



# Public Art Strategy



Town of  
**Port Hedland**





# Contents

Foreword..... v

Context..... 1

What we heard..... 4

Key definitions ..... 7

Vision ..... 8

Objectives ..... 9

Principles ..... 9

Curatorial themes and stories ..... 10

Key actions ..... 12

## Acknowledgement of Country

The Town of Port Hedland would like to acknowledge the Kariyarra, Ngarla, and Nyamal people as the Traditional Custodians of the Town of Port Hedland lands.

We recognise their strength and resilience and pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

We extend that respect to all Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people of the local community and recognise their rich cultures and their continuing connection to land and waters.





*Public art has an important role  
in educating people, promoting  
cultures and traditions, and  
building connections*

# Foreword

**Public art is a highly visible indicator of a community's creativity and plays a vital role in the development of a sense of identity and belonging, crucial to the design and enrichment of public spaces and places.**

Artwork can highlight the history and characteristics of a place, shape landscape and perception, while also influencing the environment and stimulating new experiences and interactions.

The Town of Port Hedland values the positive impact of creativity on our town and recognises that art and culture are an expression of the region's identity. Our Public Art Strategy formally recognises the large role public art plays in achieving our community's desire for a vibrant, safe, creative and inclusive town. We are committed to ensuring that art is an everyday experience for residents and visitors, and to creating unique opportunities for artists. Through this strategy, we will build upon the existing public art collection, ensure that newly acquired artworks are of high quality and that the collection is well maintained while exploring new opportunities for art in public spaces.

This document aims to provide a vision for the future of Hedland's public art program. The development of this strategy has been informed with significant community engagement and I would like to thank all who have contributed to this document throughout the process, helping us plan for a more vibrant and creative town.

I hope our Public Art Strategy will inspire artists and the community to support the Town in the planning and achievement of public art that is cohesive, engaging, innovative and authentic to Hedland.



Carl Askew

Town of Port Hedland CEO



# Context

## A place of many cultures

There has always been a diverse cultural mix in Port Hedland. Before the arrival of the European settlers there were at least 28 languages spoken by the various indigenous groups who call the area home, including Kariyarra, Ngarla and Nyamal. The region is still home to a strong community of Aboriginal Australians, almost 1/6th of the population.

In 1863 Captain Lars Peter Hedland, on the cutter Mystery, entered a narrow channel and discovered what appeared to be an inland lake, initially named Mangrove Harbour and later, Port Hedland after the Swedish explorer.

What was once a small town of 1,200 people in the early 1960s, is now a busy district boasting more than 15,000 residents, the majority of whom are young working couples and families wedded to the region as their home. The community is more diverse now than ever, with residents from New Zealand, Philippines, England, South Africa and India contributing to the cultural mix.

## Set against the backdrop of the red earth

The Town of Port Hedland covers a vast area of almost 12,000 square kilometres of the Pilbara, including the twin settlements of Port Hedland and South Hedland, and the industrial precinct of Wedgefield. The Town benefits from its isolated location with stunning expanses of coastal beaches - azure waters contrasting crimson red sunsets.

Port Hedland is the gateway to the Pilbara, with some of the most unique and beautiful national parks in Australia including Karijini, Karlamilyi and Millstream Chichester. The landscape consists of deep red iron-rich dirt, sculptural mounds of spinifex and endless blue skies.

The region is cut through with rivers flowing north to the estuaries around Port Hedland, the intertidal lands containing a saltern, mudflats and mangroves. This rich landscape makes the area a haven for fauna: flatback sea turtles, dolphins and a variety of birds attracted to the fertile mudflats, including red-necked stints, sharp-tailed sandpipers and dusky gerygone.

## An identity dominated by industry

Originally a port for pearling and pastoral industries, Port Hedland quickly became the main coastal outlet for the Pilbara mining industries. The discoveries of tin, gold, and then iron ore and lithium, alongside the Pilbara's many natural wonders, have ensured that the region thrives on the wealth of the land.

Port Hedland is the gateway to the Pilbara mining industries. Employment levels are high, the majority of whom are employed directly by the mining and shipping industries, with a high number of high-income earners compared to regional WA. Other main employment sectors in the region are construction, transport, accommodation and food services, manufacturing, retail trade and healthcare.

