Economic prosperity in the Western world is dependent on consumption.

Adequate food, clean water and shelter are basic human needs. Only a small percentage of the Western economy is required to produce these needs. Today, the majority of worker effort is directed towards producing goods and services well beyond basic human needs. The paradox is that diminished consumption will result in reduced affluence for this majority.

The level of affluence across our globe is continually changing as a result of biophysical and anthropogenic influences. Despite these influences, global population continues to rise, demanding more food from our diminishing and degrading land and water resources.

To be competitive in a global economy, production of goods for basic human needs is increasingly dependent on a supply of cheap labour. This is the paradox of China whose burgeoning economy fuels affluence mostly beyond its own borders.

The Pilbara region of Western Australia is abundant in iron ore and gas and the growing demand for these resources by countries such as China has captured the attention of national and international investors creating employment opportunities and an ever-increasing affluence for those involved.

The remoteness of these mineral resources has necessitated the generation of a distinct economy peculiar to these areas of Western Australia. Workers are paid a premium. Many come from interstate or overseas. Housing is limited and rentals, if available are beyond the scope of most people on ‘average’ wages.

The city life style and climate of Perth, its urban fringes and the associated South West make them a preferred home for the huge numbers of “fly in fly out” mining employees and associated mining support services. Mining employees experiencing a new level of affluence are distorting the local economy, fuelling a sharp rise in house and land packages especially in the urban fringes. This competition for land is slowly eroding the ability of the traditional fresh food producers to maintain business viability and to be globally competitive. This has flow on effects throughout the supply chain and into the supporting economies.

While these anthropogenic influences are economically, politically and socially driven, there are separate biophysical influences challenging the capacity, suitability and availability of land and water resources to sustain food production for future populations. The impacts of past and current land use on our resources, such as salinity, eutrophication, soil acidification, erosion, loss of organic matter, decline in soil fertility and soil structure, and the effects of toxic chemicals and pollutants will only be exacerbated by the continuing decline in annual average rainfall caused by global climate change across the South West Agricultural Region of Western Australia.
While issues of land degradation are numerous, equally important is the looming water crisis and the need for agriculture to show responsible stewardship with its allocation.

With this in mind, the challenge is to secure, through a cross government planning process, current and future fresh food production areas within Western Australia for the needs of a growing population at a local, national and global level. The focus of this paper will be to describe the intended process to ensure that future fresh fruit and vegetable production matches demand at a local level while being able to fulfill future trade opportunities.