

A scenic view of a city skyline, likely Perth, Australia, seen from a park. In the foreground, there are large, mature trees with light-colored bark and green foliage. A paved path and a bench are visible in the middle ground. The background features a dense urban landscape with various high-rise buildings under a clear blue sky.

# Pre-budget Submission

August 2021



Chamber of Commerce  
and Industry WA



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# Summary

WA has enjoyed extraordinary success during COVID-19, primarily due to booming global commodity markets. When these markets are strong, the WA economy is strong.

The WA economy has never relied on the mining sector so much. Mining now comprises 43 per cent of our economy – the highest proportion on record. The next largest sector in any state is the finance and insurance sector in NSW, which is just 12 per cent.

Commodity markets will one day turn, with many expecting we have a

few years at best. WA cannot afford to be complacent.

Reforming an economy takes time, so WA must take the opportunity now to diversify. That opportunity is significant – unlike many other places across the world, we have a rare chance to capitalise on our success in managing COVID-19.

CCIWA's recommendations to the State Government focus on enabling WA businesses and the community to grow and prosper by:

- Keeping costs to businesses as low as possible
- Ensuring a skilled workforce and world-class infrastructure
- Ensuring regulation helps, not hinders, innovation and investment
- Re-integrating WA into the global economy

This submission also considers the burning issue we face right now – skill shortages.

## Priority Recommendations To Promote Diversification

| Keep costs to business as low as possible   | Ensure a skilled workforce and efficient infrastructure         | Ensure regulation helps, not hinders, innovation and investment                   | Position WA as an attractive place to invest   |
|---|---|---|--|
| Reform WA's payroll tax model to provide relief for small & medium sized businesses | Allow universal access funding for kindy to 'follow the child'  | Provide funding to implement the Digital Strategy for the WA Government 2021-2025 | Reframing our approach to trade and investment |
| Support businesses to adapt to harmonised Workplace Health & Safety laws            | Allow all small businesses to choose their electricity retailer | Undertake incremental reforms to retail trading restrictions                      | Develop an Investment Portfolio Dealbook       |

Additional recommendations are included at Attachment 1.



There is no area of the economy left unscathed, with businesses reporting challenges in recruiting everyone

## Burning issue: skill shortages

Businesses and our economy also have a more immediate need: we urgently need access to experienced workers to allow our businesses to grow and for our community to continue to enjoy the standard of living we are used to.

CCIWA's most recent business confidence survey found that four in five WA businesses are struggling to find the skills they need and that access to skills is expected to be the biggest barrier to business growth over the next quarter.

There is no area of the economy unscathed, with businesses struggling to recruit everyone from brick layers to childcare workers to truckies to engineers.

At the same time WA businesses are rising to the challenge, with apprenticeship and traineeship commencements in the year ending March 2021 increasing 40% compared to the previous year.

However, it takes time for people to gain the experience business needs, with WA companies requiring people to have at least three years of experience to fill their vacant roles.

Poaching people from the Eastern States is also not an option with Queensland, New South Wales and Victorian businesses all reporting even worse challenges accessing workers.

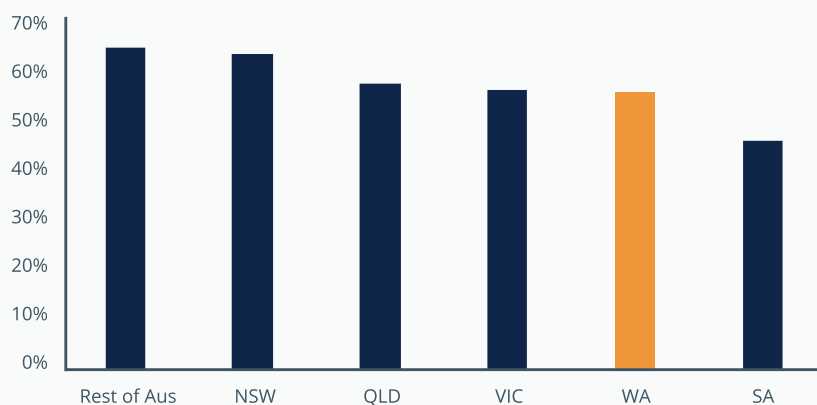
This is why the WA Government in conjunction with the Commonwealth must lean in and prioritise the entry of overseas workers in a safe and

orderly manner. Given the pivotal role international students play as both consumers and contributors to our workforce, we should also be bringing them back to the State as soon as possible.

