

The Sunday Times

STRONG REGIONS VITAL TO WA PROSPERITY

UNEMPLOYMENT is growing faster in regional WA than anywhere else in the country, according to official data.

This isn't just a problem for those living in impacted areas. It's a problem for all West Australians.

The situation cannot be ignored in Perth because people will inevitably move to where the jobs are.

At a time when urban sprawl, congestion and a shortage of affordable housing are held up as massive issues confronting the city, we should be populating our regional centres, not depleting them.

Increasing unemployment in some regions has gone hand in glove with the slowdown in the resources sector. But the situation, made worse by shrinking commodity prices, doesn't fully explain the worrying trend. There needs to be an attempt to get a handle on all the contributing factors.

While the unemployment rate is fairly static in Perth, the South-West has seen a welcome reduction. In Bunbury, for example, the jobless rate fell from 6.8 per cent in June last

year to 4.2 per cent this June. The situation is bleakest in Halls Creek, where it jumped from 26.9 per cent to 42.7 per cent in the same period. The entire Kimberley is crying out for new ideas and approaches, especially in indigenous communities where deeply entrenched social issues and poverty hold people back.

It's deeply concerning that hundreds of people have lost their jobs in our major regional centres, including Greater Geraldton, Esperance and Kalgoorlie.

Professor Matthew Tonts, a human geographer at the University of WA, warned that regional unemployment can quickly spiral if not adequately addressed.

"What you can end with is a vicious cycle of decline," he said. "As a person leaves, less money is being spent in the local shops, there's a few less kids in the local school or health system and that means there's even less demand."

"Ultimately that means there's the potential for more out-migration and more unemployment."

A map of Australia highlighting the areas currently in the grip of rising unemployment should sound an alarm for WA.


While the State Government is putting its faith in new Regional Investment Blueprints, supported by a \$292 million fund, the Opposition has called for Royalties for Regions to be better targeted at job creation.

The Sunday Times intends to scrutinise the situation closely in 2015 and we invite industry and regional stakeholders to offer their own insights and ideas.

The bottom line is that for WA to prosper, we can't leave the regions behind.

We can't have a huge gulf in employment prospects and living standards between one corner of the state and the rest.

In a state as vast as ours, tunnel vision won't do.

 Responsibility for editorial comment is taken by the editor, Rod Savage, 34 Stirling St, Perth 6000.

Time to end bush-bashing

LAST week's Future Perth story "Urban bush bulldozed" makes me wonder why we use the terms conservation or biodiversity at all, when we only give these terms lip-service. Open slather on Australia's wildlife is an understatement.

The irony is that southwestern Australia is recognised globally as one of the world's biodiversity hotspots and yet we are methodically destroying what is

Have a thought for burnt-out teachers

SO there has been another arson attack at a school ("Cops hunt school arsonist", TST, November 16). Understandably, the students are disappointed and distressed, as Atwell Primary School principal David Lee attests. Again understandably, they will be counselled by school psychologists and chaplains. But what about their poor teachers?

Every time the media reports on an incident of school arson, the students are mentioned, but no one

and as such contain their resources and records – the former generally the culmination of many hours of toil and amassed over many years.

Both my wife and I are recently retired teachers. Several years ago my wife's classroom was deliberately set alight and she lost years' worth of resources, the majority of which were irreplaceable. While the physical damage to the classroom was able to be repaired, the mental anguish caused by this incident was far

