

Submission to the Inquiry into the most effective ways for Western Australia to address food insecurity for children and young people affected by poverty.

From Dr Beth Walker 14.7.22

To the Joint Standing Committee

I would like to start by saying that this submission is not going to be like the other submissions already accepted. I am a regular visitor to the Kimberley and am familiar with the distance, isolation and challenges the towns and community's face.

I have read all of the other submissions and they all make excellent points and provide good examples of small scale solutions. The people and organisations that wrote the submissions should be congratulated on their commitment to this issue. However, I believe there is a precursor that needs to be addressed.

I was in Kununurra in August 2020 and from the 15th-20th May and Kununurra & Wyndham 7th-12th July this year (2022). Kununurra is not a remote community, it is the major centre for the East Kimberley, with several schools and a Community College that goes to Year 12, a small TAFE, a district hospital and other facilities.

On my most recent visit I was both shocked and appalled by the lack of fresh fruit and vegetables at the Coles supermarket in Kununurra. I took the photographs below at 11.59am on Friday 8th July 2022. This was just one part of the shop that was empty. Many of the shelves were empty or had very little stock. My understanding is that this is a regular occurrence. The IGA store in the town was also low on stock.



Speaking to several people in the town the general consensus regarding the main reasons for the completely empty shelves are:

1. The many tourists in the town
2. Lack of supply
3. Lack of transport
4. Lack of staff to stack the shelves.

Covid may very well have contributed to these completely empty shelves, but I believe that is an overly simplistic explanation. The reason that the shelves are empty is because Coles Supermarkets are not providing an adequate service to the population of Kununurra. The four points above are all management issues.

In terms of points 1, 2 & 3, Kununurra is a tourist destination, with limited accommodation so the numbers of visiting tourists can easily be calculated and planned for. The fact that tourists are being blamed for buying the food means that there has not been sufficient forward planning by Coles Supermarkets. In regard to lack of staff, again this is a management issue. I acknowledge that is also a national and state issue but there are strategies to address that too, including paying people more, and changing the taxation structure to allow pensioners to earn more.

I would have accepted some of the arguments about lack of supply etc, if I had not observed that several of the liquor outlets in Kununurra had full shelves. This lack of food would appear to be about business priorities, alcohol over food. Again this has a direct impact on community health and wellbeing.

If there is no access to fresh food on a regular basis, the health and welfare of the community suffers. In short this is an equity issue. I live in the leafy Western Suburbs of Perth and therefore have access to fresh food on a 24/7 basis. People out of the Perth metropolitan area should not have their health compromised by not having the ability to buy fresh food. They should not have to put up with such poor access to some of the basics of life. It is simply not equitable.

I believe it is the responsibility of Government, regardless of party, to make sure that people living outside of the metropolitan area have equitable access to fresh food. This can be achieved by putting pressure on major supermarket chains and suppliers to prioritise food delivery to regional areas and make food a priority over liquor.

Yours faithfully



Dr Beth Walker [REDACTED]