We are already behind the game when it comes to trialling alternative quarantine arrangements, as well as piloting the return of international students. If we wait much longer, we will miss out on attracting people to WA as they choose to settle elsewhere. The WA Government must be open to working with industry to run pilots and trials to bring international workers and students into WA outside the current arrivals cap.

Hotel quarantine is creating a bottleneck to bringing more people into the State, both returning Australians and international arrivals. Allowing self-quarantine for fully vaccinated, returning Australians – in the same way as is allowed for interstate arrivals to WA from low and medium risk Australian jurisdictions – would help alleviate this bottleneck. So would immediately investing in more capacity in government approved quarantine facilities. These actions would in turn allow the Government to increase WA's arrivals cap.

% of businesses struggling to hire for a particular skillset



Source: CCIWA analysis, ABS data



This must go hand in hand with greater efforts to accelerate the vaccine roll-out. WA has the lowest proportion in the country of people over 16 years that have been fully vaccinated. For as long as our vaccine rate languishes at these low levels, the business community will be forced to bear the costs of snap lockdowns.

CCIWA's view is that, once a majority of WA's population have had the opportunity to be vaccinated, snap lockdowns should only occur in response to variants that vaccines don't protect against.

Further, once that safe level of vaccination is reached, the State Government must stop closing interstate borders and requiring interstate arrivals to quarantine. These restrictions dissuade people and businesses from relocating to WA.

In any event, we implore the State Government to urgently explain what its approach to future outbreaks and local lockdowns will be. This includes providing clarity over the definition of an essential worker, and the businesses that qualify for compensation.

This information will help businesses to plan better for future lockdowns.

CCIWA's recent national survey of businesses and households shows that Western Australians are now far less inclined to move overseas than they were before the pandemic.

They also believe that overseas migration plays an important role in growing our economy – only 30 per cent of WA households disagree. At the same time, well over half of businesses around the country see WA as a more attractive investment destination than 12 months ago. This presents our State with enormous opportunities.

Now is the time for WA to lay the foundations for opening up to the rest of the world. If we don't start actively pursuing these opportunities, top talent and investment dollars will go elsewhere, and the entire WA community will miss out.

### **Actions to address WA's immediate skill needs**

CCIWA calls on the WA Government to:

1. Pilot trials and expand efforts to bring back international workers and students outside the international arrivals cap.
2. Allow home quarantine for vaccinated returning Australians and invest in more government run quarantine capacity.
3. Increase the international arrivals cap at the earliest opportunity.
4. Pull out all stops to accelerate the vaccine roll-out in WA.
5. Once a majority of WA's population have had the opportunity to be vaccinated, only lockdown in response to variants that vaccinations don't protect against, and stop closing interstate borders and requiring interstate arrivals to quarantine.
6. Explain its approach to future outbreaks and local lockdowns, so that businesses can better plan for these events.

Well over half of businesses around the country see WA as a more attractive investment destination than 12 months ago





# Keep costs to business as low as possible

Competition for capital will intensify post COVID, and WA relies on international capital more than any other State. If we want to grow current and future industries, we need a more competitive tax system. To further put WA small and medium sized businesses on a level playing field with the rest of the country, they also need more support to implement harmonised Workplace Health & Safety laws.

