the parents of those children shop somewhere else .../ The biggest concern I can see for Ballidu is the diminishing population and

then some of the essential services are withdrawn. And one of the worst ones that could happen from this lack of population is the school closing, or even diminishing further. Once people have to travel, or kids have to travel out of town for education, you're faced with the demise of the town..../

6.9 Citizenship, democracy and representation

The rise of neoliberalism has seen the state come under intense scrutiny, in its roles and its relationship with the citizenry. As a consequence, one of the key issues that has arisen for governments involves changes in culture within the bureaucratic apparatus that provides public functions and services. The transformation of public sector organizations, both internally and externally, is evidenced by these entities having moved from being traditional, process-laden entities serving homogeneous publics to becoming performance-based, service-driven providers attending to diverse consumers/customers (Du Gay and Salaman 1992; Alford 2002a).

The reforms to bureaucratic structures on the basis of corporate principles have also had implications for the state–citizenry dynamic, such as representation and democracy. Within the contemporary neoliberal framework, customers/clients and citizens may have vastly different perceptions of their status as users of services provided by public sector organizations. Customers and clients seemingly fit more closely with the outcomes-based strategies of the corporatized culture of government departments, statutory agencies and government business enterprises (Considine 1988; Sadler 2000; Fairbrother, Paddon, and Teicher 2002; Wettenhall 1998).

The concept of the ‘citizen’ recognizes that, through the electoral system, government is ultimately accountable to the people for its performance. The wide-ranging state roles and responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the oversight of the activities undertaken by public sector providers of functions and services. Given the complexity and diversity of the contemporary public sector in Australia, the citizens of communities are not always parties to the exchange–value process that underpins the functions and services that government departments, statutory agencies and government business enterprises provide (Alford 2002a; Fowler 2013; Collins

and Kim 2009; Alford 2002b). Accordingly, citizens can experience perceptions of exclusion and disenfranchisement (Clarke 2007).

From a Western Australian rural governance perspective, this contemporary public sector environment has centred on a substantially redefined scope for governments in the delivery of programs and services to rural communities (Tonts 2004; Tonts and Haslam McKenzie 2005). One issue that has emerged from this research involves participants' perceptions of an erosion of the relationship between the state and its citizens (Clarke 2004, 2007; Gray and Lawrence 2000; Gray and Lawrence 2001; McAllister and Wanna 2001; Needham 2008). In many instances, participants in this study perceived that government departments, statutory agencies and government trading enterprises had given them insufficient 'voice' or 'choice' through which to convey their issues or concerns regarding the delivery of essential functions and services.

6.10 Conclusion

This study set out to examine the delivery of services in rural areas by examining six selected study communities throughout Western Australia. The present chapter commenced with an overview of the significant findings that have emerged from this study and then put forward a definition of community effectiveness. Two discrete models of community relationships in the delivery of essential functions and services were presented. The perceptions of participants identified as part of these discussions affirmed a high level of understanding among the study communities regarding the different roles undertaken by provider organizations. The six study communities had been subjected to an ongoing decline/withdrawal of essential functions and services due to the combination of socio-economic and political/policy factors over which they have very little control.

For these communities, the ongoing issues of depopulation, changes in population demographics and socio-economic instability have converged with neoliberal public policy frameworks such that the issues associated with the delivery of essential functions and services have taken on great significance. The complexity of these

issues is underscored by the data that has been documented in this chapter. The nature of a rural community and its inherent strengths and weaknesses are all key factors that influence the way in which it responds to those challenges and complexities. This diversity and variability in rural community issues and structures is therefore reflected in the breadth of policy challenges that many communities themselves face.

Within the contemporary context, the study communities perceived that they had limited or no influence over the policy approaches of state governments and the strategies applied by government departments, statutory agencies and government business enterprises for the delivery of essential functions and services. All of the study communities in this research perceived the delivery of essential functions and services as providing a foundation for social and economic vibrancy and, often, as the key to long-term economic viability. For the rural communities, achieving such aspirations would clearly rely upon government undertaking more direct, wide-ranging involvement.

Chapter Seven Implications, Limitations and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

This study presented an examination of customer perceptions of the effectiveness and standards of the delivery of essential functions and services in Western Australian rural communities. The selection of case study communities enabled the perceptions of issues related to the delivery of essential functions and services within these communities to emerge. The context to the factors that gave rise to these perceptions was made evident through the profiles of the case study communities documented in Chapter Four. In Chapter Five the broad study findings were outlined. Chapter Six provided a definition of community effectiveness and two discrete models of community relationships with respect to the delivery of essential functions and services.

As for the context in which essential functions and services are provided, at the same time as the public sector is being subjected to increasing pressure to deliver efficiency, effectiveness and dividends to government, it is also being required to demonstrate responsiveness to issues identified by its stakeholders. Community engagement is now central to relationships between public provider organizations and customers/consumers, as well as to furthering the citizenship participatory/democracy aspirations of governments. This chapter explains the implications of the research for the application of the concepts of customers/consumers, communities as customers and empowerment within the citizenship/participatory democracy framework. Recommendations for future research are also made.

7.2 Review of the Research

The research revealed that the study communities each have their own particular experiences of the delivery of essential functions and services. However, similar trends in organizational development and in the policy factors that have influenced the delivery of essential functions and services throughout the communities were

identified. The influence of broader level policy and structural developments that have seen federal and state governments redefine their involvement in the delivery of essential functions and services were evident within the study communities. In particular, what was found to most distinguish current circumstances from those of the past was that increasing efficiency and effectiveness loom large as priorities over executive government policy-making and governance, both attracting scrutiny by parliaments (Parliament of Western Australia 2012d, 2010, 2009b). In short, over the past three decades, in line with neoliberal public policy principles, state government policies have rationalized, centralized, and regionalized many services.

In the post-neoliberal state, the interrelated matters of consumerism, citizenship and participatory democracy have featured prominently in public policy debates. These factors and their influences have affected public sector organizations delivering functions and services to customer/consumers, and, likewise, governments implementing their policy agenda (Adams and Hess 2001; Bishop and Davis 2002). Governments continually have to manage competing priorities which require them to fulfil transparency, accountability and engagement demands made by constituencies, while at the same time addressing efficiency and effectiveness priorities. Reforms have manifested in the application of corporate-based principles of ‘customer’, ‘service quality’ and ‘performance outcome management’ across the functions and services provided by governments (Alford 2002a; Considine 1988). To discuss the significance of these factors for the customers/consumers and the communities examined by this research, it is important to acknowledge the roles which have been traditionally performed by governments and markets.

As explored in Chapter Two, governments and markets differ. Whereas corporations and markets exist to serve the self-interests of consumers, the role of governments is to provide essential functions and services to citizens. Consumers operate within markets as private actors through their activities in transacting with corporations (Alford 2002a; Clarke 2007). Citizens, by contrast, are drawn together as groups by democratic participatory objectives. Governments have intervened in service provision where imperfect markets have existed and where there has been a

perceived need for social equity and economic benefit outcomes. Such public functions and services include health, education, road transport infrastructure and electricity and water.

As discussed in Chapter Two, since the early 1990s public sector reforms have centred heavily on competition and deregulation, breaking down the distinctions between governments and markets. The National Competition Policy was the catalyst for the corporatization of many government services (Australian Government – Productivity Commission. 1999; 2005a). Contemporary governance philosophies, however, have centred on fostering participatory democracy and community engagement, with the aim of providing a greater role for the constituencies in shaping public policy outcomes and in an attempt to counter the rigidity of efficiency/effectiveness priorities of government. Consequently, community engagement, consultation processes and performance measurement priorities have become a hallmark of Australian government performance indicators. In addition, greater accountability and transparency to customers/consumers and citizens has been required of governments (Adams and Hess 2001; Bishop and Davis 2002; Hazlehurst 2001).

This research identified a link between the replacement of government organizations with government trading enterprises in the area of public utilities and participants' negative perceptions of changes in service levels and standards. Importantly though, the research found it was not just the delivery of functions or services themselves that had changed, so too had expectations of the community relationships and engagement that took place between providers and customers/consumers.

7.2.1 Relationships between communities and service providers

This study presented two different models of community–provider relationships in the delivery of essential functions and services. These models were centred on community engagement, reflecting the influence of contemporary participatory democracy trends on the activities of public sector organizations. Further support for these factors was evidenced during the research, during which participants in the

community focus groups and the elected representatives expressed expectations that provider organizations should consult with them about strategic planning matters and issues relating to the delivery of essential functions and services within the study communities. The community engagement activities that the public sector providers of essential functions and services had conducted throughout the study communities were in line with published policies and guidelines, or corporate governance frameworks. Public sector providers use these structures to outline the principles and objectives that drive community engagement mechanisms and to explain the approaches that these organizations have adopted when consulting with customers/consumers. However, during consultation conducted throughout the study communities, this research identified that there can be a considerable disconnect between public sector providers' stated aspirations for community engagement and their actions.

Underpinning the development of the community relationship models, this research compared the providers' formal community engagement mechanisms to participants' perceptions of their experiences of community consultations that were undertaken. The discussion of findings in Chapter Six of this study demonstrated that this engagement has sometimes been ineffective because citizens/consumers may come away from these processes with unfulfilled expectations, or because of ambiguity over the real purpose of their involvement. Government departments and statutory agencies provide one model; this model fundamentally uses community engagement when consulting with customers/consumers as part of issues management and resolution, or during policy development. The government trading enterprises model, on the other hand, uses community engagement to inform communities about new or existing infrastructure projects and to emphasize the contemporary context in which they deliver functions and services. These two models, the statutory organization and government enterprise models respectively, highlight the limitations of community engagement and reaffirm the study outcomes, which for the study communities have led to disaffection with the democratic process and a perceived inability to influence the delivery of essential functions and services and strategic decisions.

7.2.2 Customers/consumers

In the contemporary environment, initiatives within the public sector have sought to empower customers/consumers by requiring that organizations place appropriate emphasis upon fulfilling customer service orientation and meeting service quality expectations (Alford 2002a; Clarke 2004; Jung 2010; Carver 1996; Aberbach and Christensen 2005).

Each of the participant groups in this study (communities, representatives of provider organizations and elected decision makers) stressed the significance of provider organizations engaging with communities. Nevertheless, government organizations and corporatized providers of essential functions and services that undertook consultation throughout the case study communities were also constrained in the extent to which they could accommodate issues raised and achieve communities' desired outcomes. The means by which the providers seek to address the limitations of consultation mechanisms within a neoliberal framework largely determines the success of any community engagement (Cavaye 2004; Johnston 2010). At a study community level, constraints upon the consultation processes could be seen in the tension between the issues and concerns that residents identified and their expectations for responsiveness from providers. Unless the community engagement processes returned a discernible essential function and services delivery benefit, participants expressed feelings of disengagement and disempowerment. The communities perceived themselves as generally lacking in representative voice and as being largely ineffective in influencing the strategic plans of providers or the decisions of elected policy makers.

That the rural communities expressed frustrations at their inability to influence provider organizations and elected policy makers does not necessarily suggest that these communities lacked clarity about the initiatives they require in the delivery of services. These outcomes can, however, also be seen as reflecting the manner in which provider organizations have undertaken community engagement (Auditor-General of Western Australia 2007). Some customers/consumers perceived that provider organizations failed to clarify the purpose and scope of consultations, in

terms of the issues that would be encompassed. Further, it was claimed that they did not include all affected parties. This study identified circumstances whereby community engagement was undertaken by providers ostensibly for the purposes of hearing community views and concerns; however, it was later found out that these meetings were primarily to convey information, and there was a perceived absence of community ownership of any decisions made. The constraints that public sector organizations place on engagement and consultation only serve to emphasize the implications of changes in the delivery of essential functions and services, as well as the significance of the actions that are required of various groups within communities to respond adequately to the challenges posed by the evolving community relationships. Importantly, and what is required most from these community groups, is the exercise of leadership in developing coherent strategies and in advocating key issues in order to effect change (Checkoway 1995; Davies 2009; Kelly and Steed 2004; Rappaport 1987).

7.2.3 Community expectations and Government-provided services

During the research, in their capacity as customers/consumers, participants in the case study communities expressed concerns, as outlined in Chapter Five, regarding the government's approach to the delivery of essential functions and services. The delivery of rural health services is the area in which these frustrations and antagonisms with providers surfaced most. Participants exhibited considerable angst at the ongoing removal of many specialized health services from their local hospitals. When compared to the stated principles and objectives of the contemporary delivery framework, participants perceived the actions taken by governments as amounting to a downgrading of their local hospitals and a reduction in health services generally. They identified these arrangements as imposing significant travel requirements on patients, leading to personal inconvenience and cost. Issues of equity in comparison to urban constituents were raised. The general perception of participants was that contemporary rural health services and other service delivery arrangements were more about preferencing government efficiency objectives than attending to the customer/consumer's needs and right to choice. These concerns accorded with the literature supporting this study (Haslam McKenzie

1999, 2000; Tonts 1996, 2000; Jones and Tonts 1995; Tonts and Jones 1997). Frustrations regarding the fate of key infrastructure such as local hospitals were consistently raised by research participants and were inflamed by statements such as those made by a public official who suggested the role of key infrastructure had changed, implying that it was not viable and largely redundant (Madden 2004; Strutt 2005; Parliament of Western Australia 2008a). Representatives of the service providers who participated in this study affirmed the organizational view, claiming that the implementation of rationalisation strategies had not translated into a reduction in the levels and standards of services. These representatives, by contrast, highlighted the delivery frameworks that apply throughout the regions, arguing the residents of the case study communities received the most effective/efficient delivery of services, given the scarcity of resources.

During the study, participants from within each of the six case study communities expressed very similar views about the value of education services to those they had voiced about the importance of health services in setting the lifestyle prospects for rural communities. These participants variously spoke of policy decisions that reflected changes in the delivery of education programs, particularly for residents with children of high school age, and which prompted them to consider their long-term tenure prospects.

The provision of roads by government stands out as having been a significant function, in terms of facilitating development and encouraging ongoing prosperity (Le Page 1986; Edmonds 1997). Over the past two decades, there have perhaps been few clearer illustrations of efficiency reforms upon government services than in the circumstances surrounding the management of the state's road infrastructure (Government of Western Australia 1998). Sweeping structural reforms implemented by government in 1998 have seen Main Roads Western Australia shift its focus from being directly concerned with road construction and maintenance activities to being an agency that operates as a contract manager. In Chapter Five it was noted that participants identified important social and economic factors as having been attributed to the functions of Main Roads Western Australia prior to 1998. The

defining issue, however, was that the participants perceived that the organization provided greater, more visible benefits to rural communities under its former government-based delivery framework.

The perceptions of community participants about health, education and roads infrastructure point to an underlying sentiment that favours the traditional paternalistic role of government over contemporary neoliberal approaches. For rural residents, the perception is that the delivery of essential functions and services should represent more than simply another transaction. That is, the level and standard at which these services are delivered matters, and so too does the manner in which provider organizations address issues and concerns relating to this delivery. Such assessments are founded upon equity, citizenship and democracy.

7.2.4 Essential functions and services delivery and the rural urban imbalance

During this study, participants of the study communities perceived the notion of rural-urban imbalance as having been embedded within the electoral arrangements that are applied to determine the representative composition of the Legislative Assembly in the Parliament of Western Australia. Significantly, these structures were viewed by participants as having impeded the communities in their capacity to engage directly and effectively with their elected representatives, and especially within the context of the pursuit of resolutions to essential functions and services delivery issues.

The disenchantment expressed by many participants regarding the perceived functions and service delivery issues affecting rural communities was further amplified by significant opposition which had emerged within some of the study communities to government-backed electoral reforms (Davis and Tonts 2007). As Davis and Tonts (2007) have observed, the introduction of the then Gallop Labor government's *One Vote One Value* legislation served as a repudiation of 'countrymindedness' and the 'disproportionate preferencing' of electoral representation for rural communities. The writers foreshadowed that these electoral

reforms would translate into a noticeable shift in the urban-regional political dynamic throughout the state. The Gallop Labor government acknowledged the significance of these equity issues to rural communities and their citizens, and it sought to introduce strategies to ensure that government-provided functions and services were appropriate and would encourage sustainability (Western Australia Police 2005a, 2005b; Government of Western Australia - Department of Health 2003; Government of Western Australia - Department of the Premier and Cabinet 2003). After 2005 however, both the Gallop and the Carpenter Labor governments encountered circumstances characterized by unpredictable, and ultimately declining revenue streams amid growing pressures upon budgets and resources, driven by community-wide demand for the provision of infrastructure and services (Brueckner and Pforr 2011; McLure 2004). Within the context of these developments, government policy responses implementing new delivery arrangements in policing, health and education services within many rural communities were often unwelcome and elicited strong criticism. Indeed these actions, reflected in the closure or rationalization of key facilities, often appeared to only further entrench this notion of rural urban imbalance among rural constituencies (Kappelle 2007; Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2012; The West Opinion 2007)

For rural communities, the process of governments corporatizing essential functions and services is one of the strongest influencing factors which appear to have contributed to these perceptions of community vulnerability and disconnect. Likewise, those functions and services that continue to be delivered directly to communities by government departments and statutory agencies are subject to the pressures of efficiency and effectiveness outcomes. During this study, the participants of the study rural communities demonstrated a clear understanding of the inherent differences associated with the government and the corporatized delivery models and their implications for levels and standards of essential functions and services. Significantly, participants perceived essential functions and services as having been of a higher standard under the 'traditional' government delivery model and were now seen as suffering under contemporary government arrangements. Other essential functions and services delivered to the study communities by

corporatized providers under contemporary arrangements were adjudged by participants as being inferior.