## Home to a highly engaged cultural sector

The Town of Port Hedland's cultural community is engaged and sophisticated, having been serviced by leading cultural organisation FORM for over ten years, as well as the work of a range of locally based arts and cultural organisations and community groups.

Creativity abounds in the region, from the Aboriginal artists practicing in the Spinifex Hill Studios, to self-taught arts enthusiasts and some of the State's most talented professional artists.

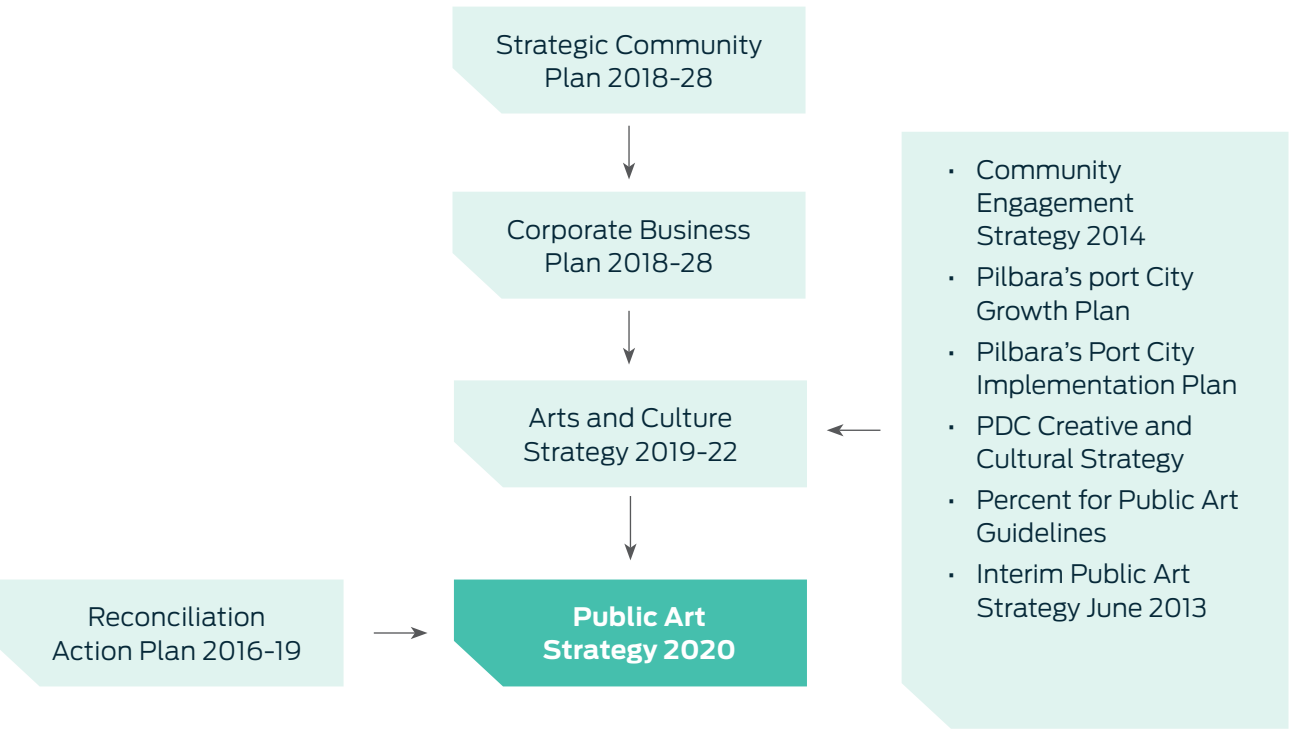
The cultural sector provides a significant calendar of events and programs throughout the year, contributing to the vibrancy and liveability of the Town of Port Hedland.



Strategic context

The Public Art Strategy has been developed in response to, and in line with, a number of the Town's key guiding documents.

These documents provide the necessary strategic context included:



Methodology





# What we heard

In mid 2019 the Town embarked on a period of engagement to inform the Arts and Culture Strategy, released in August 2019. In order to develop the Public Art Strategy, additional engagement was designed to supplement the information previously gathered by the Town.