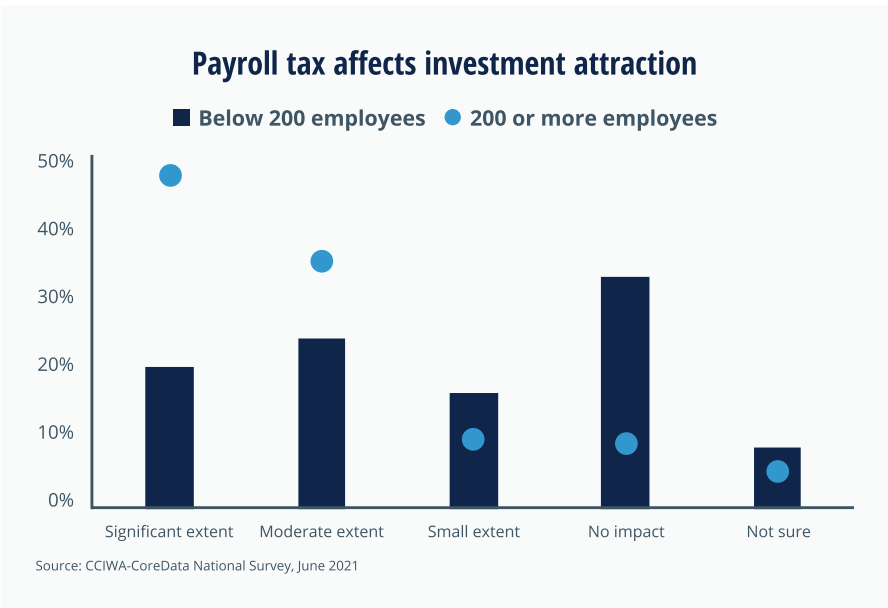
## Reduce the tax burden on business to attract investment to WA

Lumped with the heaviest payroll tax burden in the country, it is no wonder the WA economy is failing to diversify. WA businesses pay more payroll tax than businesses in any other State over a wide range of taxable wages.

In our recent national survey, we asked businesses around the country about the extent to which WA's payroll tax rate affects their perception of WA as an attractive place to expand their business. The results were emphatic (see figure below), with nearly half of large businesses saying our payroll tax rate significantly affects their perception.

CCIWA's payroll tax proposal removes disincentives to employ Western Australians and offers a way to unlock more business investment, innovation and diversification in our economy. Our proposal includes a new threshold of \$1.2 million and 15 per cent rebate on payroll tax liability for businesses with taxable wages below \$4 million. The rebate would taper down to zero for businesses with taxable wages at \$7.5 million.

Small to medium sized businesses across a range of key industries would benefit, including parts of the manufacturing sector — such as chemical plants, machinery equipment manufacturers and metal fabricators — as well as businesses in the accommodation, food and health and community sectors.





### Payroll Tax Case Study

A WA business with 20 staff is estimated to pay nearly \$40,000 (or 156 per cent more) more tax than the same business in South Australia (a state competing with WA for defence and manufacturing contracts). The business would pay \$947 less tax per Western Australian employed under CCIWA's model.

CCIWA's reforms represent an investment in delivering a more diversified economy, made possible by the Government's fiscal discipline. WA boasts a stronger fiscal position than every other state and territory, providing a unique opportunity to achieve a more competitive tax system and gain an advantage over the rest of the country.

The benefits from shifting away from stamp duty would also be significant, though the transitional challenges are significant. CCIWA is modelling different approaches to achieve change and their distributional impacts. It is critical that the State Government keep an open mind to potential pathways to a transition away from stamp duty, given the significant economic benefits.

### Invest in unleashing the benefits of harmonised Workplace Health & Safety laws

The implementation of the *Work Health and Safety (WHS) Act 2020* represents the biggest change to our occupational safety and health system since the 1980s. Despite this, with less than six months until its intended implementation, employers are unable to fully commence harmonising their

existing WHS practices due to delays in development of the accompanying regulations and codes of practice.

This is due to limited funding and resources. When WHS harmonisation was first considered by the WA Government in 2014 it was identified that its successful implementation would depend on regulators being adequately resourced. At the time, WorkSafe WA identified that its initial set up cost would be \$8.5 million with ongoing annual costs of \$3.4 million. The Government needs to provide sufficient funding to WorkSafe WA to deliver the education and support activities necessary for WA businesses to understand and implement these new obligations.

This should also include the reinvigoration of the ThinkSafe Small Business Assistance Program to provide independent advice directly to employers through specialist WHS consultants. This program was supported by both employer groups and unions, with UnionsWA having identified that *"many small businesses want to comply with health and safety*

*laws but need support"* and that the decision to cancel the original program *"displays a frightening disregard ... for the health and safety of small business employees"*.<sup>1</sup>

The reintroduction of the program would assist businesses with the high cost of implementing the new WHS laws. Whilst the initial implementation costs for large businesses operating across multiple states will be offset by the reduced regulatory burden associated with complying with multiple WHS regimes, this is not the case for small and medium sized businesses that operate solely within WA. The estimated unrecoverable cost to the WA business community of implementing the harmonised WHS system is \$86 million.<sup>2</sup>

To date the WA Government has committed to spending only \$150,000 to assist employers through a series of small grants to various employer associations. This level of support is inadequate and will result in WA small and medium sized businesses struggling to implement the new regime.