In terms of this study, the context within which residents of the case study communities and elected representatives, as participants, have viewed the concept of the rural urban imbalance has arguably informed the subjective benchmarks of participants' perceptions of the levels and standards of essential functions and services delivery. Participants across all of the study communities conveyed perceptions regarding the inequities in government policy approaches and funding allocation methodology which rural communities now faced. These differences in the treatment by governments were perceived as applying to a range of functions and services-related issues arising from within rural and urban communities, with one significant area being education. Governments were perceived as either failing or unwilling to acknowledge the important, wider social and economic role played by education services in rural communities.

In the aftermath of the tightly contested state election of September 2008, the National Party held sway in protracted negotiations with the Labor and Liberal parties that would ultimately determine the fate of the next state government. These discussions concluded with the National Party committing its support to the Liberal Party as part of a coalition government (Murray 2008). In return, the formation of political alliance would see the allocation by government of funding and programs ostensibly designed to re-focus policy direction on rural community infrastructure and services deficiencies (Preedy 2008). These policy decisions reflect the reality of the political climate and, given the significant role of rural electoral representation within government, arguably has amplified the 'rural voice'. Conversely, there has been intense public debate and associated community perceptions generated by these arrangements (Kelly 2008; Taylor 2009a). These contrasting views have the potential to exacerbate tensions between urban and rural populations regarding the appropriateness of government policy choices on infrastructure and services delivery expenditure (Casellas 2008; Deceglie 2009; Banks 2008). Such philosophical arguments have seemingly become more common as adverse economic

circumstances have compelled the state government to re-prioritize and reduce expenditure programs within urban and rural communities alike (Kerr 2008; Lampathakis 2008; Taylor 2008b, 2008a, 2009b).

During this study, the perceptions that were identified from processes impacting participants of the study rural communities and involving the elected representatives saw a high value being placed upon representation. Earlier sections of this chapter provided historical background behind the preferential electoral representation structures that have operated within Western Australian rural community settings. The longevity of these representation arrangements was largely attributable to the politically dominant rural upper house elected representatives and rural constituents generally having convinced successive parliaments of the ongoing need for such mechanisms. Reform attempts had been made by political parties over time and prior to 2005, with a view to more equitable electoral representation arrangements being introduced (Harvey 2002). Governments therefore lacked the preparedness to pursue reforms and rural constituencies successfully argued that rural communities should be afforded access to these preferential electoral arrangements as a counterbalance to an otherwise overwhelming metropolitan-based influence. What emerges throughout many rural constituencies within the context of electoral reform processes is the view that electoral representation arrangements were more than about simply determining the election of representatives (Clery 2002b, 2002a; Spencer 2007; Taylor 2008c). Rather, rural communities had also perceived these arrangements as providing a basis through which the 'rural voice' could always be heard on issues and that 'entitlements', including essential functions and services delivery, would be maintained. Rural communities and their residents had for these reasons, always harboured suspicions of proposals by governments to implement electoral reform (Spencer 2007; Craven 2007). During this study, participants of the case study communities echoed such perceptions of disaffection and disenfranchisement.

Citizens of the study communities perceived themselves to be as reliant upon essential functions and services delivery now as they have been at any time during the past two decades. For these communities, this dependency has been tested with

the ascendancy of neoliberalism as the pre-eminent influence on public policy debate within Australia and the driver behind widespread changes to public services delivery. This study described how federal and state governments, beginning in the 1990s embodied these neoliberal policy approaches through reforms that were introduced with a view to achieving deregulation, increased competitiveness and efficiencies in functions and services. The challenges that public sector organizations now face as a consequence of this contemporary environment have seen these entities adopting corporate style cultures and practices that embrace defined service quality standards and performance outcomes as part of their operations. The corporatization developments that were described within this study involving public utilities represent a substantial redefinition of the relationship that had existed between government and rural communities under previous state paternalism and Keynesian/Fordist frameworks (Jones and Tonts 1995; Tonts and Haslam McKenzie 2005). Governments had previously provided essential functions and services to rural communities in pursuing the economic development goals of the state and in promoting the social equity and welfare of its citizens.

What the study highlights is that within the contemporary rural landscape, these ideas are important to communities developing appropriate strategies aimed at overcoming gaps in functions and services that have been created by governments and corporatized government business enterprises. Within the frameworks that now prevail, governments through their public sector organizations are increasingly being pressured to deliver efficiencies as much as services. The most that communities can now expect from governments is the continuing decline and rationalization of functions and services, but they must accept the tools of self-sufficiency that governments are offering by way of concession. Under these circumstances, rural communities must assume the challenges of leadership so as to seek to shape their own futures or otherwise, face the prospect of uncertain ones (Catanzaro, Thair, and Ferguson 2008). Participants of the case study rural communities also perceived significant differences as being evident in the standards of electricity and water services since the responsibility for electricity infrastructure and water supply service functions was transferred from the government statutory agencies to the government

trading enterprises. These perceptions were that the standards of essential functions and services to communities have generally suffered because the decisions made by government trading enterprises affecting delivery and resourcing are based purely upon commercial principles.

Participants of the case study rural communities overall, perceived the direct delivery by governments of services in health, education and transport functions as being of a higher standard and more 'reliable' under previous paternalistic regimes than is the case under contemporary arrangements. Participants did acknowledge that the 'uneconomical' nature of these essential functions and services lead to government being the only viable model for their delivery to rural communities. Nevertheless, participants throughout the case study communities also conveyed common perceptions of a gradual 'decline' in the standards of delivery of these essential functions as being associated with prevailing public policy trends affecting government organizational structures. Examples of functions and services delivery changes cited by participants included reforms in the areas of health and education centred upon economic rationalism. Government policies preferencing centralization or regionalization of these functions and services were implemented in response to growing public demand for scarce and highly specialized resources and have required the achievement of greater efficiencies within the relevant departments and agencies.

The elected representatives interviewed during this study conveyed perceptions of a general inadequacy in the levels and standards of essential functions and services throughout the case study rural communities. Elected representatives perceived that the impacts of these shortcomings were more pronounced within rural communities that had experienced growth or had been subject to activities which impose considerable demands upon essential functions and services. Likewise, these participants identified gaps in the delivery of services such as health and education as being significant influencing factors within established, 'traditional' rural communities. The elected representatives also identified constituency-wide knowledge, awareness and expectations of highly mobile populations as being

important factors that have influenced community assessments of the performance of provider organizations in the delivery of essential functions and services.

Another significant finding which has emerged from this study stems from the perception of participants that functions and services delivery issues within rural communities are not widely understood by policy makers, provider organizations and urban-based populations. At various stages during the research, it was perceived that an ignorance of rural community issues had contributed to the essential functions and services delivery needs of the study communities being treated less favourably than would otherwise be the case for issues raised by communities of metropolitan or other regional areas. The participants perceived that these disparities were manifested in the strategies and ongoing service delivery arrangements of provider organizations.

This study identified participants' perceptions that providers, policy makers and residents of urban centres were generally unaware or uncaring of the geographical impediments and the demographic issues confronting the study communities. Participants perceived the lack of understanding of these factors as having manifested in functions and programs that generate significant travel access and cost obligations for residents of the communities. For some participants within the study communities, the perceived neglect of essential functions and services delivery concerns raised by rural communities was symptomatic of this rural urban imbalance. These observations also appeared to reflect the perceptions of participants that greater acknowledgement should be afforded to the contribution made by agriculture in society, and to the commitments and sacrifices made by the populations that choose to reside within rural communities.

Participants have identified a disparity in the functions and services delivery throughout the various study communities and in general perceived themselves as being abandoned by both providers and policy makers. The participants cited ignorance on the part of urban populations to the plight of residents throughout rural communities as being among the significant reasons. The commonly held views

expressed by these participants were that policy makers needed to invest greater efforts to personally familiarize themselves with rural community issues. Consequently, this study also identified from among participants an overwhelming view that the study communities have an entitlement to essential functions and services which are of an equal standard to those provided to residents who live in urban locations, by virtue of the contributions which they make to the broader economy.

.../[If [governments] [are] planning on making decisions in the level of services, they need appropriate community consultation .../ I would say [to decision-makers] 'Listen, to people in rural areas and don't forget us'.../ Australia is a great country and it's built on people with ideas, and the people in country areas have a lot of ideas. But if you shut down the country areas you will lose, every person becomes another number and gets lost in the crowd. Well, governments are always talking about decentralisation, but they've never done anything about it.../ You've got to decentralise and keep your small communities alive.../

7.2.5 Corporatized services

Corporatization was identified in Chapter Five as being a significant contemporary policy and structural development that has affected the delivery of essential functions and services throughout the case study communities. The widespread implementation of corporatized government services was clearly understood by participants throughout the study communities, although not necessarily supported by them. However, the requirement for government corporations and agencies to satisfy customer expectations while also heeding neoliberal government priorities provokes many ambiguities and consequently causes customer expectations not to be met, resulting in frustration with government. Participants described experiencing gaps in service standards and significant deficiencies in the associated services infrastructure, which they perceived to be evidence of corporatized delivery arrangements. Participants perceived commercial constraints as contributing to the corporatized providers' inability to respond effectively to infrastructure pressures associated with general community growth and specific resources development projects.

For the government trading enterprises that participated in this study, community engagement seemingly exists within the organizational framework as a governance or accountability mechanism in much the same manner as do the customer service charters (Water Corporation of Western Australia 2013b; Western Power 2012a). These enterprises have undertaken consultation consistent with governance frameworks and customer service charters. Nonetheless, research participants, including some elected representatives, expressed feelings of disempowerment associated with the community engagement strategies that corporatized business enterprises adopted, particularly when outcomes did not meet their expectations, or when there was no evidence of meaningful consultation. Such outcomes are seemingly at odds with the prominence that is accorded to the contemporary public sector concepts of consumerism, consumer sovereignty and citizenship (Du Gay and Salaman 1992; Jung 2010; Pollitt 1988; Potter 1988; Podger 2012; Sadler 2000; Vardon 2000; Zanetti 1998).

7.2.6 Citizenship/democracy and representation

Throughout Western Australia's rural communities a perception has prevailed about the role that preferential electoral representation arrangements have played in achieving fairness and equity in the delivery of functions and services (Davies and Tonts 2007). These long-standing electoral representation arrangements, which were heavily embedded in the value-laden notion of 'countrymindedness', centered on generous vote weighting in rural constituencies when compared to those which were afforded to votes in metropolitan electorates. The presence of this uneven electoral landscape had brought into focus the role of the state in pursuing social welfare and equity outcomes for citizens of rural communities. However, as Davies and Tonts (2007) explain, despite the existence of these preferential electoral arrangements, successive governments continued to implement policy decisions that led to the reduction of essential functions and services for rural communities.

The passage through the Parliament of Western Australia in 2005 of the One Vote One Value legislation removed the state's long-standing malapportioned electoral representation arrangements weighted in favour of rural constituents. Enacted in its

place was a principle of voting equality between metropolitan and rural constituents, using an approximately equal enrolment of voters throughout all 57 electorates of the Legislative Assembly of Western Australia (Parliament of Western Australia 2005).

Davies and Tonts (2007) found that the removal of the previous preferential electoral representation arrangements has had wide-ranging social, economic and political implications for rural communities. The passage of the reforms introducing equality of electoral representation marked a significant policy achievement for the government, yet challenges remained in ensuring that it minimized the disaffection that would arise within rural communities. Davies and Tonts (2007), in describing the 'iniquity' of the former electoral structures, identified that the then government could have sought to counter the anticipated resistance of rural communities to the reforms. Rural advocacy groups also called upon the government to place greater focus on socio-spatial equity issues and objectives with a view to improving community accessibility of essential functions and services (Davies and Tonts 2007). As this study has identified, there was a widely held perception throughout the study communities that citizens have largely been disenfranchised. Parliamentarians have, within a political context at least, acknowledged the ongoing deficiencies in the delivery of essential functions and services that confront citizens of rural communities throughout Western Australia. The economic and social issues that have emerged for communities as a result of these delivery frameworks, and their impacts upon citizens, are also widely acknowledged. The challenge for governments and elected representatives lies in developing appropriate policies that can promote perceptions of equity in the delivery of essential functions and services to citizens of rural communities as compared to those that their urban-based counterparts receive.

7.2.7 Community development and local level leadership

During this study, there has been extensive discussion regarding the interrelationship between the neoliberal public policy reforms in rural area governance and dilemmas in the delivery of essential functions and services facing the case study communities. Government organizations and corporatized government entities have continued to

reshape delivery models in response to government policy agendas which require that efficiency and effectiveness imperatives be met. Consequently, these rural communities are increasingly being forced to turn to locally-initiated solutions in a bid to fill the gaps that have been created as services are reduced or withdrawn. Some universally acknowledged and enduring attributes, in the form of 'capital' (resources), exist throughout rural communities in varying degrees. There was a commonality of purpose among customers/consumers/citizens of these communities brought about by the issues surrounding the reduction/withdrawal of services. These communities are certainly not all equally well-equipped to deal effectively with the problems that they face. Leadership, invariably through local government, has been highlighted throughout much of the contemporary literature as being the critical factor that brings the capital together and enables it to be effective within rural communities (Davies 2009; Morris 2007).

Within the field of rural governance, the role of local government has evolved substantially from that of a traditional provider of functions and services to being a proponent of opportunities and alternatives for new services. For the study communities, the advocacy that rural local governments conduct is highly significant as customers/consumers, disaffected by the policies of central governments, seek a focal point through which to channel their discontent. With the pursuit of effectiveness in services delivery outcomes, however, comes the obligation upon communities themselves to be pro-active and amenable to change. The study identified that contemporary policies of governments and strategies of providers highlight the need for communities' leaders to identify local solutions to address the decline in essential functions and services. At issue for many communities is, however, the absence of local capacity. These outcomes are consistent with developments that have occurred throughout rural Australia and in a Western Australian context in particular (Cavaye 2000, 2001; Herbert-Cheshire 2000; Kilpatrick and Abbott-Chapman 2005; Kelly 2000; Kelly and Steed 2004).

Under the previous, more paternalistic approaches of governments, the conventional wisdom was that rural communities would endure (Collits 1999; Haslam McKenzie

1999, 2000; Tonts 1998, 2000, 2005; Tonts and Jones 1997). More recently, doubts have been raised about whether or not some rural communities are going to remain sustainable (Alston 2002a, 2002b; Herbert-Cheshire 2003; Herbert-Cheshire and Higgins 2004; Loechel, Lawrence, and Cheshire 2005).

7.3 Implications of the research

Citizens of the study communities perceived themselves to be as reliant upon the delivery of essential functions and services now as they have been at any time during the past two decades. For these communities, this dependency has been tested with the ascendancy of neoliberalism such that it is the pre-eminent influence on public policy debates within Australia and the driver behind widespread changes to public services. What the study highlights is that within the contemporary rural landscape, there remains an element of the traditional notion that governments are responsible for the delivery of essential functions and services. This perception of government's role reflects a sense of a citizens' democratic entitlement regardless of where that citizen lives, and that government investment in the delivery of essential functions and services returns economic benefits to communities. Such perceptions are largely nostalgic and somewhat indicative of rural communities' struggle for relevance as they are no longer afforded special privileges under contemporary representation structures and changes in government approaches to regional policy.

It is important for communities to have an appreciation of the changing nature of the role of government, and consequently the delivery of essential services. The expectations of citizens and communities about what is deemed necessary in the delivery of essential services no longer accords with the contemporary government and governance frameworks. It is evident from this research that rural communities, in particular, must acknowledge and understand the contemporary rural governance models and their implications for government organizations and corporatized government business enterprises. Within the frameworks that now prevail, governments, through their public sector organizations, are increasingly being pressured to deliver program efficiencies as much as the services themselves. The most that communities can now expect from governments is the continuing decline

and rationalization of functions and services, but they must accept the tools of self-sufficiency that governments are offering by way of concession. Under these circumstances, rural communities must assume the challenges of leadership so as to seek to shape their own futures or, otherwise, face the prospect of these futures being uncertain.

