



Infrastructure
Western Australia

Major Infrastructure Proposal Assessment

Department of Transport

Tantabiddi Boating Facility

Summary Assessment Report

Infrastructure WA

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Acknowledgment of Country

Infrastructure WA acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Western Australia and their continuing connection to the land, waters and community. We pay our respects to all members of the Aboriginal communities and their cultures; and to Elders both past and present.

Purpose

This assessment report has been prepared in carrying out Infrastructure WA's (IWA) legislative function to assess and report to the Premier on major infrastructure proposals. The assessment is of the business case for the proposed Tantabiddi Boating Facility provided by the WA Department of Transport (DoT). Additional supporting information received from the proponent and consultation with relevant key stakeholders has also been used by IWA to support its analysis.

1. IWA observations

Based on the information received, IWA considers that the business case **provides sufficient information** for government to progress with the proposal, with the problem well defined, receiving strong stakeholder support and with the proposal supporting and growing the important tourism economy for the Exmouth region.

However, the business case does not provide sufficient justification to support the recommended option of full scope delivery at this point in time. Without additional information, IWA recommends a detailed comparison of the costs and benefits be undertaken between the recommended full scope now versus a phased approach.

There will remain uncertainty over the deliverability and cost of the project until key environmental approvals are received (scheduled mid-late 2026).

If the proposal is to proceed, and noting the projected increase in economic uplift and employment anticipated, it is recommended that the State put into place a strategy to address the infrastructure demands on the broader Exmouth peninsula for residential and tourist related services.

2. Context

2.1 Project background

The Tantabiddi Boat Ramp, 38 kilometres from Exmouth, is the only formal ramp on the west coast of the North-West Cape and a key gateway to Ningaloo Reef, a UNESCO World Heritage site. The current two ramp facility was constructed in 2012 after the original single ramp was upgraded.

The business case describes that a continual increase in demand from recreational users and commercial operators has led to congestion and safety concerns, and the demand for moorings has increased.

3. Strategic merit

3.1 Alignment

IWA considers that the Tantabiddi Boat Facility (TBF) proposal has strategic merit and aligns with the State Infrastructure Strategy.

The TBF will help support the tourism industry in Exmouth, which is the largest employer for the Shire.

3.2 Problems and opportunities

The business case describes that the current facility has become a bottleneck and a source of conflict for access between commercial and recreational users, with parking overflowing on the entry road (Yardie Creek Road) a safety issue and a cause for concern with Traditional Owners. The peak period is from April to September, where it is estimated that the facility operates at and above capacity consistently. This is considered a significant deterrent for users and ultimately restricts further marine recreation and tourism.

Additionally, the facility has a lack of visitor amenities, requires ongoing maintenance and, on occasions, has restricted access as a result of impacts from flooding events at the Tantabiddi Creek.

The business case identifies that, in addition to the ongoing operational costs, the boat ramp itself is starting to fail and requires major structural repair works. Without intervention, there is the potential for the existing facility to be closed for repairs or replacement within the next five years.

The new facility is described in the business case as providing “essential infrastructure to the Ningaloo World Heritage Area, offering numerous benefits to the Exmouth and Gascoyne region. The new facility will provide safe and equitable access to the Ningaloo Reef, enhance cultural awareness, reduce operational costs for the Shire of Exmouth, and create business and employment opportunities. It will also support increased tourism and private sector investment.”

4. Options assessment

The business case outlines that four sites were originally investigated for the new boating facility being:

- Alternative Site 1 – Tantabiddi Channel Navigation Lead Line
- Alternative Site 2 – North of Jurabi Point
- Alternative Site 3 – Wobiri Carpark
- Site 4 – Existing Tantabiddi Boat Ramp

After these investigations, it is stated that an additional site, being 300 metres south of the Tantabiddi site was identified and determined to be the preferred location. While IWA was not part of the initial site selection assessment review, from reviewing the available information, there does appear merit in the preferred site.

After a long list of eight options were produced for the various sites, four options were short-listed and evaluated through a Multi-Criteria Assessment (MCA) and Rapid Cost Benefit Analysis process.