<sup>1</sup> McDonald, K (22 January 2017) *Money Runs out for Thinksafe*. The West Australian

<sup>2</sup> Calculated based on the conclusions of Safe Work Australia's Decision Regulation Impact Statement for National Harmonisation of Work Health and Safety Regulations and Codes of Practice (November 2011) which estimated the average cost per employee for single state employers to implement the model WHS system. Cost has been adjusted to reflect inflation. (\$74.62 per worker, with single state employers accounting for 71.5% of employment. In today's terms this is \$85.44 per worker, considering CPI from September 2011 to March 2021.)

# Ensure a skilled workforce and efficient infrastructure

Now more than ever, we must do everything we can to both make the most of our local workforce and attract talent from other locations. One of the most exciting opportunities is to make it easier for women with young children to re-enter the workforce and work more hours.

Globally competitive infrastructure is also needed to attract talent and business investment to WA: a big step forward in this regard would be allowing all small businesses to choose their electricity retailer.

### Enable women to participate more in the workforce by reforming kindy funding

The way kindy is funded and operated in WA is particularly preventing mothers from fully participating in the workforce.

WA women with young children are the least likely in the country to work more than 20 hours a

week, and the gap between women and men’s participation is higher here than everywhere else. WA parents describe the kindy year as a “logistical nightmare” and “the year from hell”.

In addition, WA children are the least likely in the country to attend kindy for more than 15 hours a week. This is particularly the case if they are from low-income families — only 66 per cent of WA children from low income families attend kindy for more than 15 hours per week, compared to 79 per cent nationally.

The Federal Government recently announced reforms to the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education. The reforms would see \$1,340 in Federal Government funding passed on to every child regardless of whether they attend kindy at school or centre-based day care.

CCIWA strongly encourages the WA Government to pursue this reform.

When achieved it would represent an enormous achievement for the Government, and a legacy for years to come.

Allowing universal access funding for kindy to ‘follow the child’ regardless of whether they attend kindy at school or centre-based care is the approach adopted by governments nearly everywhere else in the country. By giving parents more choice over where they send their children to kindy, the reform would go a long way to enabling WA mothers to work more hours each week, should they choose to.

And in the context of the State’s skills shortage crisis, we need to do everything we can to make it easier for parents to work more, so that businesses have access to the experienced workers they need.

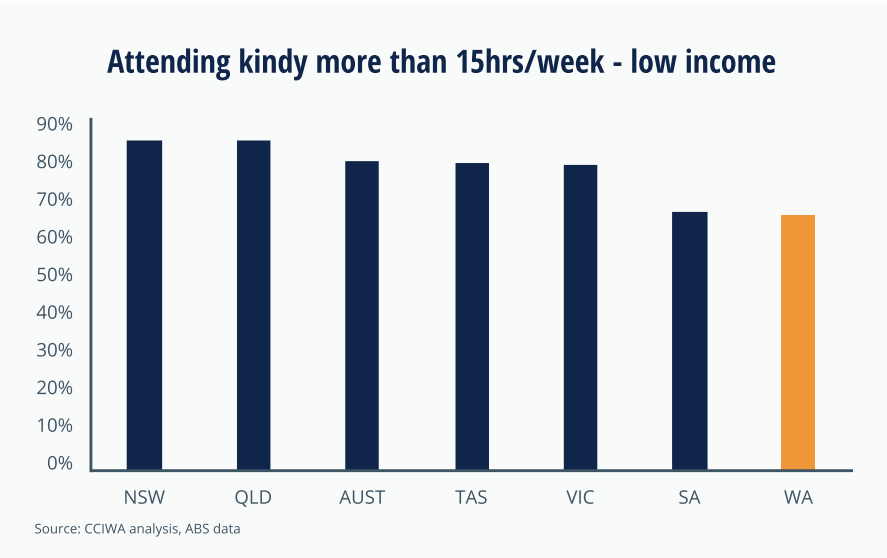
Aligning our kindy system with other States would also make WA a more attractive place to live and work, thereby improving our capacity to source interstate workers.