These observations have particular importance for the notions of community leadership in rural communities. In addition, it is important that rural communities purposefully delineate the role they wish their local community organisations and local governments to take in the delivery of services. This is to ensure that they have a deliberative say in this rather than find that they become the default provider. The delivery of essential functions and services to the study communities by governments has historically been influenced by Australian rural policy and its foundations in the *welfare state*. However, under the *enabling state* the focus is not on paternalistic policy frameworks but on rural governance approaches (Cavaye 2004). These contemporary strategies require effective government and community partnership to achieve success in the delivery of essential functions and services. They have also caused governments and, indeed, the communities themselves to re-evaluate their expectations as to which communities are likely to be sustainable. It is important that elected policy makers, and customers/citizens make judgments between the rural communities which they consider to be justified in receiving continued support and those that are deemed as being unsustainable.

7.4 Limitations of the research

It is important to note that the findings of this research must be considered conditional against certain structural and methodological limitations. This section of the chapter places the outcomes within these limiting contexts.

7.4.1 Limitation of provider organizations – public sector organizations

The processes which led to the emergence of the participant-generated definition of ‘essential functions and services’ resulted in a range of government departments and

statutory agencies being approached for their participation in the research, and a number of organizations subsequently agreeing to do so. The participation in the research of two government trading enterprises was also obtained. The study was limited in scope insofar as the effects of governments' delivery of essential functions and services on the study communities were assessed with respect to three departments and statutory agencies, i.e. The Department of Education and Training, the WA Country Health Service and Main Roads Western Australia. These organizations are, however, considered representative of all government delivery agencies that participated. The study also included the Water Corporation of Western Australia and Western Power, both organizations which have been transformed from being government utilities to corporatized providers under public sector reforms. This approach ultimately led to the study findings and assumptions being centred upon the activities of two government departments engaged in functions and services delivery, and one government department engaged predominantly in functions delivery. The framework for reporting on the outcomes of the study was organized around the recurring essential functions and services issues raised by community representatives, individuals and elected representatives, using the study communities as the points of focus (Yin 1994).

7.4.2 Limitation of customers/consumers – participating communities

In Chapter One of this study a definition of rurality was posited. Subsequently, candidates for the research were selected on this basis. This study involved customer perceptions of effectiveness and standards in the delivery of essential functions and services in six Western Australian rural communities. The participating communities possessed differing geographical, demographic and socio-economic attributes and were selected on the basis of their 'rurality', their conformance to which was explained in Chapter One. They are, however, a subset of the entire state population and are therefore not necessarily representative of all Western Australians living in rural, regional and remote communities.

7.4.3 Limitation of research method – case study approach

The research has centred upon a case study approach and this methodology is not generalizable. While multiple cases have been used, a number of common issues were recognized. Consequently, the organisation of the research was around the identified issues pertaining to essential functions and services (Stake 2005; Yin 1994). At the same time, there was considerable variation in the case study sites due to their geographical location, and demographic and socio-economic factors. In order for the case study methodology to be truly representative, significantly more case study sites would need to be examined. The limitation of this case study form is that findings from each community case are illustrative only and are not generalizable. The benefits of the case study method, however, are that it enables issues of common interest to emerge and to be discussed.

7.4.4 Limitation of research method – focus groups and elite interviews

Chapter Three of this study described how focus groups involving customers/citizens were held within each study community during the data collection phase. The focus groups were used to obtain participants' definitions of 'essential functions and services'. Participants' perceptions of levels and standards of the delivery of essential functions and services and any associated issues were also identified. Elite interviews with representatives of provider organizations and elected representatives of the Parliament of Western Australia were also conducted. Within qualitative research, focus groups and elite interviews are acknowledged as being legitimate techniques – both as data collection mechanisms and in facilitating participant–researcher engagement with a view to promoting emergent themes. Participants in the focus groups and some participants who were engaged in the elite interviews relied upon their memory of past events when conveying their perceptions of changes in the delivery of essential functions and services and the performance of provider organizations. The potential for participants in focus groups and elite interviews to encounter recall error/bias is recognized as a limitation of this methodology within qualitative research. Accordingly, the implications of these factors for the findings of this study are also acknowledged.

7.5 Recommendations for future research

7.5.1 Essential functions and services

Chapters Three and Five of this study described the methodology and the strategies that were applied throughout the case study communities, so as to allow a participant-generated definition of essential functions and services to emerge, consistent with the exploratory research. Furthermore, the participant-generated definition served as the basis upon which the involvement of certain government departments, statutory agencies and government trading enterprises within this study was achieved.

A review of public policy literature was conducted and this identified various categories of ‘essential functions and services’ as the responsibility of the Commonwealth, state and territory public sectors (Australian Government – Productivity Commission 2011a, 2011b). This literature presents a picture of public sector involvement in the delivery of essential functions and services that predominantly perpetuates traditional government approaches to and frameworks for such activities. Accordingly, the primary objective of such delivery is the provision of basic service needs (e.g. public health, law enforcement, emergency services and utilities) that are crucial to sustaining the life of citizens or preventing their harm. These concepts attract added significance given the origins of the participant-generated definition of essential functions and services that has underpinned much of this research. Equally, however, rural communities now find themselves positioned within a ‘rural governance’ environment from which there have been associated essential functions and services implications.

Throughout rural communities, governments have invested heavily in the delivery of capacity-building programs and strategies, the aims of which are for citizens and organizations to be appropriately resourced and skilled so as to feel empowered to seek local solutions to problems (Cavaye 2000, 2001; Craig 2007; Davies 2009). Elected officials and policy makers have been keen to promote community development as being the essence of this new government–citizen relationship.

Equally, empowerment means that it has been necessary for rural communities themselves to assume responsibility for ensuring that an essential function or service is provided, when other levels of government will no longer contribute to their delivery. Within contemporary rural governance, leadership arguably stands as the core characteristic which renders communities pursuing capacity building and seeking to apply capital as 'effective' or 'ineffective' (Cavaye 2000, 2001; Herbert-Cheshire 2000; Kilpatrick and Abbott-Chapman 2005; Tonts 1996). Research into leadership development and leadership models appropriate to the rural governance framework is important for long-term capacity building strategies.

As the findings of this research appear to indicate, local government is the institution which citizens and other organizations are increasingly turning to for leadership. Nowhere are the implications or leadership more evident than in the demands which are being imposed upon rural local governments to engage in the delivery of 'essential functions and services' (e.g. aspects of health services, housing, law enforcement, and road network infrastructure projects). Given this shifting landscape, there are significant political challenges faced by local governments and their communities in securing the essential functions and services needed to ensure viability. However, as has been reflected in ongoing inter-governmental debate, this capacity appears to be considerably diminished by the failure of the Commonwealth and the states to recognize and to adequately fund local government. In the absence of conducive political environments, individual rural governments and communities rely heavily on effective advocacy (whether as a result of capacity-building initiatives and leadership programs or drawn from within) to ensure they have the resources, skills and capacity that are needed. There is an important need for research which considers how local communities are taking up the demand for their engagement in the delivery of services and the capacity-building requirements for local government in regional areas to meet the new challenges arising from the need to provide effective advocacy for services.

The findings of this study indicate that there is a need for further research to be conducted into the current use of the term 'essential functions and services' to

determine whether its definition can be broadened to recognize its relevance and application to community development. This is especially important given the current approaches to rural governance which have seen local communities and local government being required to assume a larger burden of functions and services delivery and to provide innovative solutions to community development.

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Appendix A

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Appendix A-1

Chapter Three Methodology

Overview of strategies implemented during study to promote adherence to Criteria* in Grounded Research.

<i>Criteria for Grounded Research</i>	<i>Description of the issue</i>	<i>Research strategies applied</i>
<p><i>1. Emergent data providing valuable insights within a social context</i></p>	<p>Examination of the affinities which participants have to their rural community.</p> <p>Affinity, in this context, is highly relevant to what Cloke <i>et al</i> (2005: 380) define as ‘rurality and otherness’, and it brings both physical and psychological connotations.</p>	<p>Consideration of such concepts as community cohesiveness, wholeness and a problem-free environment proved to be an important aspect of the examination of essential functions and services delivery issues and their implications for the case study rural communities.</p> <p>The existence or otherwise of such attributes was identified through a process of direct engagement with participants in the focus groups and the elite interviews.</p>
<p><i>2. Ethical considerations of anonymity and protection of respondent identity afforded the highest priority and embedded in the research design.</i></p>	<p>All processes and mechanisms used in the data collection phase were required to be in conformity with the Joint National Health and Medical Research Council/Australian Vice Chancellors’ Committee Research Guidelines and the National Privacy Principles.</p> <p>Accordingly, it was necessary for the research framework was to be approved by the Curtin University’s Human Research Ethics Committee.</p>	<p>Strategies were implemented in the field by the researcher explaining both verbally and in writing to prospective participants in the focus groups, the elite interviews and the confirmatory survey instrument, the voluntary nature of their participation and providing assurances regarding anonymity.</p>

<i>Criteria for Grounded Research</i>	<i>Description of the issue</i>	<i>Research strategies applied</i>
<p><i>3. Results will always be partial and provisional.</i></p>	<p>Whiteley (2004) attributes the provisional and ‘becoming’ nature of data as being an outcome of using grounded research method in the conduct of some qualitative studies.</p> <p>Of importance here therefore, is not just the data that is collected, but also the processes of engagement (‘interaction’) that are been applied between the researcher and the participants.</p>	<p>The research in this thesis aligns itself to social constructionist theory and the work of Shotter (1993) concerning the self-organization of meaning in human conversation (Griffin et al (1998).</p> <p>In Shotter’s (1993) paradigm, socially constructed (oral) encounters and reciprocal speech rather than written texts provide the foundation for interaction. The individual is assisted in their daily social lives through what Shotter (1993) defines as three kinds of ‘knowing’ – namely; ‘knowing that’, ‘knowing how’, and ‘knowing from within’ (or joint action). Griffin et al (1998).</p>
<p><i>4. Constraints that come from the theoretical perspectives will be built into the overall design.</i></p>	<p>Whiteley (2004) identified the departure from pure grounded theory method and ‘forcing’ as being unavoidable consequences of concessions made to the cultures, experiences and meanings of respondents thereby facilitating their participation in the research.</p>	<p>In conducting the rural community focus groups, and the elite interviews, this research relied upon a structured questions approach but containing capacity for follow up of issues and elaboration by participants.</p>

<i>Criteria for Grounded Research</i>	<i>Description of the issue</i>	<i>Research strategies applied</i>
<p><i>4. Constraints that come from the theoretical perspectives will be built into the overall design. (cont.)</i></p>	<p>A grounded research approach (Whiteley 2004) requires that such constraints be foreshadowed in the research design.</p> <p>This research was also subject to theoretical constraints because it did not follow the traditional grounded theory method (Charmaz 2007).</p> <p>The research design acknowledged the limitations imposed by these structures upon data discovery and emergence. By the same token, however, it was important that the design be sufficiently robust and wide-ranging to support the relevant case study approaches – namely explanatory (multiple) (Yin 1994, 2003) and instrumental (collective) (Stake 2005), which required coordination between the individual cases.</p>	<p>A confirmatory survey designed in closed question format using a Likert Scale was subsequently used involving stratified samples of residential and business customers in the case study rural communities.</p> <p>For qualitative research founded on case study it has been common to see the use of a multiple methods approach (Mason 2006; Stake 2005; Yin 2003). These methods (i.e. focus groups, elite interviews and confirmatory survey, historical records, strategic and policy documents) are what Stake 2005: 454 describes as serving: “to clarify meaning by identifying different ways of looking at the case”. Triangulation therefore, served as the basis by which the researcher sought to reflect the validity of research outcomes (Bourgeois and Eisenhardt 1988; Eisenhardt 1989; Kohlbacher 2006).</p>

<i>Criteria for Grounded Research</i>	<i>Description of the issue</i>	<i>Research strategies applied</i>
<p>5. <i>When considering sampling or other research activities, these will be as far as possible, respondent directed.</i></p>	<p>Whiteley (2004) cites the use of respondent-directed research mechanisms as being an important characteristic of grounded research.</p>	<p>For this research, the primary data collection activities were respondent-directed.</p> <p>The final element, the confirmatory survey of selected residential and business customers in each case study community, although not enacted for the purposes of ‘sampling’ in the statistical sense, was also a voluntary and respondent directed instrument.</p>
<p>6. <i>There will be a collaborative relationship between researcher and respondent.</i></p>	<p>Whiteley (2004) cites ‘collaborative relationships’ as being a characteristic that distinguishes grounded research method from other qualitative research methodologies.</p>	<p>For this research, outcomes were also made possible only through collaboration between the researcher and the participants. This was reflected in the <i>organization</i> process – notably, recruitment / inviting nominations, informing prospective participants of their roles and rights; prospective participants assenting to their involvement based upon these ‘ground rules’.</p> <p>Collaboration was also a critical requirement of the <i>data collection</i> process – the achievement of which would be manifested in effective relationships between the researcher and the participants, in the focus groups and in the elite interviews.</p>

<i>Criteria for Grounded Research</i>	<i>Description of the issue</i>	<i>Research strategies applied</i>
<p><i>7. Any decision to select ‘socially stable’ constructs for quantitative measurement will be made following clear indications from the qualitative data. They will be reflected as matters of judgement and expressed as such.</i></p>	<p>Whiteley (2004) describes how the creation of a quantitative instrument to further ‘explore’ the ‘socially stable’ constructs of participants was not a planned phase of her research, but one which reflected ‘emergence’.</p> <p>During earlier interviews which the researchers had conducted with front line employees, supervisors and managers of stevedoring organizations, the participants described certain personal constructs (e.g. trust and communication) as having a ‘factual quality’. The researchers, after deeming these elements to be sufficiently stable, then labelled them ‘socially stable’ constructs.</p>	<p>This research involved an examination of customer perceptions of essential functions and services delivery issues affecting selected case study rural communities. In contrast to Whiteley’s (2004) situation, however, the confirmatory survey developed to garner responses from stratified samples of customers in the case study rural communities was not a result of emergence in grounded theory. Rather, it had always been intended to implement the confirmatory surveys as the final phase after the completion of the focus groups and the elite interviews.</p> <p>The purpose of the confirmatory survey was therefore to promote triangulation of method within the realms of the case study approach (See Stake 2005).</p>
<p><i>8. The imposing of structural, functional or other organisational categories, on an emergent design will be identified and explained in the research methodology.</i></p>	<p>A researcher employing Whiteley’s (2004) grounded research approach is required to identify and explain the application of structural, functional or other organisational categories, on an emergent design.</p>	<p>For this research, the research design elements focussed on promoting theoretical saturation, discovery and emergence through the data collection methods, data analysis and the coding processes (Charmaz 2006; Hood 2007; Kelle 2007; Morse 2007).</p>

<i>Criteria for Grounded Research</i>	<i>Description of the issue</i>	<i>Research strategies applied</i>
<p>8. <i>The imposing of structural, functional or other organisational categories, on an emergent design will be identified and explained in the research methodology. (cont.)</i></p>		<p>The initial use of some <i>a priori</i> constructs (i.e. definitions of ‘essential function and services’, ‘rurality’, ‘community’, ‘empowerment’, and ‘government business enterprise’) in the research objectives, led to these constructs ultimately being manifested in some of the categories developed from data coding.</p> <p>Eisenhardt (1989) identifies that <i>a priori</i> specification of constructs have not thus far represented a common feature of qualitative research (See also Kohlbacher 2006). Eisenhardt (1989: 536) does concede, however, that their use: “...can help shape the design of theory-building research ... because... it permits researchers to measure constructs more accurately.” Accordingly, for this research, the researcher deemed the use of <i>a priori</i> constructs to be appropriate, given that theory-building constituted one of the primary aims.</p>
	<p>Many qualitative researchers (See Byrne-Armstrong <i>et al</i> 2001; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Miles and Huberman 1994; Seale 2004; Wengraf 2001) have written about the issue of the ‘relationship between perception and reality for individuals’.</p>	

<i>Criteria for Grounded Research</i>	<i>Description of the issue</i>	<i>Research strategies applied</i>
<p>9. Aspects of the research may look 'real-like' but they will not fulfil realist assumptions.(cont.)</p>		<p>In terms of this research, the examination of <i>perceptions</i> regarding the essential functions and services issues extended to residential and business customers, representatives of essential functions and services providers, and to elected policy makers. The study of these perceptions involved bringing forth the 'lived experiences' of participants, and of the <i>meanings</i> (i.e. realities) which they have attributed to their particular social worlds.</p>
<p>10. Items on quantitative instruments will be generated from the emergent concerns/ideas of respondents.</p>		<p>The confirmatory survey design closely followed the content of the questions used in focus groups and elite interviews. The primary rationale for this was triangulation in case study (Stake 2005 refers to 'different ways of looking at the case').</p> <p>Following feedback received from participants regarding the questions used during the focus groups and elite interviews, the survey instrument was reviewed. Minor adjustments were made to those questions with the aim of making the survey more accessible to respondents and hence, to produce data which is both interesting and relevant.</p>

