

Geraldton to become State's largest regional city: expert

WATCH OUT, ALBANY

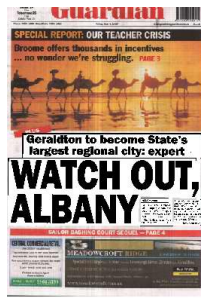
ALEX MUNRO

GERALDTON is expected to surpass Albany and become WA's biggest regional city under a forecast iron ore boom.

The findings come from the Mid West Iron Ore

Alliance's new report — Mining Expansion in the Mid West: Social and Economic Benefits — which says Geraldton is set to become second only to Perth in WA in population size over the next 25 years.

Continued Page 2



back



Boom will make us a mega-city

From page 1

The report, released on Wednesday, found the expanding Mid West iron ore industry would cause this potential population increase.

"An increase in the local workforce of around 8500 people has the potential to increase the total population by about 20,000 people," the report said. "This would be a 40 per cent increase in the region's population if all of the workforce were to locate from other areas in the State.

"Based on recent trends (of coastal population drift), 90 per cent are likely to choose to live in coastal areas around Geraldton, thus potentially making this a population aggregation comparable in size to Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Albany and Bunbury."

Report co-author Dr Brian Martin said the scale of the new projects and the availability of local skills mean many of the projects would emphasise regional employment over fly-

in, fly-out arrangements from South West parts of the State.

He said he had never seen figures like these before and they were not wild assumptions.

"These are dramatic numbers. The State Government needs to start thinking in terms of planning for schools and services," he said.

"This is an enormous opportunity for the people of Geraldton and for the growth of the Mid West. It is time to start."

Geraldton Iron Ore Alliance chairman Clive Brown said the report showed iron ore would not only increase the local population significantly but also provide opportunities for young people to acquire skills and secure long-term careers.

He said it predicted many mine site workers would use Geraldton rather than Perth as a transport hub to travel to projects up to 400km away.

Former Geraldton City Mayor Ian Carpenter said the area would be able to handle the

increase if the State Government started spending more on infrastructure in the region.

"We now have the information to make the decisions," he said. "There are a lot of planning issues that need to be addressed.

"While the local councils will need to address some of these, the primary focus is on the State Government."

POPULATIONS: REGIONAL WA

Estimated June 2006:

1 Albany	33,364
2 Geraldton-Greenough	33,040*
3 Bunbury	32,499
4 Kalgoorlie-Boulder	29,152
5 Busselton	28,649

*Former city 19,018 + former shire 14,022.
Source: ABS