This engagement involved:

- 3 workshops with community and key stakeholders
- Aboriginal engagement led by local consultant Maureen Kelly
- 10 Social media polls gathering over a thousand responses
- An online survey

This engagement focussed on the following key areas relating to public art:

- Types of public art and key locations
- Key themes and narratives
- Objectives for public art
- Other big ideas

## Who we engaged

The input of over 1,210 members of the community was gathered through the various forms of engagement. Of these:



22% male



73% female

The majority were between **25-35 years old**

A significant number of **over 60s** were engaged

Almost **25%** of respondents identified as Aboriginal



**54%** agreed that the Town should invest resources in public art



**67%** would like to see more public art by local Aboriginal creatives



**71%** believes public artwork contributes to a town's attractiveness



**76%** would like to see public art used to enhance the attractiveness of existing spaces

*"It's really nice when you go to the towns that are preserving and invigorating their most historic areas"*



## Emerging themes

### **The Port Hedland community value their unique cultural heritage and natural assets**

The engagement reflected the community's belief that cultural heritage and natural assets should be the focus for public art commissions, taking advantage of the distinctive colours, remarkable stories, endemic flora and fauna as inspiration for the artworks.

The community expressed a desire for artwork that celebrates Port Hedland and what distinguishes it from other places in the region.

### **Public art is a way of signalling Port Hedland is 'open for business'.**

The community understands the ability for arts and culture to contribute to tourism, and that public art is a way of signalling Port Hedland is a dynamic and vibrant place to live, work and visit.

In line with national and international trends, iconic artworks are a way of attracting visitations from audiences of all ages and generating organic social media content.

### **Public art should respond to the Pilbara landscape and industry operations**

In the Pilbara, a place of wide-open spaces untouched by industry, contrasted with rugged landscapes dotted with haul trucks and drill rigs, public art needs to be impactful, highly visible, and considered.

These are aspects which contribute to Port Hedland's identity, and should be reflected through public art.

### **Support local**

The Pilbara creative community is made up of diverse practitioners – graphic designers, illustrators, painters, sculptors and street arts, amongst many others. This diverse community has a lot to offer, however varying levels of experience mean they can be overlooked for public art opportunities.

Yet these creatives are best placed to create public art for the Town which is intrinsically linked to place and cultural identity. A focus on local professional development and opportunities for emerging creatives would encourage growth and engagement with this community.

### **Celebrate the locals – diversity and belonging**

There was strong sentiment to include and celebrate local Aboriginal artists and involve different members of the community in the creation of public art, such as youth and older people.

This is seen as a way of fostering pride within the Town and building a cohesive community spirit.

# Key definitions

- ▶ **Vision:** The vision is the overarching future-focussed statement towards which the Town is striving at all times.
- ▶ **Objectives:** The goals and outcomes which will be achieved through public art commissions. New proposals and commissions must respond to at least two objectives.
- ▶ **Principles:** The foundation for all public art related activity, to maintain quality and consistency across the Town's collection. These principles underpin all activities, proposals and commissions relating to public art.
- ▶ **Curatorial themes:** Curatorial themes defined through community engagement provide the inspiration for artists and will ensure the collection develops in a curated manner.
- ▶ **Sub themes and stories:** A number of significant stories, narratives and sub-themes have been defined under each curatorial theme, providing further guidance and inspiration for artists.
- ▶ **Actions:** The actions are the Town's initial priorities. These actions are intended to build the Town's collection and program in line with the overarching vision.



# Vision

Our public art collection tells the Hedland story through thought-provoking artworks, bringing our public places to life and creating opportunities for our local creative community.

The collection signals who we are, the value we place on innovation, cultural heritage and the natural environment and our aspirations to be an inclusive and dynamic place to live, work and play.

*"The art in a transient town like this should play a part in reminding people what's to love about the place on a social and environmental level"*

# Objectives

## Improve and beautify public spaces

Public art in the Town of Port Hedland enhances the public realm through arresting installations, fine grain details and functional artworks. These artworks activate spaces, engender pride of place, and increase safety through increased passive surveillance.

## Celebrate cultural identity and heritage

Public art reflects the diverse communities who call Port Hedland home. The collection fosters community cohesion by sharing information about local stories and values, facilitating conversations, and demonstrating an inclusive approach to all cultures.

## Boost tourism and visitor attraction

High impact artworks create recognisable icons for the Town and provide organic social media impacts beyond the Pilbara. Alongside this, public art which interprets local history and culture, provides tourism product opportunities and additional reasons to visit.

## Support the local creative community

The Town's public art collection contributes to the growth of the local cultural sector through both income generation and professional development opportunities for practicing artists, through commissions, workshops and artist talks.