<i>Criteria for Grounded Research</i>	<i>Description of the issue</i>	<i>Research strategies applied</i>
<p><i>11. There may be some dialectical tacking between paradigms but these activities will be clearly stated and related to theories such as Schultz and Hatch (1996) on paradigm interplay.</i></p>	<p>Further understanding of Whiteley's (2004) reference to 'dialectical tacking between paradigms' as an agent for grounded research may be promoted through reference to Burrell and Morgan's (1979) Four Paradigm Model of Social Theory.</p> <p>Burrell and Morgan's (1979) four paradigms are categorized into:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) The radical humanist paradigm (2) The radical structuralist paradigm (3) The interpretive paradigm (4) The functionalist paradigm. <p>Subsequent decades following the release of Burrell and Morgan's (1979) model were marked by extensive debate among qualitative researchers concerning the questions of <i>multiple paradigms, paradigm incommensurability, and structuralist inquiry</i> (See Deshpande 1983; Hassard 1988; Hassard 1991; Lewis and Grimes 1999; Weaver and Gioia 1994; Willmott 1993).</p>	<p>The underlying concepts of Schultz and Hatch's (1996) paradigm interplay were considered to be highly relevant to this thesis. <i>Functionalism</i> has particular relevance in terms of the organizations engaged in essential functions and services delivery, given their traditional bureaucratic structures, and their internal rule-bound cultures (Daft 2007; Garston 1993).</p> <p>These factors, in turn, had created obstacles for the way in which managers and employees of bureaucratic organizations were able to communicate with their customers and deal with stakeholders (e.g. Ministers, other agencies).</p> <p>It was the recognition of such limitations by these bureaucracies, which led to many eventually adopting what could be termed as being a more 'corporate' approach.</p> <p>These transitions occurred rapidly in Australia and globally during the 1970s, driven largely by severe economic pressures and the resultant harsh realities visited upon political leaders and their constituents (Barzelay 2001; Kettl 2000; Whincop 2003).</p> <p>By the 1980s, and leading into the later decades of the twentieth century, one significant driver for reform within public bureaucracies in many western economies was the implementation of New Public</p>

<i>Criteria for Grounded Research</i>	<i>Description of the issue</i>	<i>Research strategies applied</i>
<p><i>11. There may be some dialectical tacking between paradigms but these activities will be clearly stated and related to theories such as Schultz and Hatch (1996) on paradigm interplay (cont.):</i></p>	<p>Significant among these contributions however, was that of Schultz and Hatch (1996), which had served to progress the debate on multi-paradigm relations. Schultz and Hatch's (1996) work proposed three distinct theoretical positions in the context of the original Burrell and Morgan (1979) model. These were: (a) <i>paradigm incommensurability</i>; (b) <i>paradigm integration</i>; and (c) <i>paradigm crossing</i>.</p> <p>Schultz and Hatch (1996: 534), having further expanded on the concept of <i>paradigm crossing</i> as a third metatheoretical position to hold up against both incommensurability and integration, also developed a fourth strategy, which they labelled '<i>interplay</i>'. They defined '<i>interplay</i>' as being: "the simultaneous recognition of both contrasts and connections between paradigms." (Schultz and Hatch 1996: 534).</p> <p>Schultz and Hatch (1996), in creating this '<i>interplay</i>' strategy, confined their discussion to the paradigms of</p>	<p>Management ('NPM'), a measure designed to generate greater whole-of-government efficiency and effectiveness outcomes (Christensen and Laegreid 2007; Ferlie <i>et al</i> 1996).</p> <p>Since the early 1980s, a further significant reform initiative affecting public bureaucracy in Australia has involved the ongoing process of corporatization of a vast array of statutory agencies at the Commonwealth and state government levels (Fairbrother <i>et al</i> 2002; Funnell and Cooper 1988; Whincop 2003).</p> <p><i>Interpretivism</i> was also identified as having a resonance to this research – especially for the essential functions and services providers, and the elected policy makers associated with the case study rural communities. Within contemporary setting, the role of providing essential functions and services (e.g. electricity, water, gas) is vested in corporatized government business entities in Western Australia, departments and statutory agencies retained within the 'whole-of-government' framework (e.g. health, education, housing, police, fire and emergency services) must also operate according to more 'corporate-style' key performance indicators. In some Australian jurisdictions, however, following public asset sales it is now not uncommon that fully privatized corporations are responsible for</p>

<i>Criteria for Grounded Research</i>	<i>Description of the issue</i>	<i>Research strategies applied</i>
<p><i>11. There may be some dialectical tacking between paradigms but these activities will be clearly stated and related to theories such as Schultz and Hatch (1996) on paradigm interplay (cont.):</i></p> <p><i>12. Any quantitative or confirmatory work will be built on bedrock of emerged and respondent-directed data.</i></p>	<p><i>functionalism and interpretivism as defined by Burrell and Morgan (1979). Functionalism was chosen because this has been the dominant paradigm within organization theory (Gioia and Pitre 1990; Morgan and Smircich 1980). Likewise, Schultz and Hatch (1996) selected interpretivism because it offered the greatest contrast to functionalism's theories.</i></p> <p>Whiteley (2004) identifies the emergent and respondent-directed nature of any quantitative of confirmatory process conducted in addition to grounded research.</p>	<p>particular functions and services. As Shultz and Hatch (1996: 531) point out, organizations (entities) that subscribe to interpretivism should ideally reflect this approach through: "organizational culture...organizational identity, learning, and cognition."</p> <p>The confirmatory survey process was implemented as an adjunct to the qualitative data collection undertaken during the focus groups and in the elite interviews.</p> <p>The confirmatory survey questions were modelled on the questions used in earlier qualitative processes (i.e. the focus groups and the elite interviews). These questions had also been subject to the prior approval of the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee. Accordingly and where appropriate, the researcher used feedback generated from participants in the focus groups and in the elite interviews, to modify the confirmatory survey questions. The outcomes of the confirmatory survey were then applied by the researcher to inform the findings and recommendations chapters of the thesis.</p>

<i>Criteria for Grounded Research</i>	<i>Description of the issue</i>	<i>Research strategies applied</i>
<i>13. Quantitative results will be descriptive, and attached to/informed by qualitative findings.</i>	Whiteley (2004) asserts that in grounded research, quantitative data can only be applied in descriptive form. As such, its scope is limited to being attached to, or informing, qualitative outcomes.	In this research the confirmatory survey was not undertaken for 'statistical purposes'. Rather it was intended to serve a 'descriptive' function and to assist in informing the qualitative material obtained from the focus groups and the elite interviews.

* Source: (Whiteley 2004)

Appendix A-2
Introductory letter to local governments

28 August 2005

Our Ref: GMR researchintro

Mr/Mrs/Ms Surname

Position
Organization
Address
Address

Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms Surname

INTRODUCTION TO DOCTORAL RESEARCH PROJECT – CUSTOMER PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVENESS AND STANDARDS IN ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS AND SERVICES DELIVERY IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

In mid August 2005, I wrote to various community/volunteer organizations operating throughout the <Local Government Name>, by way of introduction to a doctoral research project which I have recently commenced under the auspices of Curtin University of Technology's Graduate School of Business.

My research has as its cornerstone, an examination of customer perceptions of effectiveness and standards in essential functions and services delivery in rural communities.

This research is considered important to contemporary political and policy developments in Western Australia. Within this context, strategic frameworks and models for delivery of essential functions and services are having significant implications for rural communities.

The research has identified as a key objective, an investigation of the effectiveness or otherwise of rural communities in influencing the decisions and strategic plans of organizations providing essential functions and services. A further related matter involves the impact of community cohesiveness and empowerment upon policy makers responsible for driving the delivery models for these functions and services.

The research seeks to examine perceptions of essential functions and services and whether rural communities are effective in influencing their delivery. Community-based, volunteer organizations exist as key stakeholders in rural communities and it was on this basis that the involvement of the organization name is sought.

The <Local Government Name> has been selected because of its unique geographic, demographic and community characteristics. The Shire is situated within an important part of the State and hosts traditional industries which are consistent with the concept of 'rurality' underpinning this research. By the same token, the Shire is also now subject to new and emerging industries (eg: rural-based manufacturing and tourism) which are translating to impacts upon essential functions and services delivery.

As part of this research, it is proposed to conduct a focus group in Mount Barker on 20th September 2005. An invitation is extended to the organization name to nominate one representative to participate in the forthcoming focus group. The focus group which I propose to personally facilitate, will comprise 8 participants as follows:

- Local Government Name – two representatives;
- Local businesses – two representatives;
- Community service /volunteer organizations – two representatives; and
- Community members – two representatives.

The focus group will have a maximum duration of 120 minutes and light refreshments provided for participants.

With respect to local business and community member representation, a public notice has been placed in the <Publication Name> and in the <Publication Name>. Nominations have been sought from persons interested in participating in the focus group. Researcher contact details have also been included to facilitate provision of project background details and official nomination forms. In the event of more than two nominations each being received from local business and community members, the proposal is that a ballot draw will be conducted to determine representation.

After having reviewed the information appearing in the *Community Directory 2005*, it is noted that a number of industry-focused general interest groups currently operate in the Local Government Name. Given the absence of a formal chamber of commerce or local business association within the Shire, it was also considered appropriate that an invitation be extended to industry-focused general interest groups to nominate as part of the local business category.

Having regard to the limited number of stakeholder positions available in the focus group, it is proposed that any nominations submitted by industry-focused general interest groups be included within the business category. In the event that a number of nominations are received, my view is that a ballot draw process would provide the fairest and most equitable method of determining business stakeholder representation.

Notwithstanding that a particular industry-focused general interest group may be unsuccessful in attaining representation on a focus group following the ballot draw process, I undertake to provide advice on the outcomes and to invite feedback and comment accordingly.

Should you require further details or clarification regarding the research project and my request for participation by the <organization name> do not hesitate to contact me at: 25 Orwell Crescent Woodvale WA 6026.

I can also be contacted via email: joer@hotlinks.net.au or on telephone 0417 17 56 50.

Alternatively and if required, an independent overview of the research proposal can be obtained by contacting Associate Professor Fiona McKenzie on telephone 9266 1087.

I trust that this information is of assistance. I look forward to receiving your advice regarding the availability of the <organization name> to nominate for participation in the proposed focus group.

Yours sincerely

Giuseppe Ripepi

Appendix A-3

Introductory letter to community organizations, sporting organizations and representative bodies within the study communities

31 May 2005

Our Ref: GMR researchintro

Mr/Mrs/Ms Surname
Chief Executive Officer
Shire of Local Government Name
Address
Address

Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms Surname

INTRODUCTION TO DOCTORAL RESEARCH PROJECT – CUSTOMER PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVENESS AND STANDARDS IN ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS AND SERVICES DELIVERY IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

I am pleased to write to you today by way of introduction to a doctoral research project which I have recently commenced under the auspices of Curtin University of Technology's Graduate School of Business.

My research has as its cornerstone, an examination of customer perceptions of effectiveness and standards in essential functions and services delivery in rural communities.

This research is considered important to contemporary political and policy developments in Western Australia. Within this context, strategic frameworks and models for delivery of essential functions and services are having significant implications for rural communities.

The research has identified as a key objective, an investigation of the effectiveness or otherwise of rural communities in influencing the customer service mechanisms and strategic frameworks of corporatized government entities as essential functions and services providers. A further related matter involves the impact of community cohesiveness and empowerment upon policy makers having stewardship of the delivery models for these functions and services.

The participation of the Local Government Name in this research has been sought because of the Shire's unique geographic, demographic and community characteristics. The Shire is situated within an important part of the State and hosts traditional industries which are consistent with the concept of 'rurality' underpinning this research. By the same token, the Shire is also now subject to new and emerging industries (eg: viticulture, timber plantations and tourism) which are translating to impacts upon essential functions and services delivery. Accordingly the Shire, like many local governments, is increasingly being required to assume responsibility for delivery of some essential functions and services due to changes in strategic plans of service providers and delivery models promoted by policy makers.

As part of this research, it is proposed to conduct a focus group in <community name> and <community name> in September or October 2005. An invitation is extended to the Local Government Name to provide two representatives to participate in the forthcoming focus groups.

The focus groups which I propose to personally facilitate, will comprise 8 participants as follows:

- Local Government Name – two representatives;
- Local Business Association or Chamber of Commerce Committee – two representatives;
- Community service /volunteer organizations – two representatives; and
- Community members – two representatives.

It is proposed that written invitations be extended to office bearers of the local business association and community service/volunteer organizations. With respect to community member representation, the proposal is that a public notice be placed in a local newspaper and any other available newsletter circulated throughout the Local Government Name. Nominations will be sought from persons interested in participating in the focus groups. Researcher contact details will also be included to facilitate provision of project background details and official nomination forms. In the event of more than two nominations being received, it is proposed that a ballot draw be conducted to determine representation.

The Shire's assistance is also sought in:

- Providing access to data of key business and community service organization stakeholders within the Local Government Name. This will enable contact to be made by the researcher to invite three representatives from each category to attend the focus group.
- Providing ballot equipment and one-off access to a public facility (eg: Library) if required, to facilitate an open and transparent draw of nominations received from the community.
- Providing access to a Council facility in <community name> and <community name> to enable conduct of the focus groups with each having a maximum duration of 120 minutes.
- Should you require further details or clarification regarding the research project and my request for participation by the Local Government Name, please do not hesitate to contact me at:

25 Orwell Crescent
WOODVALE WA 6026

I can also be contacted via email: joer@hotlinks.net.au or on telephone 0417 17 56 50.

I trust that this information is of assistance. I look forward to receiving your advice regarding the Local Government Name's availability to participate in the proposed focus groups and its capacity to assist by providing the support identified for progressing the research.

Yours sincerely

Giuseppe Ripepi

Appendix A-4

Public advertisement for community members

NOMINATIONS SOUGHT FROM COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Nominations are sought from community members of the Local Government Name who may be interested in participating in a doctoral research to investigate customer perceptions of effectiveness and standards in essential functions and services delivery in rural communities.

The research has recently been commenced under the auspices of Curtin University of Technology's Graduate School of Business.

The research seeks to examine:

Customer perceptions of the effectiveness and standards in the provision of essential functions and services and their impact on rural communities.

The research will also investigate:

Whether rural communities are effective in influencing the decisions and strategies of essential functions and services providers.

As part of this research, focus groups involving various stakeholder organizations of the Shire of Wagin are to be conducted in Wagin on 19 September 2005.

Community members wishing to participate in the focus groups will be required to complete and lodge a formal nomination with the researcher, Mr Joe Ripepi. Nomination forms and additional background information can be obtained by contacting Mr Ripepi at 25 Orwell Crescent, WOODVALE WA 6026. Mr Ripepi can also be contacted via email: joer@hotlinks.net.au or, on telephone 0417 17 56 50.

Alternatively, prospective participants requiring an independent overview of the research project may wish to contact Associate Professor Fiona McKenzie on telephone 08 9266 1087.

Appendix A-5

Letter to public sector organizations inviting their participation in the study

<Insert Date 2006>

Our Ref: GMR phdeliteorgs

<Insert name>
<Insert position>
<Address>
<Address>
<Address>

Dear <Insert name>

DOCTORAL RESEARCH PROJECT: “CUSTOMER PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVENESS AND STANDARDS IN ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS AND SERVICES DELIVERY IN RURAL COMMUNITIES” – REQUEST FOR INTERVIEW WITH REPRESENTATIVES

I write to inform you of a doctoral research project which I am currently undertaking under the auspices of Curtin University of Technology’s Graduate School of Business. I am also pleased to extend an invitation to <insert organisation name> to participate in highly topical and important research analysing the past achievements and future trends in essential functions and services delivery in Western Australia.

Since July 2004, I have been examining customer perceptions of the effectiveness and standards of essential functions and services delivery in rural Western Australia. A brief overview of this research is **attached** for your reference.

During mid to late September 2005, I conducted focus group sessions comprising representatives of the local governments, business and community service/volunteer stakeholder organisations in the communities of Wagin, Mt Barker, Rocky Gully and Boyanup. I am currently arranging to conduct similar focus group sessions in other rural communities during March 2006.

An important part of my research also involves obtaining the views of policy makers and the organisations engaged in essential functions and services provision in response to focus group outcomes. The proposal is that the views of policy makers and the essential functions and services provider organisations be sought by interviewing nominated representatives who are involved in strategic and policy development and, in overseeing the functions and services delivery. It is expected that these interviews would be conducted over a period spanning mid to late 2006.

Your advice is sought on whether <insert organisation name> will agree to participate in the research by approving the interview of its representatives operating at both the central office and regional levels, to respond to outcomes of recent rural community focus groups. This process will also enable

<insert organisation name> to outline its strategies and plans for essential functions and services delivery.

