

GILGANDRA

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY CONDITIONS



photo by Philip N Young, Flickr



Northern
Basin
Review



Gilgandra and surrounds, What the research tells us

- Population
- Education
- Employment
- Land use
- Water availability

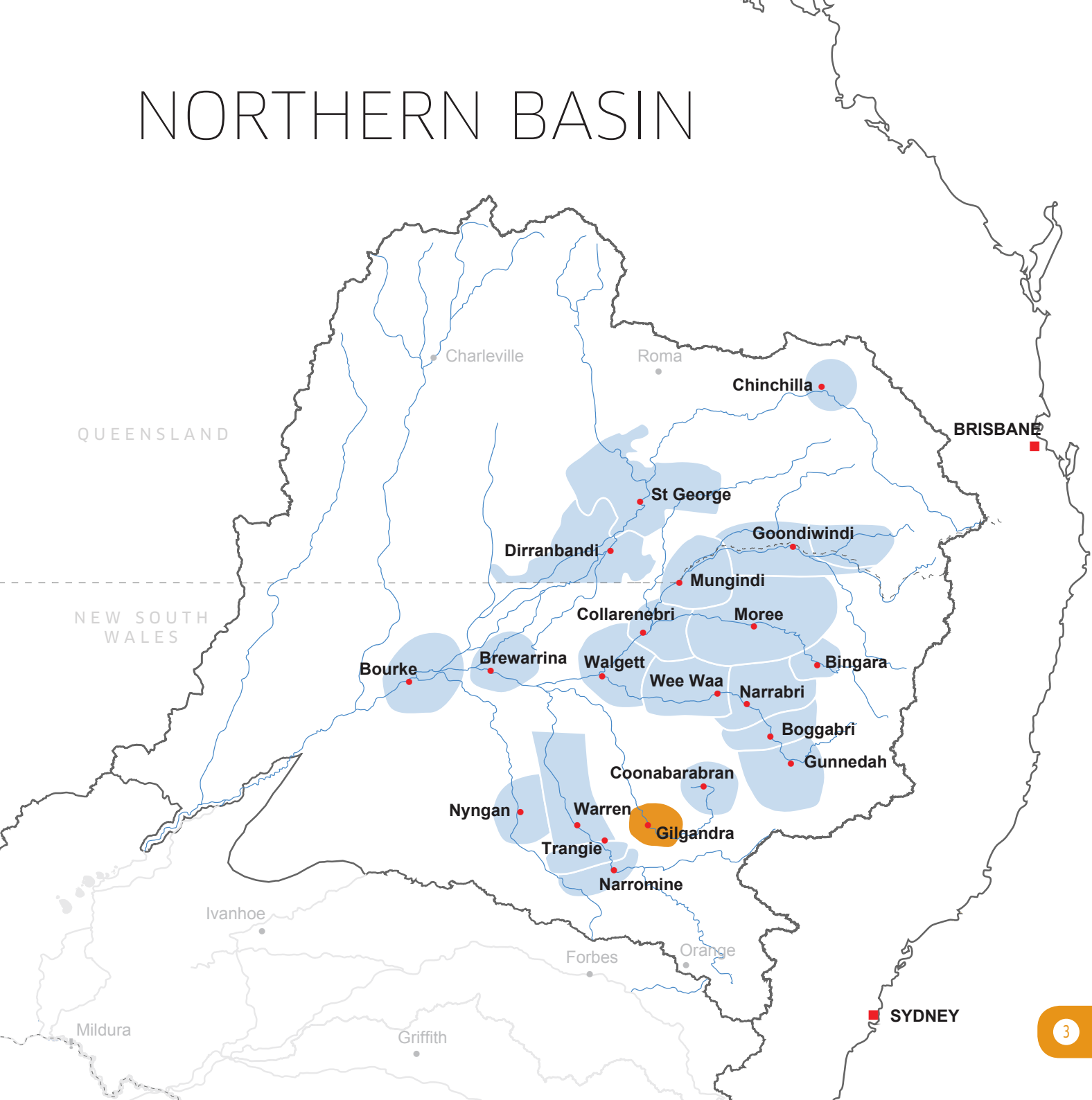
Gilgandra and surrounds, From the locals' point of view

- Looking back
- Managing change
- What is happening

Gilgandra is a predominantly agricultural community whose population and total employment have remained fairly constant across time. The changes within the population are consistent with the demographic characteristics of stable communities.