We understand the reform will have budgetary implications. The WA Government would need to find alternative funding sources for programs that the Department of Education has been delivering using universal access funds. However, in exchange for allowing universal access funds to follow the child, the Commonwealth has committed to provide ongoing (rather than single year) funding. We believe the associated funding certainty would be a good outcome for the WA budget, and an investment in families, women and the economy.

### Allow all of WA’s small and medium businesses to choose their electricity retailer

The State Government is successfully

WA parents describe the kindy year as a “logistical nightmare” and “the year from hell”.







## Three quarters of businesses surveyed by CCIWA agree the reform would help their business to invest and grow in the next five years.

rolling out energy reforms that will ensure reliable access to energy into the future. However, further reform is necessary to drive energy costs for small and medium businesses down in a sustainable way.

Within the South West Interconnected System, Synergy has a monopoly over customers consuming less than 50 megawatt hours per year. Further, businesses on sub-meters within large developments (e.g. shopping malls) are unable to choose their electricity retailer. Instead, they are on-sold electricity paid for by the owner, landlord or manager of the property.

This pushes up electricity prices for small and medium businesses.

Allowing businesses to choose their electricity retailer would help drive down prices by promoting competition. Three quarters of businesses surveyed by CCIWA agree the reform would help their business to invest and grow in the next five years.

Another critical – yet often overlooked – benefit of expanding the number of contestable customers is it would encourage private sector investment in new generation assets and technologies.

This is driven not just by the expanded customer base in and of itself, but also the greater ability for new investors to develop affordable wholesale hedging instruments.

The Government should:

- Lower the contestability threshold to 20 megawatt hours of electricity per annum or define all non-residential customers as contestable.
- Enable businesses on sub-meters to choose their electricity retailer.

These changes would provide choice and price competition for small and medium businesses.



## Ensure regulation helps, not hinders, innovation and investment

Our State's economic diversification relies on WA businesses being free to focus on innovating and investing. The Government can enable this by streamlining the interface between business and government and removing restrictions on retail traders.

### Invest more in digitising regulatory services

WA's regulators give businesses limited access to online regulatory services.

For example, the Economic Regulation Authority found 124 licenses for which there was no

information on agency websites, and 138 examples of applications that had to be lodged in person or by post despite the application forms being available online. There are applications that must be completed through an online system but then printed and lodged in person or post. Several application fees, including some fishing access fees, still need to be paid in person by cheque. Even applications administered by the same agency have different processes.

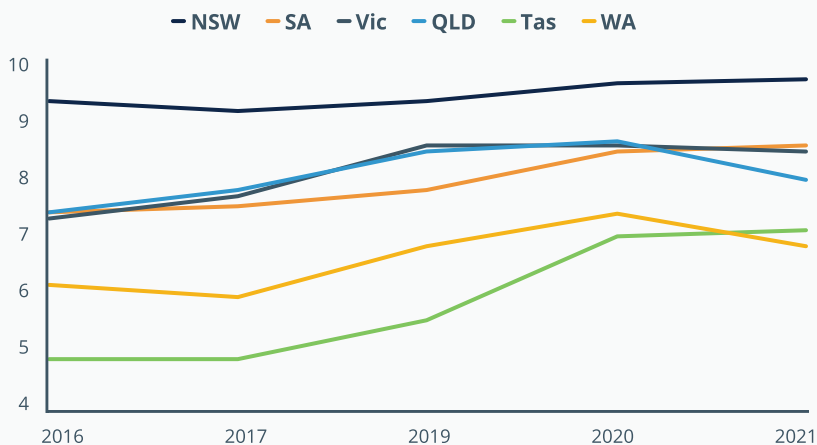
The slow pace of the WA public sector's digitisation is holding businesses back from growing their organisation and imposing

unnecessary costs. We are also falling behind other jurisdictions, making WA a less attractive place to do business (see figure below).