# Principles

## Accessible

Public art is engaging for all ages and demographics and is sited strategically to be able to be enjoyed by all members of the community.

## Best practice

The Town adheres to benchmark processes and methods, as defined by industry bodies NAVA and ArtSource. Appropriate cultural protocols are followed at all times when commissioning artworks.

## Locals first

The Town's cultural sector is enriched through significant opportunities for locals, including for culturally and linguistically diverse groups, ensuring the collection truly reflects the diversity of the community.



# Curatorial themes and stories

## Themes

### Deep-rooted cultural heritage

The region's identity is inherently connected to the traditional owners who have called this place home for tens of thousands of years, the Kariyarra, Ngarla and Nyamal.

The Town's cultural heritage, both Aboriginal and otherwise, is intrinsically linked to Hedland's abundant natural environment; with minerals, resources and climate attracting visitation and investment from near and far.

### Community connections, diversity and belonging

The Town is recognised as a place of loyal community stalwarts, transient drifters, and those who return again and again like the tide.

These characters add to the story of Hedland, shaping a place which is grounded in diversity, belonging and inclusivity.

### A rugged landscape of extremes

The Town of Port Hedland is a place of sensory overload; the hum of the port, rush of tides, and sounds of a community, all set against a visual feast of colours.

Baked by the sun and carved by the hands of generations, the evidence of the passing of time is marked across the landscape.

## Sub themes and stories

- Kariyarra, Ngarla and Nyamal significance
- Stories from traditional owners
- Historic town centre
- Pearling history

- A multicultural and diverse community
- Pride of place
- Inclusivity regardless of background
- Transience communities
- Customs and traditions
- Connection to the world via the Port

- Red dirt
- Blue ocean
- Endemic flora and fauna
- Marine life
- Manmade landscapes and port operations
- Seasons



# Key actions

		Objectives			
Category	Action	Improve and beautify public spaces	Celebrate cultural identity and heritage	Boost tourism and visitor attraction	Support the local creative community
Collection conservation and care	Document all existing public art and create working database	✓			
	Create maintenance plans for each work, and a schedule for ongoing works	✓			
	Develop relevant public art guidelines to ensure ongoing collection maintenance, including decommissioning	✓			
Procurement	Create a public art masterplan identifying opportunities for public art across the Town, to be commissioned over the coming five years. Masterplan to include:	✓	✓	✓	✓
	• Marker style trail artworks focussing on local Aboriginal stories	✓	✓	✓	✓
	• Iconic artworks in high profile locations, designed to act as recognisable entry statements	✓	✓	✓	✓
	• Play-based artworks to local parks and underutilised public spaces	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Establish an annual public art budget for Town-led commissions as identified in the Masterplan	✓			✓
Management	Develop a set of commissioning guidelines for public art				✓
	Public Art Advisory Panel to advise on commissions, including local creatives, elders and Town representatives				✓
	Review the Town of Port Hedland Public Art Policy to reflect industry best practice in the acquisition and implementation of public art initiatives, management and maintenance of the collection	✓			✓

		Objectives			
Category	Action	Improve and beautify public spaces	Celebrate cultural identity and heritage	Boost tourism and visitor attraction	Support the local creative community
Access to collection	Provide online access and information on the Town of Port Hedland's existing public art collection, including information on artists		✓	✓	✓
	Establish an artwork trail – via a physical and online map for distribution from Visitors' Centre		✓	✓	
	Retrofit existing artworks with didactic plaques with information on the work, artist and location	✓	✓	✓	✓
Local artist development	Provide commission opportunities for local artists, including sculptural works, 2D and functional artworks		✓		✓
	Facilitate artist talks and workshops from commissioned artists, for the local community				✓
Funding, including partnership opportunities	Identify opportunities for co-funded artworks with significant industry and commercial operators	✓			✓
	Encourage the integration of public art in private developments	✓	✓		✓
	Review the Town's budgetary commitment to the commissioning and ongoing management of public art to reflect and enable growth of the program	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Explore and pursue external funding opportunities, including grants, philanthropic and sponsorship arrangements				✓
	Ensure public art opportunities are considered within the Town's capital infrastructure program, master-planning processes, open space projects and precinct developments	✓		✓	✓



Prepared by:

**element.**  
the art and science of place