The major change has been to the internal structure of the local economy where the decrease in jobs for the agriculture and agriculture supply sector has been largely offset by growth in employment for the non-agriculture private and government services sectors. The general social and economic conditions of the community indicate the potential challenges for Gilgandra if it were confronted with large change.

NORTHERN BASIN



Gilgandra and surrounds

What the research tells us

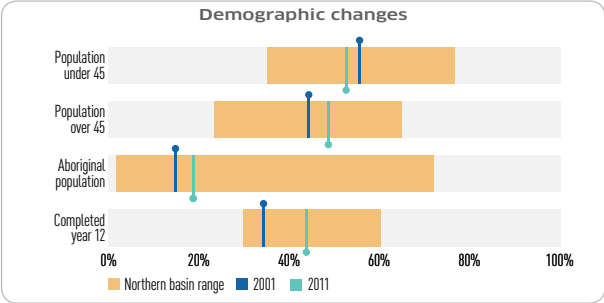


POPULATION

| | 2001 | 2006 | 2011 |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Total area population | 3,799 | 3,888 | 3,749 |
| Total town population | 2,718 | 2,680 | 2,665 |

Between 2001 and 2011, the population in both the Gilgandra area and Gilgandra town was relatively stable. In 2011, 18% of Gilgandra’s town population identified as Aboriginal.

In 2001, 44% of the town population was 45 years or older. This increased to 48% by



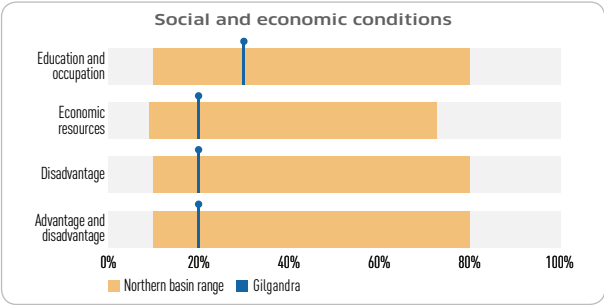
2011. During this period, there was a 7% increase in the number of people aged 45 years and over and a 9% decrease in the number of people under 45. Most of this change occurred between 2006 and 2011.

EDUCATION

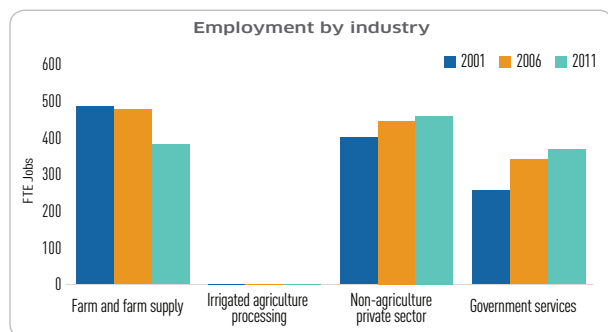
In 2011, 43% of people in the town (aged over 15) had completed year 12 and 24% had completed some post-school qualifications. The latter is an increase from 19% in 2001.

In 2011, Gilgandra town had an index score of 2 for economic resources, 2 for disadvantage, 2 for advantage and disadvantage, and 3 for education and occupation. For 2006, the index scores were the same except for the index score of 1 for economic resources.

General social and economic condition



EMPLOYMENT



Across the period 2001 to 2011, employment in the Gilgandra community was around 1,200 FTE, with an overall increase of around 6% (67 FTE). However, there have been large changes in the types of employment in the local economy.