CCIWA supports the Government's recently released *Digital Strategy for the Western Australian Government 2021-2025*. However, if not accompanied by a clear signal to agencies that investing in digitisation is a priority, and in particular, without sufficient funding in the budget, the pace of change will continue to be slow. In short, we will lag the rest of the nation in transforming the interface between the State Government and its citizens and businesses.



### Government digital readiness around Australia



Source: Intermedium, Digital Government Readiness Indicator Report, 2021

We recommend the Government include significant funding in the budget for implementing the Digital Strategy. Doing so would quickly improve regulatory and administrative processes across multiple industry sectors, enabling businesses to focus on doing business and diversifying our economy. This would not come at the cost of compromised community, safety and environmental outcomes – if anything, more digitisation and greater use of data analytics offers the potential to improve regulatory oversight.

### Support the vitality of the retail sector by removing restrictions on trading

Western Australia's restrictions on retail trading hours are a textbook example of government red tape unnecessarily holding back the vitality and liveability of our community, while stifling WA jobs in the process.

Tasmania, Victoria, New South Wales, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory have all moved forward and allowed their businesses and consumers flexibility

about when they can shop and what they can buy. When they relaxed their trading hours, the sky did not fall in.

In fact, multiple independent studies found that relaxing restrictions led to more retail jobs and hours of work – particularly for young people and women – and higher retail sales. Busy families and shift workers were able to shop at times that suited them, and smaller retailers in shopping precincts benefited from the increased foot traffic.

The clear majority of Western Australian businesses (72%) and households (69%) believe that to give local businesses the best shot at surviving COVID-19, all WA businesses should have the freedom to open their doors when they want.<sup>3</sup>

We are calling on the State Government to undertake incremental reforms that represent a reasonable compromise from both sides of the debate. Not only are our proposed reforms easy to implement and have no costs attached to them, they would push WA's economic diversification in the right direction.

### CCIWA's Common Sense Proposal For Retail Trading Reform

|          | Monday-Friday | Saturday | Sunday   | Public Holidays | Regulations  |
|----------|---------------|----------|----------|-----------------|--|
| Current  | 8am-9pm       | 8am-5pm  | 11am-5pm | 11am-5pm        | Government dictates individual products certain categories of retailers can & cannot sell. |
| Proposed | No change     | 8am-9pm  | 8am-5pm  | 8am-6pm         | Remove part of the regulations that dictates what certain businesses can & cannot sell.    |

<sup>3</sup> CCIWA, Business and Consumer Confidence surveys, 2020.

# Position WA as an attractive place to invest

Western Australia must take every opportunity to attract investment into the state – doing so is vital to growing and diversifying our economy.

CCIWA recently conducted a national survey of businesses and households. The survey identified that east-coast businesses have become more interested in relocating or expanding into Western Australia. Interest was particularly strong from the service sector in New South Wales.

Western Australia should also seek to leverage the opportunities our management of COVID-19 has presented us with by conducting a strong forward press back into the global economy.

To capture these opportunities, Western Australia should seize the moment and compete harder. Many of the initiatives outlined above will be critical to this end. In particular, a more competitive payroll tax system will help to attract investment.

This section outlines some of the specific initiatives WA should take to position itself as an attractive place for national and international investors.

## Reframing our approach to international trade and investment

Currently WA has no clear strategy for making a hard press into key trade and investment markets. It is time for WA to reframe its approach to international trade and investment.

There is particularly a strong need to focus on attracting inbound investment, with new opportunities in renewable energy and electric vehicles.

A strategic assessment is needed of where WA needs to focus its efforts.

Areas that require looking at include the United States. Despite being WA's largest investment partner, WA has no trade and investment office there. CCIWA considers Austin would be an ideal location, with its proximity to both the resources sector, and emerging tech industries.