While some scope elements are based on the problem definition there are components that should be further elaborated, such as the inclusion of the boat pens, the multipurpose building and renewable energy hub. If the full build out option is approved, it is recommended that prior to entering into contracts, detailed business plans are prepared for these elements to understand the ongoing costs to the State associated with operations.

5. Societal impacts

5.1 Economic and financial assessment

The estimated capital cost of the recommended option is \$111.3 million, with an additional \$4.3 million being requested for infrastructure, implementation, operational management, repairs and maintenance and depreciation for the period 2025-26 and 2028-29.

A key driver of the proposal is the broader benefits expected to the region from the new TBF. As the current facility is at or beyond capacity during most of the peak season, without expansion there will be a limit on economic growth.

The business case states that it is recommended that the full scope is funded and delivered as there is limited benefit in deferring some of the capital costs. While there would be additional costs through a staged delivery program, this needs to be countered with the reduced initial capital cost, as well as the ongoing maintenance and operational savings of the reduced scope.

If the proposal is to proceed, and noting the projected increase in economic uplift and employment presented, it is recommended that the State put into place a strategy to address and fund the infrastructure demands on the broader Exmouth peninsula area for residential and tourist related services (such as road upgrades, accommodation, food/beverage and retail) and the physical infrastructure required to support the growth.

It is IWA's view that the revenues projected in the business case are high and there is a risk of additional funding being required to subsidise the TBF.

5.2 Social assessment

IWA agrees that the proposed TBF would provide social benefit, by improving access to a recreational facility, should enable tourism and recreation opportunities for more people and provide much improved visitor amenity.

The business case provides strong evidence of support from a key range of stakeholders. It is encouraging that the business case references that the removal of the existing facility is welcomed by the Traditional Owners. DoT has advised that further engagement with the Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation / Nganhurra Tharnardi Garrbu Aboriginal Corporation will continue in March 2025.

Similarly, it is unarguable that the Ningaloo Reef is a significant site for tourism and economic activity, with Tantabiddi a key connection between visitors and the reef. Commercial operators depend on tourism in the area and use the ramp to provide services to visitors and sustain their businesses.

The business case states that it is expected to support a substantial increase in additional ongoing jobs over the long term. While there would be an increase in employment, the figures used are considered to be either highly optimistic or based on additional expenditure on projects that are not part of this proposal.

5.3 Environmental assessment

Being in a World Heritage site, it is expected that the environmental considerations will be a key focal point for the development and operation of the TBF.

The TBF will require referral under the Environmental Protection Act 1986 (State) and the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cwlth). While there has been to be a high level of engagement undertaken to date, until the environmental approvals processes are concluded, there will be a risk to the scope, cost and program.

While there is evidence that there has been continual growth in tourism to the Exmouth region, it will be important to understand whether there is a limit on this growth, and especially if there is a target for the TBF, to ensure that it is sustainable and does not diminish the uniqueness of the Ningaloo experience. This would also assist in determining the appropriate level of infrastructure required.

6. Recommended Option: Project definition

The business case identifies Option H (both stages 1 and 2) as the recommended option, with the scope items shown in Figure 1.