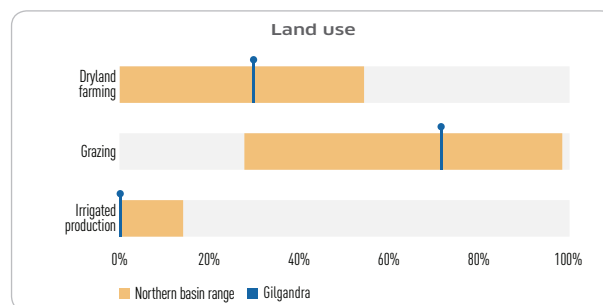
Unemployment in the town of Gilgandra was 9% in 2011.

Between 2001 and 2011, employment in the agriculture and agriculture supply sector decreased by 21% (103 FTE), mostly between 2006 and 2011. Over the same period, employment in the non-agriculture private sector increased by 14% (58 FTE) and jobs in the government services sector increased by 44% (113 FTE). Most of the increases occurred between 2001 and 2006.

LAND USE

Gilgandra's agricultural industry is largely dryland production with grazing accounting for 71% and dryland farming 29%. Irrigation production is very limited with only a small area identified for irrigated production.

Agricultural production includes wool, beef, legumes, lupins, chickpeas, fava beans, wheat and barley.



IRRIGATION WATER AVAILABILITY

In the Gilgandra area, a very small amount of surface water entitlements are held for water in the Macquarie-Castlereagh catchment. To date, there has not been any water recovery from the Gilgandra area under the Basin Plan.



Gilgandra and surrounds

From the locals' point of view

Looking back

Gilgandra (or Gil as locals call it) is set on the banks of the Castlereagh River. It is known as the town of windmills and the home of the Coo-ees. Until 1966, the town did not have a central water supply and most people had a windmill to pump water to their homes. At one time, the skyline was dominated by more than 360 windmills scattered around the town.

In 1915, 35 men left Gilgandra and marched to Sydney to volunteer for World War 1. By the time they reached Sydney that number had swelled to 263. The Coo-ee March marked

the most significant recruitment march of World War 1.

The Gilgandra community is predominately an agricultural area for sheep, beef cattle, and winter cereal crops. Sheep have been grazed for wool production here since 1830 and there has been a significant increase in cattle numbers over the last century.

The town had its share of disasters. In 1955, Gilgandra was flooded, with water reaching a height of more than 5 feet (1.5 metres) in the main street, Miller Street. Many people were

left homeless and more than 300 homes were flooded. The flood made worldwide headlines and received a message of condolence from the Pope.

In 2009, the town was hit by another disaster, when fire ripped through the main street and completely destroyed 6 businesses, including 2 banks and the town's only pharmacy.

Like many rural towns, the Gilgandra economy has been driven by the prosperity of its local farmers and agricultural industry. Local agent and resident of more than 50 years, Paul Alchin, said Gilgandra has always been a true mixed farming area and he described this area as 'safe'.

'We have had our droughts, but we are not one of those areas that get absolutely nothing. We generally get a crop in and we generally can sell livestock.' Paul Alchin

However, Paul says mechanisation in the area during the last 30 years has had a major impact on the town and the number of families living on farms.

When Paul attended Gilgandra High School 30 years ago, it had 350 children. Now it has 270. Back then, Paul said most farmers had a worker on their farm – who also had a family.

Paul said Gilgandra's biggest challenge is keeping services in the town.

Managing change – a business owners view

Jenny Gilmour has owned the Gilgandra Pharmacy for more than 20 years. It currently employs 12 staff and this number has grown slightly over recent years.

Jenny said the local economy relies on the business which traffic from the junction of the three highways brings.

Jenny told us that while her business 'has been good to her', it is not as profitable as it used to be and 'you have to work harder for the dollars you get'.

Competition from local supermarkets, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, internet shopping and residents choosing to shop in Dubbo are four major factors that Jenny told us affects her business.

While the dispensing of prescriptions represents 80% of her business, she told us that she has just taken on a junior partner to help build the 'front of house' – in an effort to increase profits.

Jenny said replacing pharmacists here in Gilgandra is a real struggle. Just recently, one of her staff left to take maternity leave and despite advertising extensively, she is yet to find a replacement. In fact, she didn't have anyone apply for the position.

'You used to be able to run it (the pharmacy) with just one pharmacist, but now there is a need to provide more clinical services, where we sit down with patients and talk to them about their prescriptions.'