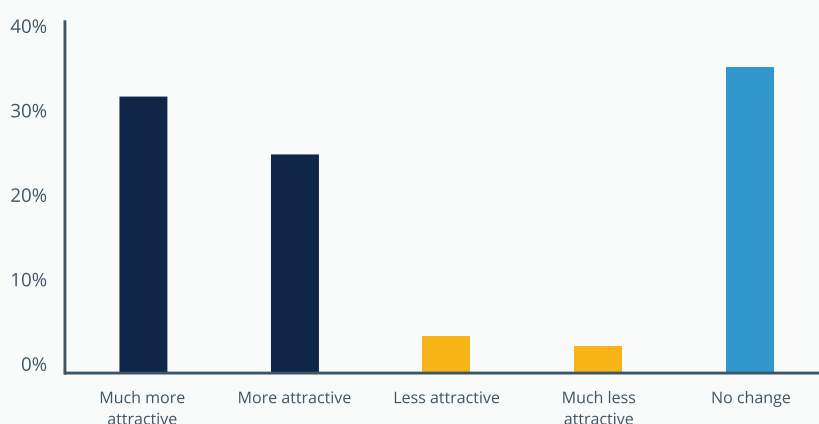
Other areas that clearly require attention are ASEAN, Japan, India and Latin America. On the latter, key WA businesses already have a foothold there, which can be leveraged to attract investment.

## Make it easier to invest in WA by developing an investment dealbook

There is an opportunity to fill the vacuum in global investment and trade markets by strengthening the value proposition for foreign businesses to invest in WA. This would help us to re-integrate into the global economy, and capitalise

### WA as an investment destination

Has your business' perception of WA as a place to invest shifted in the past 12 months?



Source: CCIWA-CoreData National Survey, June 2021







## At any given time there is always a significant number of WA businesses seeking foreign investment

on the opportunities created by businesses rethinking global supply channels and investment priorities.

At any given time there is always a significant number of WA businesses seeking foreign investment, mostly to fund new ventures or grow international presence.

We are proposing that the State Government develop an Investment Portfolio Deal Book (IPDB) – a comprehensive and consolidated resource for foreign direct and interstate investors looking to invest in WA. The IPDB would be in an online portal, with content made available for multiple platforms (such as JTSI's Invest and Trade WA site, [wa.gov.au](http://wa.gov.au), [cciwa.com](http://cciwa.com), etc), and updated regularly.

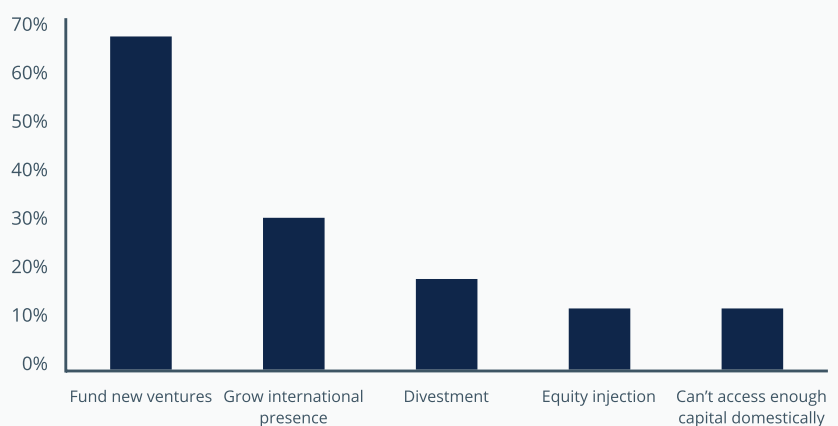
The IPDB would support the WA Government when on investment tours answer the simple question: "What can I invest in?" It would equip

the WA Government, Austrade/ DFAT offices and International Chambers of Commerce to market WA as an attractive investment destination showcased by a suite of investment proposals. Similarly, the bilateral Chambers and Consulates in Perth would be able to better promote

WA as an attractive investment destination.

Now is the time for WA to capitalise on our geographic advantages to build the awareness and attractiveness of WA as an innovative and diverse investment hub for foreign direct investment.