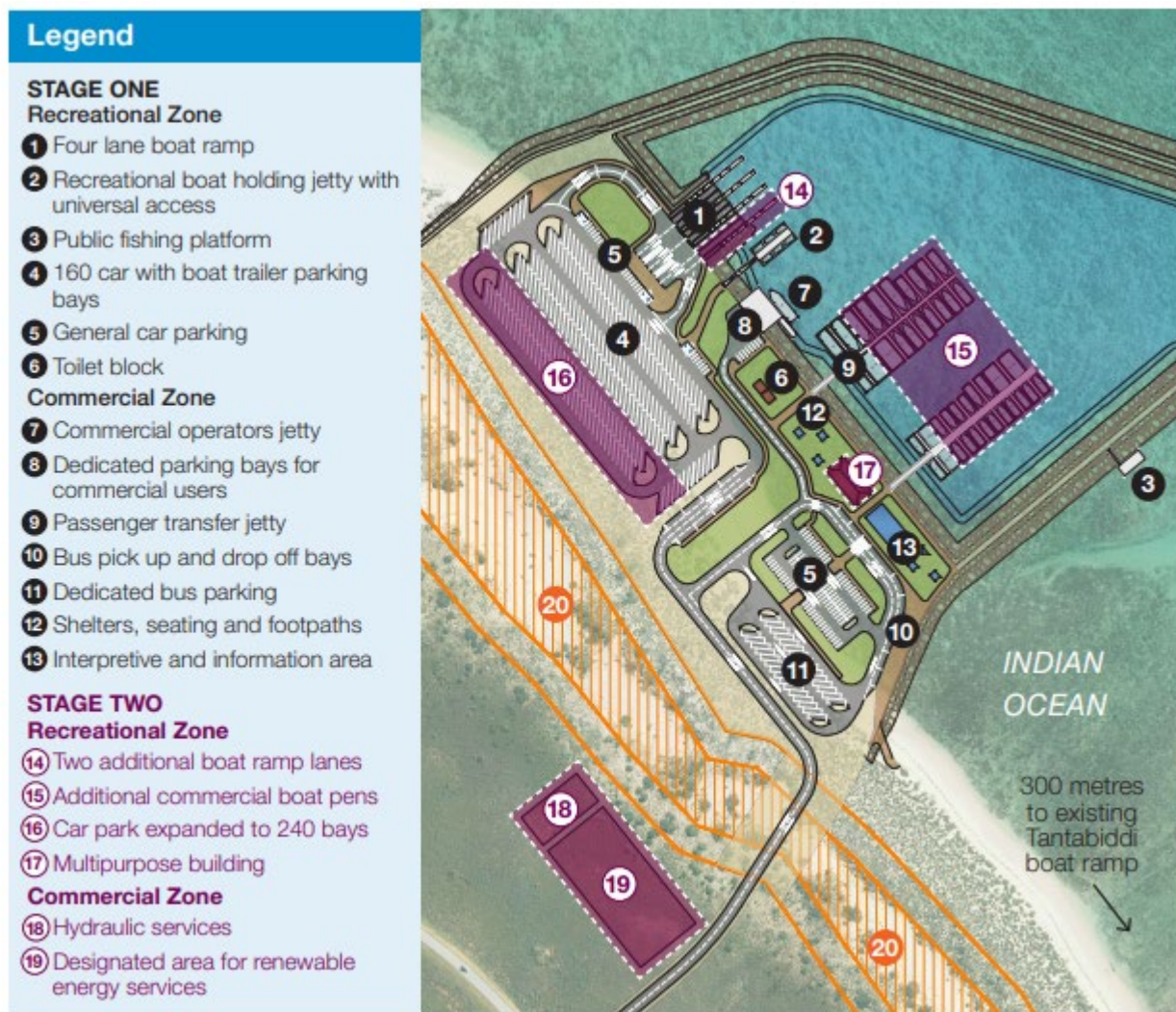


Figure 1: Preferred Design Concept

Source: Tantabiddi Proposed Boat Launching Facility concept design September 2024

7. Deliverability

The business case outlines that the proposal is intended to use a construct only methodology with DoT responsible for the specifications for the marine and civil works. DoT have had experience in similar projects at Augusta, Onslow and Bunbury Waterfront.

The project is expected to commence mobilisation in mid-2027 and is scheduled for completion in mid-2029. Throughout construction, the current boat ramp will stay functional. Once the new facility is finished, the existing ramp will be decommissioned, and the site will be rehabilitated.

The business case adequately identifies the key risks and, as has been identified, it is important that the Project Risk Register is updated as the project progresses.

IWA considers the environmental approvals to be the most significant risk in terms of schedule and consequential outcomes on the proposal. As this process is yet to formally commence, there will be uncertainty until the outcomes are known (which may not conclude until the end of 2026).

The business case should provide additional information on the planning and development approval process for the TBF. Noting that the business case states there are land tenure changes, a requirement for the inclusion of Tantabiddi in a reserves bill to excise the facility area from the marine park and change the vesting of the area to sit under the Marine and Harbours Act, Native Title process and development application, if the proposal is to proceed this should be a key short-term focus area to ensure the proposal can be delivered in a timely manner.