For further details or clarification regarding the research project and my request for participation of <insert organisation name>, please contact me via email: joer@hotlinks.net.au or on mobile telephone 0417 17 56 50 or alternatively, at 25 Orwell Crescent WOODVALE WA 6026.

Additionally, and if necessary, an independent overview of my research project can be obtained by contacting Professor Fiona McKenzie on telephone 08 9266 1087.

I trust that this information is of assistance and I look forward to receiving your response in due course.

Yours sincerely

Giuseppe Ripepi

**CURTIN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS
PhD RESEARCH PROJECT OVERVIEW
RESEARCH PROJECT TITLE:**

“An Examination of Customer Perceptions of Effectiveness and Standards in Essential Functions and Services Delivery in Rural Communities.”

RESEARCHER NAME: Giuseppe (Joe) Ripepi.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

The key objectives of my research project include:

- identifying the implications of customer perceptions upon political and policy developments and, on the strategic planning and delivery programmes of organisations providing essential functions and services.
- investigating the effectiveness or otherwise of rural communities in influencing the customer service mechanisms and strategic plans of essential functions and services providers.
- examining whether community cohesiveness and empowerment impacts upon decisions taken by policy makers and essential functions and services providers.

My research seeks to pursue its objectives by applying a case study approach involving four to five selected communities in rural Western Australia. These particular rural communities have been drawn from the Great Southern, South West and Northern Wheatbelt regions of the State and were selected because of their unique geographic, demographic and community-based characteristics.

Factors common to the communities selected for this research are that:

- each community hosts traditional industries consistent with the concept of ‘rurality’ underpinning this research;
- the communities are also now being subjected to new and emerging issues (eg: population demographics changes and funding/resourcing needs) and which impacting upon essential functions and services provided by organisations such as <insert organisation name>.

Providers of essential functions and services at all levels are increasingly being required to assume particular roles and responsibilities for delivery of some essential functions and services in rural communities.

These changes are due to various factors and pressures impacting on:

- strategic plans and operational priorities of the essential functions and services providers; and
- the philosophies underpinning the delivery models promoted by policy makers.

PROGRESS SO FAR:

During the recent focus groups, participants representing key stakeholder organisations were asked a series of questions regarding their perceptions of the level and standard of essential functions and services delivered in these communities.

The views of participants were also sought regarding the perceived effectiveness or otherwise of their respective community in influencing the strategic plans of provider organisations and the delivery models of policy makers.

The <insert organisation name> was identified during the focus group sessions as being an organisation which occupies an important role and influence in the delivery of essential functions and services to these selected rural communities.

WHERE TO NEXT

Detailed analysis of rural community focus group outcomes is currently being undertaken and it is expected that this work will continue up until the planned interviews of policy makers and the essential functions and services providers.

Once the research phases involving the focus groups of key stakeholder representatives and interviews of policy makers and the essential functions and services providers are completed, confirmatory surveys of business and residential customers will be conducted within the selected rural communities.

These surveys will seek to identify and examine the extent to which perceptions and issues relating to essential functions and services delivery are represented throughout the wider community.

HOW YOUR ORGANISATION CAN ASSIST IN THIS IMPORTANT RESEARCH:

The proposed interviews of policy makers and important essential functions and services providers are considered as being crucial to achieving the overall research outcomes. In respect of <insert organisation name>, the interview is intended to afford an opportunity to:

respond to outcomes of recent rural community focus groups regarding their perceptions of the level and standard of essential functions and services delivered in these communities;

explain the issues and impediments encountered in delivering essential functions and services in rural communities; and,

outline the adopted strategies and initiatives for accommodating customer perceptions and needs.

Should <insert organisation name> agree to being involved in this research, the interview of its nominated representative(s) will be conducted by me and based on a set of questions developed from the focus group outcomes. A hard copy version of these questions will be provided to your nominated representative(s) prior to the interview. Responses to the interview questions will be recorded using a micro cassette recorder, with a draft hard copy transcript of proceedings provided to interview participants for review and comment as to accuracy.

I assure you that all information obtained during the proposed interviews will be used and retained in accordance with established *National Privacy Principles* and, the specific approvals granted to me by the Curtin University of Technology's Human Research Ethics Committee.

Appendix A-6

Letter to elected representatives of the Parliament of Western Australia inviting their participation in the study

2 March 2007

Our Ref: JR_gryllsrep

Mr/Mrs/Ms Surname MLA

Member for <Electorate Name>

Address

Address

Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms Surname

DOCTORAL RESEARCH PROJECT: “CUSTOMER PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVENESS AND STANDARDS IN ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS AND SERVICES DELIVERY IN RURAL COMMUNITIES” – REQUEST FOR INTERVIEW.

My name is Joe Ripepi and I am currently undertaking a doctoral research project through the Curtin University of Technology’s Graduate School of Business. My research involves examining customer perceptions of the effectiveness and standards of essential functions and services delivery in selected rural communities throughout Western Australia. The purpose of my letter is to invite you in your role as a policy maker, to contribute to the advancement of knowledge on what I consider to be a very important topic for rural areas of our State.

During 2006, I conducted focus group sessions comprising representatives of local government, business and community service/volunteer stakeholder organisations in the communities of <community name> and <community name> which are located within your electorate. For the purposes of my research, the essential functions and services identified by participants in the focus groups (eg: health, education, local policing, housing, transport, telecommunications, electricity and water) are those which have traditionally been delivered by governments. As you are aware, however, some of these are now being delivered by government business enterprises.

An important part of my research also involves obtaining the views of policy makers and the organisations engaged in delivering essential functions and services. To achieve this, from late 2006 through to early 2007, I have interviewed nominated representatives of government departments, agencies and government business enterprises who are involved in strategic planning and in overseeing the essential functions and services delivery.

I seek your advice on whether you will agree to participate in the research by approving my request for an interview in Perth on a mutually convenient date prior to the beginning of May 2007. It is expected that the interview would take approximately 30 minutes. This process will enable you to

outline your perceptions of the strategies and plans for essential functions and services delivery used by government departments, agencies and government business enterprises. By participating in this research, I am confident that you will also be able to gain valuable insights into the issues and concerns of the selected communities within your electorate.

Should you agree to being involved in my research, the interview will be based on a set of questions developed from the focus group outcomes and which are similar to those used for representatives of government departments, agencies and government business enterprises. A hard copy version of these questions is **attached**.

It is proposed that responses to the interview questions would be audio-taped for the purpose of coding and categorising key concepts arising from the research. A draft hard copy transcript of proceedings will be provided to you for review and comment as to accuracy.

I assure you that all information obtained during the proposed interview will be used and retained in accordance with established *National Privacy Principles* and, the specific approvals granted to me for this research by the Curtin University of Technology's Human Research Ethics Committee.

For further details or clarification regarding the research project and my request for your involvement, please contact me via email: joer@hotlinks.net.au or on mobile telephone 0417 17 56 50 or alternatively, at 25 Orwell Crescent WOODVALE WA 6026.

Additionally, and if necessary, an independent overview of my research project can be obtained by contacting Professor Fiona McKenzie on telephone 08 9266 1087.

I trust that this information is of assistance and I look forward to receiving your response in due course.

Yours sincerely

Giuseppe (Joe) Ripepi

Appendix A-7

Overview of confirmatory survey distribution across each of the study communities and the responses subsequently received – A-7

Description	Wagin	Mount Barker	Rocky Gully	Boyanup	Wongan Hills	Ballidu	Total
Confirmatory surveys distributed	87	112	27	66	88	35	415
Confirmatory survey responses received	23	26	9	16	20	11	105
Percentage Return	26.4%	23.2%	33.3%	24.2%	22.72%	31.4%	25.0%
Detailed explanation of survey results							
Residential Customers:	16	16	3	10	14	8	67
Business Customers	7	10	6	6	6	3	38
Male	9	14	3	10	12	4	52
Female	14	12	6	5	8	7	52
Respondents Age							
18 years – 25 years	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
26 years – 40 years	2	4	1	2	2	1	12
41 years – 55 years	7	7	4	3	12	6	39
56 years – 70 years	10	9	3	10	3	3	38
71 years and over	4	6	1	0	2	1	14
Respondents birthplace:							
Australia	21	20	8	12	19	10	90
Respondents birthplace:							
Africa		1					1
Asia							
Canada							
Europe	2	1			1		4
Republic of Ireland							
South Africa							
South America							
United Kingdom							
United States of America		4		4			8
Other			1			1	2

Detailed explanation of survey results (continued):							
Description	Wagin	Mount Barker	Rocky Gully	Boyanup	Wongan Hills	Ballidu	Total
Respondents residential status:							
Property owner	21	23	9	14	17	9	93
Renting property	2	2	0	2	2	2	10
Respondents residency in community:							
Less than 1 year	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Between 1 year and 10 years	8	5	0	7	6	1	27
Between 10 years and 20 years	3	8	3	4	3	3	24
Over 20 years	9	11	6	5	11	7	49
Respondents reasons for residing in community:							
Employment	9	8	6	4	11	3	41
Opportunities	9	14	3	6	7	6	45
Family Commitments	3	3	0	5	1	2	11
Leisure							
Respondent is a member of, or is involved in supporting the activities of a community/volunteer organisation in community							
Yes	18	19	8	5	19	10	79
No	3	7	1	11	1	1	24
Respondents employment circumstances							
Engaged in full time employment	7	4	0	9	4	3	27
Engaged in part time employment	2	5	2	0	2	3	14
Not engaged in formal employment	6	7	0	2	6	2	23
Self employed	8	10	7	5	7	3	40
Engaged in work placement programs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respondents employment category:							
Industry and trades	1	4	1	6	3	0	15
Agriculture & mining	5	5	6	4	4	6	30
Retailing	3	1	1	0	1	1	7
Manufacturing	3	0	0	0	1	0	4
Government	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Health & medicine	2	2	0	0	2	0	6
Education & training	1	0	1	1	0	0	3
Service and hospitality	1	2	0	2	1	0	6
Other	4	9	0	3	6	2	24
The community has a clear understanding about the essential functions and services that are being provided?							
Strongly Agree	2	1	0	0	2	0	5
Agree	16	14	5	9	14	4	62
Neither Agree or Disagree	3	7	3	5	2	2	22

Disagree	1	1	0	2	2	5	11
Strongly Disagree	1	3	1	0	0	0	5
Detailed explanation of survey results (continued):							
Description	Wagin	Mount Barker	Rocky Gully	Boyanup	Wongan Hills	Ballidu	Total
The activities of key organisations in the community are influenced by the essential functions and services that are provided.							
Strongly Agree	7	4	1	1	0	2	15
Agree	13	12	4	9	16	6	60
Neither Agree or Disagree	2	6	2	4	3	2	19
Disagree	0	2	0	2	1	1	6
Strongly Disagree	1	2	1	0	0	0	4
The level of essential functions and services that are being provided to the community is perceived as being:							
Totally Adequate	2	0	0	2	0	0	4
Adequate	8	15	0	9	14	2	48
Neither Adequate or Inadequate	4	5	3	3	2	3	20
Inadequate	8	6	6	2	4	6	32
Totally Inadequate	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
There has been change(s) in the essential functions and services provided to the community over time.							
Strongly Agree	6	2	0	1	2	0	11
Agree	12	17	3	8	15	7	62
Neither Agree or Disagree	4	4	2	3	3	2	18
Disagree	1	1	3	4	0	2	11
Strongly Disagree	0	2	1	0	0	0	3
There is a relationship between the provision of essential functions and services and the viability of the community							
Strongly Agree	12	8	2	1	9	5	37
Agree	10	13	5	9	8	1	46
Neither Agree or Disagree	0	3	0	3	3	4	13
Disagree	0	1	0	3	0	1	5
Strongly Disagree	0	1	2	0	0	0	3

Detailed explanation of survey results (continued):							
Description	Wagin	Mount Barker	Rocky Gully	Boyanup	Wongan Hills	Ballidu	Total
Our community has been effective in identifying the views of businesses and residents regarding the provision of essential functions and services							
Strongly Agree	3	1	1	0	2	1	8
Agree	10	12	3	9	10	2	46
Neither Agree or Disagree	4	6	2	2	6	3	23
Disagree	4	5	1	5	2	5	22
Strongly Disagree	1	2	2	0	0	0	5
Our community has been effective in conveying the views of businesses and residents regarding the provision of essential functions and services to government agencies, corporatized entities and policy makers							
Strongly Agree	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Agree	10	5	4	6	7	2	34
Neither Agree or Disagree	3	11	0	6	6	2	28
Disagree	7	5	3	4	4	6	29
Strongly Disagree	1	4	2	0	2	1	10
Our community has been effective in influencing the service mechanisms and strategic plans of government agencies, corporatized government agencies and policy makers responsible for provision of essential functions and services							
Strongly Agree	2	0	0	0	4	0	6
Agree	6	8	2	4	3	1	24
Neither Agree or Disagree	7	8	2	5	9	3	34
Disagree	5	6	4	7	3	6	31
Strongly Disagree	3	4	1	0	1	1	10

Appendix A-8

The covering letter and confirmatory survey instrument forwarded to participants within study communities

26 March 2007
Mr/Mrs/Ms Surname
Address
Address

JR_commsurv

Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms Surname

DOCTORAL RESEARCH PROJECT (JOE RIPEPI) – COMMUNITY SURVEY OF THE DELIVERY OF ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS AND SERVICES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES.

My name is Joe Ripepi and I am currently undertaking a doctoral research project through the Curtin University of Technology's Graduate School of Business. My research involves examining customer perceptions of the effectiveness and standards of essential functions and services delivery in selected rural communities throughout Western Australia. The purpose of my letter is to invite you to contribute to the advancement of knowledge on what I consider to be a very important topic for rural areas of our State.

In 2005, I conducted a focus group session comprising representatives of the local government, businesses and the community service/volunteer-based organisations in your community. For the purposes of my research, the essential functions and services identified by participants in the focus groups (eg: health, education, local policing, housing, transport, telecommunications, electricity and water) are those which have traditionally been delivered by governments. However, some of these are now being delivered by government business enterprises. A government business enterprise is commonly known as an organisation whose structure and policies are defined by legislation and they are responsible to a government minister. From a day-to-day perspective, these organisations now operate in a commercial environment, with products and services delivered on a "user-pays" basis.

I am seeking your involvement in my research by completing the **attached** survey which I have developed to obtain the views of businesses and residents on how essential functions and services are being delivered to your particular community. Should you agree to complete the survey, I assure you that all information obtained during the process will be used and retained in accordance with established *National Privacy Principles*, and the specific approvals granted to me for this research by the Curtin University of Technology's Human Research Ethics Committee.

A pre-paid, self-addressed envelope is also **attached** so that the completed survey can be returned. If your completed survey is submitted to me by **Friday 11 May 2007**, you will be eligible to be entered in the draw for a small prize.

For further details or clarification regarding this research work and my request for your involvement, please contact me via email: joer@hotlinks.net.au or on mobile 0417 17 56 50. I can also be contacted by post at 25 Orwell Crescent WOODVALE WA 6026. If necessary, an independent overview of my research project can be obtained by contacting Professor Fiona McKenzie on 08 9266 1087.

I trust that this information is of assistance and I look forward to receiving your completed survey.

Yours sincerely

Giuseppe (Joe) Ripepi

SURVEY

DOCTORAL RESEARCH PROJECT: AN EXAMINATION OF CUSTOMER PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVENESS AND STANDARDS IN ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS AND SERVICES DELIVERY IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Introduction

This survey has been developed as a key element of a doctoral research project which is being conducted under the auspices of the Curtin University of Technology's Graduate School of Business. It has been motivated by an ongoing corporatization of key government enterprises and utilities responsible for providing essential functions and services.

The research project seeks to examine customer perceptions of effectiveness and standards in essential functions and services that these organisations provide, together with the impacts for rural communities. The research has also identified a need to investigate whether rural communities are effective in influencing the decisions and strategies of government departments, agencies and utilities providing essential functions and services.

Consultations have been undertaken with key organisations in selected rural communities throughout Western Australia to provide the case studies through which findings and objectives will be achieved.

Focus groups comprising representatives of these key organisations were conducted during 2005 and 2006 to obtain views on the issues outlined and a number of outcomes were identified.

This survey of business and residential customers in the wider population of the selected rural communities seeks to identify whether there is support or otherwise for views and outcomes arising from the focus groups.

In inviting your participation, I assure you that all research undertaken will be in accordance with National Privacy Principles and the specific ethics approvals which the Curtin University of Technology has granted to me for this research project. The covering letter accompanying this survey confirms the voluntary nature of any participation which you may choose to have in the research. You are also entitled to withdraw from the research at any time and without prejudice, should you wish to do so.

Research Project undertaken by Giuseppe M. Ripepi

Doctoral research student

Curtin University of Technology, Graduate School of Business

C/- 25 Orwell Crescent

WOODVALE, WA 6026.

PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN THIS SURVEY IN THE ATTACHED PRE-PAID ENVELOPE, BY FRIDAY 11 MAY, 2007.

1. Respondent's Details.

(Please insert using BLOCK CAPITALS)

Town or, Locality in which respondent is situated.

Respondent's customer category

Please Circle One

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| Residential | 1 |
| Business | 2 |

2. Respondent's Gender.

Please Circle One

- | | | |
|----------|--------|---|
| You are: | Male | 1 |
| | Female | 2 |

3. Respondent's Age.

Please Circle One

- | | | |
|----------|---------------------|---|
| You are: | 18 years – 25 years | 1 |
| | 26 years – 40 years | 2 |
| | 41 years – 55 years | 3 |
| | 56 years – 70 years | 4 |
| | 71 years and over | 5 |

4. Respondent's place of birth.

Please Circle One

Were you born in Australia? Yes No

If NO in which of the following
were you born?

- | | Please Circle One | | Please Circle One |
|---------------------|-------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Africa | 1 | Asia | 2 |
| Canada | 3 | Europe | 4 |
| Republic of Ireland | 5 | South Africa | 6 |

5. Respondent's Country of Birth (continued).

South America	7	United Kingdom	8
United States of America	9		
Other	10	Please Specify _____	

6. Respondent's Residential Status.

Which of the following statements best describes your residential status?

Please Circle One

Property owner	1
Renting property	2

7. Respondent's Residency in Community.

Please Circle One

You have resided in this particular community for:

Less than 1 year	1
Between 1 year and 10 years	2
Between 10 years and 20 years	3
Over 20 years	4

8. Respondent's Reasons for residing to community.

Which of the following statements best describes the reasons why you were attracted to the community?

Please Circle One

Employment Opportunities	1
Family Commitments	2
Leisure	3

9. Respondent's exposure to community/volunteer organizations.

Please Circle One

You are a member of, or are involved in supporting the activities of a community/volunteer organisation in your community?

- Yes 1
- No 2

10. Respondent's Employment Circumstances.

Which of the following statements best describes your employment circumstances?

Please Circle One

- Engaged in full time employment 1
- Engaged in part time employment 2
- Not engaged in formal employment 3
- Self employed 4
- Engaged in work placement programs 5

11. Respondent's Employment Category.

Which of the following categories best describes the type of employment in which you are engaged?

Please Circle One

Please Circle One

- | | | | |
|----------------------|---|-------------------------|---|
| Industry and trades | 1 | Agriculture & Mining | 2 |
| Retailing | 3 | Manufacturing | 4 |
| Government | 5 | Health & Medicine | 6 |
| Education & Training | 7 | Service and hospitality | 8 |
| Other _____ | 9 | | |
| (specify) | | | |

12. Respondent's perception of community understanding of essential functions and services provision issues.

Please Circle One	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The community has a clear understanding about the essential functions and services that are being provided.	1	2	3	4	5

13. Respondent's perception of essential functions and services provision influences on key organisations in the community.

Please Circle One	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The activities of key organisations in the community are influenced by the essential functions and services that are provided.	1	2	3	4	5

14. Respondent's perception of the level of essential functions and services being provided in the community.

Please Circle One	Totally Adequate	Adequate	Neither Adequate or Inadequate	Inadequate	Totally Inadequate
The level of essential functions and services that are being provided in the community is perceived as being:	1	2	3	4	5

15. Respondent's perception of the provision of essential functions and services to the community over time.

Please Circle One	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
There has been change(s) in the provision of essential functions and services to the community over time.	1	2	3	4	5

16. Respondent's perception of the relationship between provision of essential functions and services and viability of the community.

Please Circle One	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
There is a relationship between the provision of essential functions and services and viability of the community.					
	1	2	3	4	5

17. Respondent's perception of the effectiveness or otherwise of the community in identifying views of businesses and residents regarding the provision of essential functions and services.

Please Circle One	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Our community has been effective in identifying the views of businesses and residents regarding the provision of essential functions and services.					
	1	2	3	4	5

18. Respondent's perception of the effectiveness or otherwise of the community in conveying the views of businesses and residents regarding the provision of essential functions and services to government agencies, corporatised government entities and policy makers.

Please Circle One	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Our community has been effective in conveying the views of businesses and residents regarding the provision of essential functions and services to government agencies, corporatised government entities and policy makers.					
	1	2	3	4	5

19. Respondent's perception of the effectiveness or otherwise of the community in influencing the customer service mechanisms and strategic plans of government agencies and corporatised government entities and policy makers responsible for providing essential functions and services.

Please Circle One

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree or Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Our community has been effective in influencing the customer service mechanisms and strategic plans of government agencies, corporatised government entities and policy makers responsible for provision of essential functions and services.

1 2 3 4 5

This completes the survey. Thank you once again for your contribution to the research project.

Appendix A-9: Coding and classification outcomes

List of Categories and Sub-categories:

Focus Groups

Category: Case study rural communities

Sub-category: Appreciation of geographical factors
Economic Issues
Empowerment
Expectations of service
Future of essential functions and services
Lifestyle Factors
Lobbying issues
Origins of essential functions and services
Perceived essential functions and services
Representational Issues
Safety Factors
Viability Issues
Volunteering Issues

Category: Consultation with customers and stakeholders

Sub-category: Engaging with communities and stakeholders
Liaising with peak and industry organisations
Liaising with political representatives
Maintaining ongoing relationships with customers and stakeholders in regions
Maintaining trust and credibility with stakeholders and communities
Regularly scheduled visits to regional communities

Category: Customer Feedback

Sub-category: Customer satisfaction with services outcomes
Encouraging customer contact

Category: Legislative and regulatory factors

Sub-category: Accountability
Competitive and business-based principles
Ensuring services comply with government regulations
Factors affecting origins of organisational structure

Focus Groups (continued):

Category: Strategic Management

Sub-category: Centralised management of service delivery
Customer service charter specifying minimum service levels
Customers influencing functions and services delivery
Eligibility criteria and functions and services
Environmental factors affecting functions and services
Mutually agreed alternative levels of services
Perceived changes in essential functions and services delivery
Perceived Government and provider policy decisions affecting delivery
Resolving complaints
Skills factors affecting functions and services delivery
Supporting communities
Sustainability and corporate vision

Category: Customer and community understanding of services and issues

Sub-category: Perceived constituent awareness of services and functions provided
Representatives' views of comparative levels and standards in services delivery

Category: Knowledge of organisation role

Sub-category: Customer Awareness

Elite Interviews

Category: Consultation with customers and stakeholders

Sub-category: Engaging with communities and stakeholders
Liaising with peak and industry organisations
Liaising with political representatives
Maintaining ongoing relationships with customers and stakeholders in regions
Maintaining trust and credibility with stakeholders and communities
Regularly scheduled visits to regional communities
Responding to *ad hoc* issues

Elite Interviews (continued):

Category: Customer and community understanding of services and issues

Sub-category: Communications officers promoting the organisation
Perceived constituent awareness of services and functions provided
Representatives' views of comparative levels and standards in services delivery

Category: Customer Feedback

Sub-category: Analysing customer enquiries and complaints
Customer satisfaction with services outcomes
Encouraging customer contact
Internal dissemination of customer feedback on issues
Obtaining information on customer awareness
Providing feedback to customers
Reporting on customer satisfaction outcomes
Review of existing functions, services and infrastructure
Surveying customers affected by operational and maintenance work
Using technology to assist customers report issues and enquiries

Category: Knowledge of organisation role

Sub-category: Customer Awareness
Defining the organisation's functions

Category: Legislative and regulatory factors

Sub-category: Accountability
Competitive and business-based principles
Ensuring services comply with government regulations
Factors affecting origins of organisational structure

Category: Strategic Management

Sub-category: Centralised management of service delivery
Customer service charter specifying minimum service levels
Customers influencing functions and services delivery
Departures from strategic plans
Eligibility criteria and functions and services
Environmental factors affecting functions and services
Improving services and functions
Mutually agreed alternative levels of services
Organisation culture and structure factors
Perceived changes in essential functions and services delivery

Elite Interviews (continued):

Category: Strategic Management

Sub-category: Perceived Government and provider policy decisions affecting delivery
Perceived standards of infrastructure and services
Resolving complaints
Skills factors affecting functions and services delivery
Strategic planning promoting legislative compliance
Supporting communities
Sustainability and corporate vision

Category: Understanding of services and issues

Sub-category: Communicating programs through advertising and information
Frequency of customer contact with organisation
Informing customers of service standards
Promoting programs through physical actions
Providing information through corporate publications
(Elected) Representative's perceived effectiveness of advertising and promotion
Resources and the capacity to promote functions and services
Using experts to inform customers
Using technology to inform customers of services and issues

Appendix A-9 (cont.): List of Categories and illustrative participant quotations

<u>Category Name</u>	<u>Illustrative participant quotations</u>
<i>Focus Groups:</i>	
Case study rural communities	<p>“Well I think if you, you have a look around the facilities, it’s...we’ve been a fairly successful community.”</p> <p>“[Y]ou look at the community rec centre, uh, and those sort of things, they are really good examples of community’s wants being satisfied by the government through the interception of our-through our local Member.”</p> <p>“Well, that’s always the way. Yeah, that’s always the way. I mean if it is something very important and a lot of people are interested, they’ll agitate, they’ll get it.”</p> <p>“When you are not very important and you are not -- all that lobbying- which is -- a lot -- most of us aren’t, then things don’t happen.”</p> <p>“I actually look at this community as being, uh, one of the better ones that provides these services. ...[W]hen you look around the communities, you know, there are a lot of committees, communities and that, and I’d say, I thought we’d be one of the more effective ones.”</p>
Consultation with customers and stakeholders	<p>“I, I would actually think that the Water Authority has been the most proactive of the groups. Like they actually respond to the customers---effectively. Like they do sample very regularly”.</p> <p>“Yeah, the Progress Group I would suggest, is far more about “community” and their interests -- residential interests -- rather than businesses.”</p> <p>“And, the shire is probably more involved with the community-side, more so than they are with business.”</p>

<u>Category Name</u>	<u>Illustrative participant quotations</u>
<i>Focus Groups (cont.)</i>	
Customer Feedback	<p>“I have a lot of...(indistinct)... because I’m on the progress group, and we’re always, uh, looking for extra money to get, to improve our town. And that’s either going to the shire, or going for grants and things like that.”</p> <p>“There was a bloke in town from Western Power last week, and he was actually standing on the roof of his vehicle in the middle of town trying to talk on his phone.”</p> <p>“You know, it’s a joke. This is a 100 mile stretch of highway and you’ve got to do that to get communication, come on.”</p> <p>“Well, you know, if something really went wrong in this town, there is no worries about the town coming together and making a noise about it. But sometimes, it’s just the little-by-little, and the little thing here and the little thing there, and it gets forgotten.”</p>
Legislative and regulatory factors	<p>“Politicians out, look, look after yourself. We’re not going to...”</p> <p>“But since their partial privatisation, the service has gone down the gurgler.”</p> <p>“Yeah. All services are affected if governments withdraw the funding, or reduce their services.”</p> <p>“Obviously without the funding, without that services don’t occur.”</p>

<u>Category Name</u>	<u>Illustrative participant quotations</u>
<i>Focus Groups (cont.)</i>	
Strategic Management	<p>“Yeah, but it’s a useless service. Not problematic, it’s non-existent.”</p> <p>“I, I would suggest that the power and the water delivery of thirty years ago was far superior to what we’ve got now, because that infrastructure was all brand new thirty years ago. Now we’re suffering the problem of the age of the infrastructure.”</p>
Strategic Management (cont.)	<p>“The lack of services has seen people move out of rural communities, because they can’t get the services in rural communities, so they move to bigger communities. And, and that’s got to be a, a big issue.”</p> <p>“Yeah well, in that Western, Western Power case, we did have two servicemen here and until they retired and they were never replaced. And they quickly fixed up the little problems, and now, they are an hour away before they can even get here, so, you know, they’ve never replaced their men...”</p> <p>“On the other hand though, my perception is that Western Power works, and I think the services they provide are pretty damn good, if you go back forty years or thirty years. But if something goes wrong with anything though, that’s where it gets, that’s where it hurts.”</p>

<u>Category Name</u>	<u>Illustrative participant quotations</u>
<i>Focus Groups:</i>	
Customer and community understanding of services and issues	<p>“They never... it’s the weighting. Because it’s a safe seat, in the National Party...”</p> <p>“If people know about it and there is time to do something.”</p> <p>“It’s just a lack of information that’s in the community. I mean the Department, which every one, knows that if they - - if they open it up for the community, they are going to open a can of worms, and so they just don’t say anything.”</p> <p>“I mean, if they are going to do something I would like them to say: ‘Look we have this plan to do such and such in 6 months’ time.’ – You’ve got a period there to do something about it.”</p>
Knowledge of organization role	<p>“Well, it has always been something that we’ve traditionally we’ve had; a lot of support through the Agricultural Department.”</p> <p>“It purely downsized...”</p> <p>“We’ve seen a whole new raft of, of FESA laws.”</p> <p>“Emergency services. Agencies taking us in a completely different direction.”</p> <p>“Yeah. In fact CALM do have funding problems with the roads, I think, and the Department of Agriculture are in the same boat. They can’t provide the service they used to be...”</p>

<u>Category Name</u>	<u>Illustrative participant quotations</u>
<i>Elite Interviews:</i>	
Consultation with customers and stakeholders	<p>“Well, we certainly, uh, listen to, listen to what’s been said to us and... where possible... we take ..take the appropriate, appropriate corrective action.”</p> <p>“[O]ur, Department has this... I mean, well put it in inverted commas, focus on customer service i-idea or process going for – well, I think I’ve been here for seven years – so, for about five and a half, six years, there was a real move to focus on listening to your client.</p> <p>[A]nd I think that that – culture is, – has permeated-right through the organisation---“</p> <p>“That’s an interesting question, because there are some communities that are very aware of the link between their local member and the lobbying process – there are others that aren’t.</p> <p>So I would say, I spend seventy percent of my time working for four or five communities who are quite proactive in keeping me aware of what’s going on. And other communities don’t do any of that, which I find quite strange.”</p> <p>“I can say that the, the Department’s focus is very much on customer service, and, you know, that, that is a, that is a strong initiative for the Department and that, uh, the necessary resources will be applied to those, uh, those areas with a, with a, with a high customer focus, and that can only, look, that can only bode us well down here”.</p>

<u>Category Name</u>	<u>Illustrative participant quotations</u>
<p>Customer and community understanding of services and issues</p>	<p>“[W]e’ve sort of, tried to sort of, map out some of the issues that are affecting sort of, the services and the direction (indistinct) around health care. So, it’s tried to share that with, with anybody that might be interested.”</p> <p>“From time to time regions host presentations to local communities, at which ‘experts’ address customers on issues which may interest or impact them. Invitations are extended through advertisements in local newspapers.”</p> <p>“Most schools, including these schools, have their own website which offers information in terms of, uh, you know, how it can support the community and those sort of things.”</p>
<p>Customer Feedback</p>	<p>“There is contact between people like myself and some of the shire representatives, or the shire chief executives. There clearly are, you know, feedback in terms of complaints and, uh, compliments, things like that.”</p> <p>“My sense is that we haven’t sort of, undertaken a sort of, big survey or anything like that about how people feel about, about services. So it feels quite reactive ... it feels – it doesn’t feel a very proactive approach – it feels more reactive.</p> <p>“I guess we’ve got our, you know, I guess the standard way is when receiving information is this, that when communities, you know, phone or write a letter to the, regional manager in their... local region.”</p>

<u>Category Name</u>	<u>Illustrative participant quotations</u>
<i>Elite Interviews (cont.)</i>	
Customer Feedback (continued):	<p>“But also, we’ve got our, our customer services managers who are involved in, in general exercises--- to put information out to the community. And, and that can be sometimes through, uh, direct mail outs or through direct news that they do”.</p> <p>“Yeah, I’m aware of most of them...we deal with a lot of them. [T]here is-, I have to say, there are probably two levels of customer service mechanisms – one for the general public and I guess, luckily for me, it’s a separate one for members of parliament.</p>
	<p>“ I, I find generally, the ones for the general public are probably average at best – and generally give poor response. I get a better response from the ones for members of parliament.”</p>
Knowledge of organization role	<p>“Yes, I think – our belief is that – they, through their own experiences – either as – students themselves, or as, as parents – have a very clear understanding of the basics of the service we provide, but within that, and we constantly are asking schools to monitor that level of understanding of their schools and the sense of their shared vision”.</p>

<u>Category Name</u>	<u>Illustrative participant quotations</u>
<i>Elite Interviews (cont.)</i>	
Knowledge of organization role	<p>“Wagin, Mount Barker? Oh, I think that the one the focus of, of, WACHS is, to engage the community ... and, find out exactly what the question that you’ve just asked really – and also to ensure that, that, that the communities actually have a clear understanding of, um, of their own needs I think, versus wants. And that’s, that’s been a big, a big issue.”</p>
Legislative and regulatory factors	<p>“I think the two key ones are, the formal school council, and the school council is a legislative requirement of all schools, and all schools are expected to have a, one where there is equal balance between parent group - the community group, and school staff.”</p> <p>“The (Water) Corporation operates in accordance with a licence issued by the Economic Regulation Authority, which permits us to provide our services, subject to compliance with the requirements of the Licence.”</p> <p>“---our role is to try and deliver to the country, a reliable and efficient supply of electricity. And what that means is,that you do all that you can in your, um, um, powers within the, under the Act and the Regulations that allow us to do, is to do whatever we can to ensure that capacity and reliability of supply is available to country customers.”</p>

<u>Category Name</u>	<u>Illustrative participant quotations</u>
<i>Elite Interviews (continued):</i>	
Strategic Management	<p>“ I don’t think it was any of them, particularly in terms of Mount Barker. I think it was a community desire...”</p> <p>“So, this was a grass roots, community-driven change, it wasn’t anything to do with government policy or any particular strategic plan, it had nothing to do with economic or, or, uh, financial concerns – it was community. Community-driven and, a lot of community ownership.”</p> <p>“Our, financial reporting has got a lot better, and more precise. [T]he flexibility schools have over their own destiny in terms of, untied school grants – as increased greatly over the, over previous years, so schools have got a much stronger, uh, responsibility and accountability to be self-managing for improvement.”</p>
Understanding of Services and Issues	<p>“Well, there, there certainly are advertising campaigns..... there’s a number of brochures and mails outs, etcetera – I, I have to say that I think that very few of those are effective.”</p> <p>“Effective service is going to be a better advertisement than anything else they’re putting in place, uh, and I, I don’t think that they’re particularly valuable.”</p> <p>“They, they may appeal in terms of being seen to be doing something, but they don’t, don’t really have a good outcome.”</p>

Creating the Core Construct: Explaining the links to categories and codes

Preamble (Ch 3 Methodology: Section 3.13.3 refers)

Many writers (See Corbin and Strauss 2008; Gibson and Brown 2009; Flick 2009; Strauss 1987) have examined the application of coding protocols within grounded theory methodology. These writers in turn, assert that researchers undertaking coding activities must as a final process, develop a central theme or ‘core category’ that accounts for a significant proportion of the variance in the data.