### Reasons for seeking foreign investment



Source: CCIWA Business Confidence Survey, September 2020

# Attachment 1: additional policy recommendations

## Keep costs to business as low as possible

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Make the current tax system more competitive:

- Abolish transfer duty on non-land business assets and at a minimum abolish the tax for business restructures.
  - Reduce the burden of complying with the tax system:
    - Allow organisations to lodge quarterly if their payroll tax liability is between \$20,000 and \$150,000.
    - Explore options for issuing notices of assessment electronically, developing online portals and, for taxes such as land tax and transfer duty, rationalising the number of brackets and rates.
- 

Simplify the industrial relations system for small businesses and not for profits:

- Refer the Government's residual industrial relations powers regulating private and not-for-profit sector workplaces to the Commonwealth.
  - Absent this referral, harmonise with Commonwealth laws to deliver an efficient, consistent and competitive business environment.
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Reduce the cost of electricity by removing the cross-subsidies currently used to support the Uniform Tariff Policy and funding the policy from general revenues instead.

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Ensure local government charges do not disadvantage WA organisations by tasking the Economic Regulation Authority with reviewing:

- The functions local governments are currently undertaking, including their basic statutory responsibilities, discretionary activities and functions the State Government requires them to perform.
  - The mechanisms that could be put in place to ensure local governments operate and invest efficiently, and that only efficient expenditure is passed on to businesses and households in rates, fees and charges.
- 

Public funds for the arts sector should come from general revenues, not businesses seeking to invest in our economy. Local Government Per Cent for Art Schemes should be scrapped, with funding coming from general revenues instead.

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Strike a balance between fiscal sustainability and supporting diversification of the economy:

- Do not impose new revenue measures, including establishing new, or increasing existing, taxes.
  - Continue to strictly enforce the public sector wages policy.
  - Examine State-owned assets to determine if they would be better placed in private ownership.
  - Do not bring services currently provided by the private sector back into public hands.
  - Develop a policy and implementation strategy for using innovative financial instruments to invest in achieving social outcomes.
  - Continue identifying opportunities to implement the recommendations of the Service Priority Review and Langoulant Inquiry.
- 

## Ensure a skilled workforce and efficient infrastructure

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Allow the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system to be driven by the informed choices of students and employers, with the flexibility to deliver a broad suite of training options:

- Allow private providers of publicly supported VET courses to determine their own prices.
- Ensure students can access clear information on the pricing and quality of courses.



- Require the Department of Training and Workforce Development and TAFEs to have a simple ‘front door’ process for businesses, not-for-profits and private VET providers to develop training courses and programs that meet their specific needs.
  - Ensure the public education system has infrastructure to deliver effective career development activities.
- 

Establish an overarching manufacturing Industry 4.0 strategy to accelerate the adoption of these technologies. Consider the need for financial support for the uptake of Industry 4.0 technologies and processes, but in a tightly targeted way.

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Accelerate implementing non-controversial recommendations in Infrastructure WA’s 20-year Strategy — don’t wait until the process concludes. For example:

- Elevate WA’s focus on accelerating digital transformation and connectivity infrastructure.
  - Develop digital capabilities within government.
  - Develop a single digital government approvals system.
  - Develop a Sustainability Bond Framework to facilitate green, social or sustainable bonds funding.
  - Begin considering how to address the future loss of fuel excise revenue.
  - Progress regional maintenance and freight productivity programs to provide fit for purpose road networks.
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Consider ways to engage the private (including not-for-profit) sector more in financing, designing, building, operating and maintaining infrastructure.

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Continue to update the forecasts of future container trade for the Westport project, and potential costs of trade for the business community. Take a cautious approach to future decision making on the project.

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Work with industry to identify parts of the High Wide Load road corridor network where enhanced functionality is needed and prioritise addressing these bottlenecks.

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## Ensure regulation helps, not hinders, innovation and investment

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Make the Treasurer responsible for driving continuous improvement of regulation, to raise the priority given to improving regulation in Cabinet and Parliament and help create a culture across government of continuous improvement.

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Hold agencies to account for continuously improving regulation:

- Commit to implementation timetables for red-tape reforms and regularly publicly report on progress.
  - Publish information about the number of complaints from businesses about red tape and the time taken to resolve them.
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Develop a policy and framework that allows businesses and regulators to propose and establish regulatory sandboxes.

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## Re-integrate WA into the global economy

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Address the decline in migration and associated reduction in economic growth:

- Develop a strategy to grow WA’s population.
  - Review all relevant State policy settings, including in relation to visa and tax policy.
- 

Fast-track WA’s reintegration into the global economy:

- Expand efforts to support small and medium sized businesses seeking to diversify their import and/or export markets.