Jenny Gilmour

This pharmacy was one of the stores involved in the fire of 2009 that destroyed 6 businesses in Miller Street.

MH Thomas was established in Gilgandra as a stock and station agency more than 60 years ago by Martin Thomas. Nowadays, his grandson Bryce Thomas is the licensee of the business. In August this year, MH Thomas merged with local competitor, Gilgandra Real Estate.

Office administrator Alison Thomas told us they currently have 220 rental properties on their books. Alison said that the rental market is very tight and if you were new to town and needed a house, you might have to wait a few months.

Alison says the housing market is slow at the moment. Normally this business would sell around 2 homes a month. At the moment they are selling one every 2 months. In Gilgandra, homes range from \$65,000 – \$300,000.

'People aren't certain about investing in small communities at the moment.'

Alison Thomas

The aging population is also a concern as many tradesmen in Gilgandra are reaching retirement age.

What is happening now?

Randall Meed is the Economic Development Officer at Gilgandra Shire Council. He has been there for 14 years and feels the town is tracking better now than it was 10 years ago.

In 2013, the Council spent \$2 million purchasing land and developing an industrial sub-division in town. Already, the Council has sold 4 blocks, with 3 of them being new businesses.

'It's not a field of dreams, but we knew there was a need for it. People here were pushing for it so we could be investment ready. If you can't accommodate new businesses, they won't come.'

Randall Meed

The local vet has already moved the business to the new industrial development. Mr Meed said the new businesses coming to town include welding fabrication and a trucking company.

Randall said they are selling the blocks for \$11 per square metre. In Dubbo, equivalent land is worth \$80-\$150 per square metre.

'It takes a lot of political courage to sink \$2 million into it and we won't make a return on it, council will be lucky to get half a million back.' *Randall Meed*

But he told us this is 'employment generating land', and the council got involved to create jobs.

In Gilgandra, there are 2 local primary schools and 1 high school. Relieving Principal at Gilgandra High School, Neal Reed, says numbers have dropped over the last three years from 320 to 270 students.

Over the last few years, most families who have left the high school have sent their children to schools in Dubbo (65 kilometres from Gilgandra). However, Neal says he hopes to bring those numbers back to Gilgandra High School.

'We have held our numbers well this year, and we have 100% from year 6 coming up from the public school next year. We have 18 from a possible 23 coming from the Catholic school.' *Neal Reed*

Gilgandra Public School Principal Trisha Howard told us that numbers have remained constant at her school over the last 7 years. Trisha says Gilgandra Public School has more than 190 students enrolled, and more than half of the students enrolled are Aboriginal.

St Joseph's Catholic School has 205 students enrolled, which is up from 180 students only five years ago.

From a farming perspective, manager of agricultural supply business Landmark, Russell Anderson, said rain in January and then again in April has brought good prospects for grain growers in the district.

Russell told us that Landmark is the biggest servicer for cropping activities in the district and it makes up 90% of his business. His turnover target for this year is \$3 million and he already hit that mark by August.

'Over the last 10 years it has been pretty average, but this year there are plenty of crops in. But we won't really know how things will end up in the cropping scene until farmers get their crops off.'

Russell Anderson

Farmers have put in legumes, lupins, chickpeas, fava beans, wheat and barley. Russell said wheat is the predominate crop this year.

Russell said the aggregation of farming land has been significant in this area over the last 20 years. He said there are 3 families in the district who own around 20,000 acres each, however, most farms are now 4,000-5,000 acres.

Stock and station agent Paul Alchin said farmers in their 30s and 40s are changing enterprises out here from livestock to cropping.

He says the property market here is strong and prices have taken off over the last 8 years. However, unlike many neighbouring districts, Paul said corporate purchase of land in the Gilgandra Shire hasn't happened at this stage.

Paul is also the President of the High School Parent and Citizens Association and said there is a real focus here at the moment to keep kids at the local high school and stop them 'jumping on the bus and heading to Dubbo'.

'We are trying to convince the community what an asset they have in their local high school.'

Paul Alchin

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