Consistent with these assertions, and at the conclusion of *open coding - axial coding* stages of this research, the researcher conducted *selective coding*.

From this point, the researcher then proceeded to isolate those coded categories and the related sub-categories that were deemed as constituting the *core construct* (i.e. the phenomena that best represented the overriding theme(s) of this research).

Accordingly, the researcher determined the core construct applicable to this research as being:

The case study communities seek greater effectiveness to influence provider organizations and elected policy makers concerning essential functions and services delivery issues.

Selective Coding and the emergence of the core construct

The case study communities considered as being *effective* are those having the capacity:

- to *communicate* with provider organizations through established organizational structures and feedback mechanisms; and

- to *lobby* elected policy makers on an ongoing, and *ad hoc* basis;
- with the aim of influencing current essential functions and services delivery issues, future policy and strategies.

“We haven’t influenced anyone I don’t think. We tried a lot of things; we tried different things, the Court House, the medical, the hospital’s going backwards, the doctor’s surgery.”

So as far as us succeeding in influencing...It is hard to influence someone when you don’t know what their purpose; they don’t tell you, talk to anyone.... Until after it has all been done.”

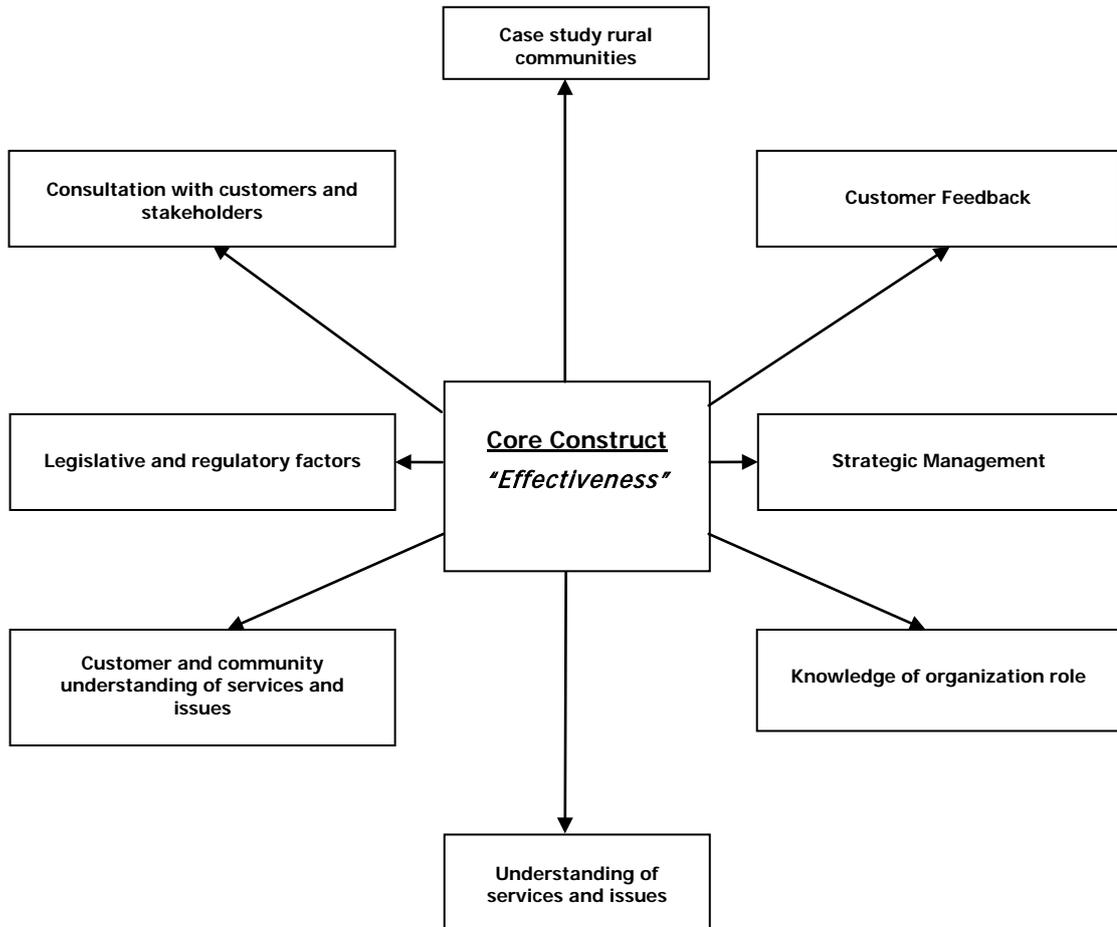
Source: Participant - Case Study Rural Community Focus Group, Wagin

Once the core construct was selected, the researcher conducted a *compare and contrast* process against the categories and codes with a view to reaffirming that choice (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

The outcome is shown diagrammatically as follows:

The “Effectiveness” Core Construct and its relationship to the coded Categories and

Sub-categories



Appendix A-10: Information Pages for Research Participants – Focus Groups and Elite Interviews

INFORMATION SHEET

DOCTORAL RESEARCH PROJECT: AN EXAMINATION OF CUSTOMER PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVENESS AND STANDARDS IN ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS AND SERVICES DELIVERY IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

This doctoral research project is conducted under the auspices of the Curtin University of Technology's Graduate School of Business. It has been motivated by the ongoing corporatization of key government enterprises which has occurred since the mid 1980s, and significant policy-driven changes made in the delivery of essential functions and services.

The project seeks to examine customer perceptions of effectiveness and standards in essential functions and services delivery and the impacts upon rural communities. The research also aims to investigate whether rural communities are effective in influencing strategic decisions made by utilities and services providers and government policy makers.

Case studies of selected rural communities will be used to progress the research objectives. A focus group comprising representatives of key stakeholder organizations will also be conducted in Wongan Hills on <Date 2006> and your participation is sought. It is intended that the focus group will have a maximum duration of 120 minutes and refreshments will be provided for participants.

The focus group which I propose to personally facilitate, will comprise 8 participants as follows:

- Shire of Wongan-Ballidu – two representatives;
- Local businesses – two representatives;
- Community service /volunteer organizations – two representatives; and
- Community members – two representatives.

Subject to your acceptance of this invitation, it is intended that the scope of your involvement in the research would be limited to participating in the focus group session and in reviewing and approving the report of outcomes.

In inviting your participation, you are assured that all research undertaken will conform with the ethical and privacy requirements of the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC's) *National Statement on Ethical Conduct Involving Humans*.

In accordance with this protocol, I confirm the voluntary nature of any participation which you may have in the research. You are entitled to withdraw from the research at any time and without prejudice, should you wish to do so.

Within the context of this research project:

- Information regarding the names and addresses of stakeholder representatives will not be published in focus group reports and research findings.
- Focus group reports will not attribute specific responses to questions to any individual participant but instead, will contain composite details of views and issues raised.
- Participants' input into focus group questions will be facilitated through use of an electronic decision support system. Accuracy of focus group outcomes will be promoted through recording of proceedings using a laptop computer and display via multimedia projector.

Proceedings will also be recorded on a micro-cassette for back up purposes and to assist with transcription.

- Following completion of focus groups, participants will be provided with a draft of the focus group report to confirm accuracy and to enable suggestion of any changes which may be required.
- Data collected via the decision support system will be translated into hard copy. This information, together with proceedings recorded electronically via micro-cassette, will be retained for five years in secure location within Curtin University of Technology's Graduate School of Business.

Details of researcher and supervisors involved in this research project:

Giuseppe Mario Ripepi is the doctoral research student undertaking this project. Questions regarding the research project can be obtained by contacting Mr Ripepi at:

25 Orwell Crescent
WOODVALE WA 6026
Email: joer@hotlinks.net.au
Telephone: 0417 17 56 50.

The following staff members of Curtin University of Technology serve as the nominated supervisors for this research project:

Supervisor

Associate Professor Fiona Haslam McKenzie
Director
Housing and Urban Research
Institute of Western Australia
Curtin University of Technology

Co-Supervisor

Professor Margaret Nowak
Graduate School of Business
Curtin University of Technology

Contact information for further details or clarification on ethical research issues:

The Curtin University of Technology's Human Research Ethics Committee has been approved this research project.

Prospective participants seeking further details on ethical research issues or, wishing to make a complaint on ethical grounds, should contact:

The Secretary
Human Research Ethics Committee
C/- Office of Research and Development
Curtin University of Technology
GPO Box U1987
PERTH WA 6845
Email: S.Darley@curtin.edu.au
Telephone: 9266 2784

Participant's Consent Form

(Please detach on completion and return to researcher)

I, _____, agree to participate in the doctoral research project entitled: *"An Examination Of Customer Perceptions Of Effectiveness And Standards In Essential Functions And Services Delivery In Rural Communities"* being conducted by Giuseppe Mario Ripepi under the auspices of Curtin University of Technology's Graduate School of Business.

I understand that the research project involves my participation in a focus group which will be conducted over a two hour period.

I understand that the intended scope of my involvement in the research project will be limited to participation in the focus group session, and in reviewing and approving the report of outcomes.

I have been informed of and understand the purposes of the study.

I have been afforded an opportunity to ask questions.

I understand the voluntary nature of any participation which I may have in the research and that I am entitled to withdraw from the research at any time without prejudice, should I wish to do so.

I understand that any information relating to participation in focus groups which might potentially identify me, will not be published in focus group reports and research findings.

I agree to participate in the research project as outlined to me.

Participant's Signature

Date

INFORMATION SHEET

DOCTORAL RESEARCH PROJECT: AN EXAMINATION OF CUSTOMER PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVENESS AND STANDARDS IN ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS AND SERVICES DELIVERY IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

This doctoral research project is conducted under the auspices of the Curtin University of Technology's Graduate School of Business. It has been motivated by the ongoing corporatization of key government enterprises which has occurred since the mid 1980s, and significant policy-driven changes made in the delivery of essential functions and services.

The project seeks to examine customer perceptions of effectiveness and standards in essential functions and services delivery and the impacts upon rural communities. The research also aims to investigate whether rural communities are effective in influencing strategic decisions made by utilities and services providers and government policy makers.

Case studies of selected rural communities will be used to progress the research objectives. Interviews of representatives of key decision-maker entities and essential functions and services provider organizations will also be conducted in mid to late 2006 and your participation is sought.

It is intended that the interviews will have a maximum duration of 30-45 minutes.

Subject to your acceptance of this invitation, it is intended that the scope of your involvement in the research would be limited to participating in the interview session and in reviewing and approving the report of outcomes.

In inviting your participation, you are assured that all research undertaken will conform with the ethical and privacy requirements of the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC's) National Statement on Ethical Conduct Involving Humans.

In accordance with this protocol, I confirm the voluntary nature of any participation which you may have in the research. You are entitled to withdraw from the research at any time and without prejudice, should you wish to do so.

Within the context of this research project:

- Information regarding the names and addresses of stakeholder representatives will not be published in interview reports and research findings.
- Interview reports will not attribute specific responses to questions to any individual participant but instead, will contain composite details of views and issues raised.
- Participants' input into interview questions will be facilitated through use of an electronic decision support system.
- Proceedings will also be recorded on a micro-cassette for back up purposes and to assist with transcription.
- Following completion of interviews, participants will be provided with a draft of the interview report to confirm accuracy and to enable suggestion of any changes which may be required.
- Data collected from interview notes and audio tape will be translated into hard copy. This information, together with individual micro-cassettes, will be retained for five years in secure location within Curtin University of Technology's Graduate School of Business.

Details of researcher and supervisors involved in this research project:

Giuseppe Mario Ripepi is the doctoral research student undertaking this project. Questions regarding the research project can be obtained by contacting Mr Ripepi at:

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I understand that the research project involves my participation in an interview which will be conducted over a 30-45 minute period.

I understand that the intended scope of my involvement in the research project will be limited to participation in the interview, and in reviewing and approving the report of outcomes.

I have been informed of and understand the purposes of the study.

I have been afforded an opportunity to ask questions.

I understand the voluntary nature of any participation which I may have in the research and that I am entitled to withdraw from the research at any time without prejudice, should I wish to do so.

I understand that any information relating to participation in interview which might potentially identify me, will not be published in interview reports and research findings.

I agree to participate in the research project as outlined to me.

Participant's Signature **Date**

Appendix B

TABLE OF APPENDICES (B)

Profiles of the study communities Study Communities: Tables showing school data	Appendix B-1 (Tables B-1A to B-1H)
Profiles of the study communities Study Community: Tables showing population Data	Appendix B-2 (Tables B-2A to B-2)
Wongan Hills District High School Enrolment	Appendix B-3 (Table B-3A)

Appendix B-1
Chapter Four – Scene setting: Profiles of the study communities
Study Communities - School Data

Table B-1A: Wagin District High School (4102)* Student Population and Staffing Allocation

Students			
<u>Category</u>	<u>Pre-Compulsory Kindergarten</u>	<u>Years 1 to 7</u>	<u>Years 8 to 12</u>
Full Time	26		
Part Time	40		
Full Time		156	
Full Time			50
Total	66	156	50
Academic and administration staff			
<u>Category</u>			
Principals and Deputy Principals	3		
Teaching Staff	24		
School Support Staff	22		
Total	49		

*School Identification Number assigned by the Department of Education

Source: Government of Western Australia: Department of Education 2011d.

Table B-1B: Mount Barker Community College (4186)* Student Population and Staffing Allocation

Students			
<u>Category</u>	<u>Pre-Compulsory Kindergarten</u>	<u>Years 1 to 7</u>	<u>Years 8 to 12</u>
Full Time	52		
Part Time	40		
Full Time		300	
Full Time			289
Total	92	300	289
Academic and administration staff			
<u>Category</u>			
Principals and Deputy Principals	3		
Program Coordinators	4		
Teaching Staff	46		
School Support Staff	37		
Total	94		

*School Identification Number assigned by the Department of Education

Source: Government of Western Australia: Department of Education 2011a.

**Table B-1C: Boyanup Primary School (5058)*
Student Population and Staffing Allocation**

Students		
Category	<u>Pre-Compulsory Kindergarten</u>	<u>Years 1 to 7</u>
Full Time	18	76
Part Time	19	
Total	37	76
Academic and administration staff		
Category		
Principals and Deputy Principals		2
Teaching Staff		8
School Support Staff		8
Total		18

*School Identification Number assigned by the Department of Education

Source: Government of Western Australia: Department of Education 2011c.

