

## **WHERE ARE THE GAPS – HARNESSING OPPORTUNITIES FOR DESERT SMES**

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### **Abstract**

The desert region of Australia is a major contributor to the Australian economy. With an output of about \$90.5 billion, it is a major contributor to income and employment. While industries in the desert purchase a large portion of goods and services locally, there is still a significant “leakage” in the economy. Kalgoorlie, for example, sources over \$1.8 billion from outside its borders, while Alice Springs, also a major desert economy, spends over \$1 billion in imports. Overall, about \$21 billion are sourced outside the desert’s regional boundaries. This leakage represents opportunities for businesses in the desert. If these goods and services are purchased within the region, they are likely to create more jobs and stimulate the desert economy. In this paper, we identify the major importing sectors in the desert and estimate the magnitude of the leakages. We then explore the implications and opportunities for SMEs in meeting this gap.

### **Biography**

Fay Rola-Rubzen is Associate Professor at Curtin University of Technology and the core project leader of the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre's Desert Biz™ Project. She leads a team of researchers looking at factors that influence success of businesses in desert regions of Australia. Fay is a development economist and lectures in economics and policy, econometrics and mathematical programming. She has a strong background in economic modelling and extensive experience in international development, rural and regional development, capacity building, community development and small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Murray McGregor is Professor of Agribusiness at Curtin University of Technology and General Manager - Research at the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre. He has a strong background in the application of systems thinking to desert socio-economic systems, agribusiness supply chains, farm management and rural development. He has a strong interest in business planning and development in desert areas particularly with bush foods and products, management of feral animals, and regional development in rural and remote areas.