**Table B-1D: Wongan Hills District High School (4105)*
Student Population & Staffing Allocation**

Students			
<u>Category</u>	<u>Pre-Compulsory Kindergarten</u>	<u>Years 1 to 7</u>	<u>Years 8 to 12</u>
Full Time	17		
Part Time	24		
Full Time		144	
Full Time			55
Total	41	144	55
Academic and administration staff			
<u>Category</u>			
Principals and Deputy Principals			3
Teaching Staff			22
School Support Staff			21
Total			46

*School Identification Number assigned by the Department of Education

Source: Government of Western Australia: Department of Education 2011e.

Table B-1E: Ballidu Primary School (5029) Student Population and Staffing Allocation

Students		
Category	<u>Pre-Compulsory Kindergarten</u>	<u>Years 1 to 7</u>
Full Time	2	20
Part Time	4	
<u>Total</u>	6	20
Academic and administration staff		
Category		
Principals and Deputy		1
Teaching Staff		2
School Support Staff		10
Total		13

***School Identification Number assigned by the Department of Education**

Source: Government of Western Australia: Department of Education 2011b.

Appendix B-2
Chapter Four – Scene setting: Profiles of the study communities
Study Community Population Data

Table B-2A: Wagin (S) (LGA) Selected Person Characteristics for Time series 1996 – 2006
Count of Persons Based on Place of Emuneration¹³

	1996 Census			2001 Census			2006 Census		
	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons
Total									
Persons (a)	922	946	1,868	856	869	1,725	885	900	1,785
Age group (a)									
0-4 yrs	76	71	147	70	71	141	54	68	122
5-14yrs	149	176	325	126	140	266	136	134	270
15-19yrs	60	52	112	64	38	102	44	47	91
20-24yrs	46	51	97	26	41	67	44	41	85
25-34yrs	134	125	259	105	109	214	81	91	172
35-44yrs	149	151	300	123	121	244	113	117	230
45-54yrs	131	98	229	136	124	260	130	144	274
55-64yrs	61	69	130	104	87	191	146	108	254
65-74yrs	63	90	153	47	56	103	71	65	136
75-84yrs	42	45	87	43	58	101	47	57	104
85yrs and over	11	18	29	12	24	36	19	28	47
Overseas Visitors	3	0	3	0	0	0	4	4	8
Indigenous Persons:									
Aboriginal	43	47	90	52	36	88	35	40	75
Torres Strait Is.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Is.(b)	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	3
Total	43	47	90	55	36	91	35	43	78
Birthplace:									
Australia	789	786	1,585	735	718	1,453	705	701	1,406
Elsewhere(c)	99	131	230	94	130	224	110	130	240
Languages spoken at home:									
English only	882	910	1,792	820	834	1,654	812	831	1,643
Other language (d)	21	13	34	13	14	27	11	12	23
Australian Citizen	852	858	1,710	797	789	1,586	761	781	1,542

¹³ The place of emuneration count is a count of people based on where they were located on Census Night. In many cases people are located away from where they usually live. Census counts by place of emuneration include overseas visitors for the variable Age, Sex and Registered Marital Status but exclude overseas visitors for all other person variables.

Table B-2B: Plantagenet (S) (LGA) Selected Person Characteristics for Time series 1996 - 2006
Count of Persons – Based on Place of Enumeration

	1996 Census			2001 Census			2006 Census		
	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons
Total Persons (a)	2,142	1,975	4,117	2,246	2,083	4,329	2,146	2,142	4,288
Age group (a):									
0-4yrs	167	147	314	142	136	278	135	120	255
5-14yrs	369	346	715	371	351	722	370	346	716
15-19yrs	134	137	271	150	129	279	130	138	268
20-24yrs	114	78	192	110	88	198	86	67	153
25-34yrs	301	270	571	263	235	498	191	220	411
35-44yrs	331	305	636	352	361	713	317	332	649
45-54yrs	278	271	549	344	281	625	318	346	664
55-64yrs	234	185	419	251	223	474	297	278	575
65-74yrs	145	135	280	169	160	329	181	158	339
75-84yrs	61	66	127	76	88	164	97	98	195
85yrs and over	8	35	43	18	31	49	25	39	64
Overseas Visitors	7	5	12	7	6	13	12	7	19
Indigenous Persons:									
Aboriginal									
Torres Strait Is.	99	83	182	66	73	139	35	51	86
Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Is.	3	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	3
(b)									
Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	102	83	185	66	73	139	35	51	89
Birthplace:									
Australia	1,728	1,583	3,311	1,775	1,646	3,421	1,608	1,575	3,183
Elsewhere (c)	326	324	650	360	343	703	368	402	770
Language spoken at home:									
English only	2,011	1,872	3,883	2,004	1,947	3,951	1,926	1,936	3,862
Other language (d)	62	53	115	71	66	137	77	73	150
Australian Citizen	1,948	1,798	3,746	1,946	1,884	3,851	1,859	1,860	3,719

(a) Includes overseas visitors.

(b) Applicable to persons who are both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Origin.

(c) Includes 'Australian External Territories', 'Inadequately Described', 'At Sea', and 'Not Elsewhere Classified'.

(d) Includes 'Inadequately described' and 'Non-verbal, so described'.

Source: (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008)

Table B-2C Estimated Resident Population of Rocky Gully as at 30 June 2006

<u>Rocky Gully</u>	<u>Estimated Resident Population – 30 June 2006</u>
Total number of persons	193
Population by age group	(%)
Persons - 0 to 4 years	7.3
Persons - 5 years to 14 years	14.5
Persons - 15 years to 24 years	8.3
Persons - 25 years to 54 years	46.1
Persons - 55 years to 64 years	11.9
Persons - 65 years and over	11.4

Table B2-D Estimated Resident Population of Boyanup as at 30 June 2006

<u>Boyanup</u>	<u>Estimated Resident Population – 30 June 2006</u>
Total number of persons	615
Population by age group	(%)
Persons - 0 to 4 years	4.4
Persons - 5 years to 14 years	14.3
Persons - 15 years to 24 years	13.5
Persons - 25 years to 54 years	41.3
Persons - 55 years to 64 years	15.1
Persons - 65 years and over	11.4

**Table B2-E: Persons in Rocky Gully attending types of education institutions:
Comparing 2006 and 2011 Censuses**

Type of Educational Institution Attending (Full/Part-Time Student Status By Age)	Census 2006	Census 2011	% Change +/-
Pre-school	3	9	+200.00
Infants/Primary:			
Government	14	12	-14.28
Catholic	0	0	0.00
Other Non Government	0	0	0.00
Total	14	12	-14.28
Secondary:			
Government	11	12	+9.09
Catholic	0	0	0.00
Other Non Government	0	6	∞
Total	11	18	+63.64
Technical or Further Education Institution (a)			
Full-time student:			
Aged 15-24yrs	3	0	-100.00
Aged 25yrs and over	0	3	∞
Part-time student:			
Aged 15-24yrs	3	0	-100.00
Aged 25yrs and over	0	6	∞
Full/Part-time student status not stated	0	0	0.00
Total	6	9	+50.00
University or other Tertiary Institutions:			
Full-time student:			
Aged 15-24yrs	0	0	0.00
Aged 25yrs and over	0	3	∞
Part-time student:			
Aged 15-24yrs	0	6	∞
Aged 25yrs and over	0	0	0.00
Part-time student status not stated	0	0	0.00
Total	0	9	∞
Other type of educational institution:			
Full-time student	3	0	-100.00
Part-time student	0	0	0.00
Full/Part-time student status not stated	0	0	0.00
Total	3	0	-100.00
Type of educational institution not stated	13	104	+700.00
(a) Includes Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Colleges			

Adapted from: Australian Bureau of Statistics Census of Population and Housing 2006; 2011 Rocky Gully (WA) (SSC 55446) B14 - TYPE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION ATTENDING (FULL/PART-TIME STUDENT STATUS BY AGE) BY SEX COUNT OF PERSONS ATTENDING AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION.

Table B2-F: Industry diversity contributing to employment within Boyanup for persons aged 15 and over – Comparing 2006 and 2011.

Based on usual place of residence

Industry Classification (incorporating all occupation categories)	Census 2006	Census 2011	% Change +/-
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	21	20	-4.76
Mining	16	27	+68.75
Manufacturing	25	36	+44.00
Electricity, gas, water & waste services	5	6	+20.00
Construction	38	50	+31.58
Wholesale Trade	18	14	-22.22
Retail Trade	29	43	+48.28
Accommodation & food Services	11	19	+72.73
Transport, postal & warehousing	15	19	+26.67
Information, media & telecomm.	0	3	∞
Financial & postal services	0	3	∞
Rental, hiring & real estate services	6	12	+100.00
Professional, scientific & technical services	0	11	∞
Administrative & support services	5	5	0.00
Public Administration & safety	23	14	-39.13
Education & Training	33	37	+12.12
Health care & social assistance	16	36	+125.00
Arts & Recreation services	4	9	+125.00
Other services	15	26	+73.33
Inadequately described/Not stated	17	9	-47.06
Total	297	399	+34.34

Source: (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008a; 2013c)

Adapted from: 2006 and 2011 Censuses of Population and Housing: Boyanup (L) (UCL 506100)

B44 INDUSTRY OF EMPLOYMENT (A) BY OCCUPATION (B) COUNT OF EMPLOYED PERSONS AGED 15 YEARS AND OVER.

Table B2-G: Wongan-Ballidu (S) (LGA) Selected Person Characteristics for Time series

Count of Persons Based on Place of Enumeration

	1996 Census			2001 Census			2006 Census		
	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons
Total Persons (a)	818	727	1,545	814	699	1,513	701	641	1,342
Age group (a):									
0-4yrs	74	68	142	73	56	129	51	54	105
5-14yrs	127	139	266	144	121	265	110	97	207
15-19yrs	49	22	71	32	28	60	26	26	52
20-24yrs	54	39	93	48	36	84	42	33	75
25-34yrs	150	128	278	130	114	244	90	92	182
35-44yrs	152	131	283	138	124	262	117	110	227
45-54yrs	107	92	199	123	98	221	132	105	237
55-64yrs	51	44	95	62	49	111	73	52	125
65-74yrs	35	37	72	47	33	80	30	28	58
75-84yrs	18	22	40	14	28	42	27	30	57
85yrs and over	3	5	8	3	12	15	3	14	17
Overseas Visitors	4	3	7	5	5	10	0	0	0
Indigenous Persons:									
Aboriginal	25	29	54	26	26	52	30	25	55
Torres Strait Is.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Is. (b)	0	0	0	3	5	8	0	0	0
<i>Total</i>	25	29	54	29	31	60	30	25	55
Birthplace:									
Australia	710	638	1,348	694	593	1,287	593	562	1,155
Elsewhere (c)	80	69	149	81	83	164	80	58	138
Language spoken at home:									
English only	788	696	1,484	773	667	1,440	663	620	1,283
Other language (d)	7	9	16	10	13	23	16	12	28

(a) Includes overseas visitors.

(b) Applicable to persons who are both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Origin.

(c) Includes 'Australian External Territories', 'Inadequately Described', 'At Sea', and 'Not Elsewhere Classified'.

(d) Includes 'Inadequately described' and 'Non-verbal, so described'.

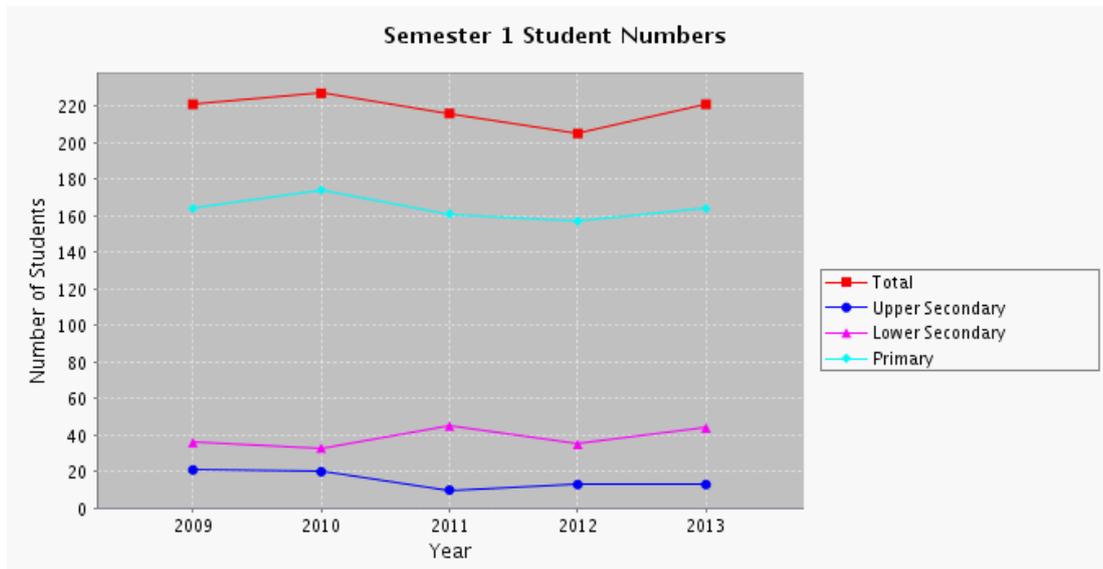
Appendix B - 3

Chapter Five – Findings

Table B-3A Wongan Hills High District High School

2012 Student Enrolment

	Pre-compulsory	Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary	Total
Semester One	22	164	44	13	243



Retention and Participation

(percentage of students retained at Wongan Hills District High School)

	Years 8-10	Years 8-12	Years 11-12
2012	111%	11%	100%

Source: Wongan Hills District High School Annual Report 2012. p. 7

Appendix C

TABLE OF APPENDICES (C)

Schedule showing the dates on which the focus groups were conducted within each of the study communities	C-1
Schedule showing details of elite interviews conducted	C-2

Appendix C-1
**Schedule showing the dates on which the focus groups were conducted within
each of the study communities**

Study Community	Date of focus group	Focus group venue
Wagin	Monday, 19 th September 2005	Shire of Wagin Council Chambers, Arthur Road, Wagin.
Mount Barker	Tuesday, 20 th September 2005	Frost Park Clubrooms, Mount Barker.
Rocky Gully	Wednesday, 21 st September 2005	Rocky Gully Hall, Muirs Highway, Rocky Gully.
Boyanup	Friday, 23 rd September 2005	Boyanup Community Centre Meeting Room, Thomas Street, Boyanup.
Wongan Hills	Wednesday, 22 nd March 2006	Shire of Wongan-Ballidu Council Chambers, Corner of Quinlan Street & Elphin Crescent, Wongan Hills.
Ballidu	Thursday, 23 rd March 2006	Ballidu Community Hall, Cnr Fairbanks Street and Alpha Street Ballidu.

Appendix C-2

Schedule showing details of elite interviews conducted (Participants' names withheld)

Representative(s) Position	Organisation	Date & Location
Mr <Surname>, Regional Services Coordinator, and Mr <Surname>, Customer Services Manager.	Water Corporation of Western Australia	Whole-of-organisation questionnaire completed and returned to researcher 15 August 2006.
Mr <Surname>, Chief Executive Officer.	Country Housing Authority	Perth, 17 August 2006.
Mr <Surname>, Manager Country Services.	Western Power Corporation	Perth, 28 August 2006.
Mr <Surname>, Executive Director XXXX Services, and Mr <Surname>, Executive Director XXXX Services.	Main Roads Western Australia	Perth, 30 October 2006.
Mr <Surname>, Regional Manager.	WA Country Health Services, Great Southern Region.	Albany, 23 November 2006.
Mr <Surname>, District Director.	Albany District Education Office. Department of Education and Training.	Albany, 23 November 2006.
Superintendent <Surname>.	Western Australia Police Service, Great Southern District.	Albany, 23 November 2006.
Mr <Surname>, Regional Manager.	Department of Housing and Works, Great Southern Region.	Albany, 23 November 2006.
Mr <Surname>, Regional Manager and Mr <Surname>, Manager Housing.	Department of Housing and Works, Wheatbelt Region.	Northam, 12 February 2007.
Ms <Surname>, Regional Manager.	WA Country Health Services, Wheatbelt Region.	Northam, 12 February 2007.
Mr <Surname>, District Director.	Midlands District Education Office. Department of Education and Training.	Northam, 12 February 2007.
Mr <Surname>, Regional Director.	WA Country Health Services, South West Region.	Bunbury, 23 February 2007.
Ms <Surname>, Regional Manager.	Department of Housing and Works, South West Region.	Bunbury, 23 February 2007.
Mr <Surname>, District Director.	Bunbury District Education Office. Department of Education and Training.	Bunbury, 23 February 2007.
Mr <Surname>, MLA.	Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia.	Perth, 4 April 2007.
Mr <Surname>, MLA.	Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia.	Perth, 19 April 2007.
Mr <Surname>, MLA.	Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia.	Perth, 8 May 2007.