

1 Primary data – accommodation – Gara BESS

1.1 Introduction and objective

Objective:

Gather primary data to identify available accommodation and any cumulative impacts for the region.

SEARs requirement:

Social Impact Assessment: Including consideration of any increase in demand for community infrastructure services and consideration of construction workforce accommodation.

1.2 Target stakeholders

Real Estate Agencies

- First National
- Laing & Simmons
- Ray & White
- Hutchinson and Harlow
- Professionals
- Raine & Horne
- Belle Property
- Town and Country
- Uphill & Schaefer

Additional Accommodation Providers

- Country Comfort Motor Inn
- Cedar Lodge Motor Inn
- Estelle Creamer Motor Inn

Response

- Responses Received: 8 detailed responses (6 in-person; 1 via phone; 1 via email)

1.3 What was said – respondents

Table 1: Accommodation providers primary data

Accommodation Provider	Key Points	Details/Comments
Real estate agents		
Town and Country	Availability – Low	Manages 200 properties and has 4-5 current vacancies, colleague manages a similar portfolio and has zero vacancies. All the vacancies they currently have can fit on one A4 page.
	Market trends – interstate movement, development	Have noted a lot of interstate relocation from the coast to Armidale. Mainly young families. Noted a high number of housing development and sub-division that their agency will be managing. Believe that supply will increase in the coming years as a result of this demand.
	Annual trends – school holidays	Noted that far more supply enters the market during school holidays, especially around end of year holidays. Some winters can also be quiet.
Professionals	Availability – Low	1.6% vacancy rate. On average, vacancy rate sits between 0.5% and 1.5% but has hit 2.5% at its highest.
	Market trends – cyclical student trends, housing development	More properties on the market between October and March when The University of England is on break. Noted a high number of housing development in the area and expect more properties to enter the rental market once construction is complete.
	Renter profile – mixed	Seasonal workers, families and students.
First National	Availability – higher than average	Currently, only 2.8%, which is higher than normal
	Market Trends – Do not expect low availability to change	Noted that some landlords may be open to short (6 month minimum) lease terms for a higher rate. However, still believe that it would be difficult to see the vacancy rate being much different mid next year.
	Renter profile – Mixed	A large mix of families and couples as well as refugee families and students.
Ray & White	Availability – Low	3 properties available. Low availability and has been for quite some time. Believe it is getting harder. Landlords have dealt with property damage so set strict conditions that deter future renters.
	Renter Profile – Mixed.	Couples, refugee families and seasonal workers.

Accommodation Provider	Key Points	Details/Comments
	Market trends – getting tighter	Don't foresee any changes to rental availability.
Professionals	Market Conditions - Tight housing market with limited availability.	Few houses are available for rent, indicating challenges in securing accommodation.
	Follow-up - Requested follow-up email to clarify specific questions.	Awaiting response.
Hotels/Motels		
Country Comfort Armidale	Experience with Transient Workforces - limited experience accommodating transient workers.	Some experience with transient workers, but usually enough day-to-day demand that they do not need to consider long-term seasonal workforce stays.
	Opportunities - Identified opportunities to repurpose accommodation for longer stays	Noted that if there was sufficient timing provided, they could cooperate with the developer and repurpose some rooms for longer stays. Believe that other motels could do the same.
	Demand trends - Summer is the low season	Noted that summer months tend to be quieter months for their demand, as less workers and travellers pass through the town.
Cedar Lodge Motor Inn	Experience with Transient Workforces – limited	Mainly accommodate tourists and travellers passing through Armidale.
	Facilities – has some facilities to accommodate longer stays.	Most rooms could accommodate longer stays and could adjust existing rooms to make more available.
Estelle Kreamer Motor Inn	Current Capacity - Limited capacity with 3-4 caravans with bunk beds.	Represents a constrained resource for accommodation.
	Demand – Sufficiently consistent	Has found the post-Covid demand sufficiently consistent to not need to accommodate seasonal workers. Also noted that summer months tend to be quieter.

1.4 Analysis

Table 2: Short-term accommodation availability as of October 2024

Accommodation platform	Armidale
Airbnb properties available	280
realestate.com and Domain.com properties available	77

Our primary investigation for the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) and cumulative impacts indicates that Armidale is experiencing some housing pressures. With its established academic community and seasonal fluctuations in rental demand, Armidale's housing market shows some capacity for flexibility. The presence of the University of New England influences rental cycles, as student populations drive up demand during the academic year and alleviate it during breaks, particularly over the summer. This dynamic offers a potential seasonal buffer for accommodating transient workforces when students are away. However, with the current tightness in the rental market, the influx of workers associated with the project may intensify pressures, further constraining available accommodation options for both temporary and long-term residents.

Local real estate agents and accommodation providers express cautious optimism regarding Armidale's capacity to adapt to increased demand, while also acknowledging existing limitations. Real estate agents noted substantial new housing developments in the broader region, which could help expand the rental pool over time. They also pointed out that many Airbnbs converted into long-term rentals during high-demand periods, could revert to short-term rentals if necessary to support an influx of project workers. This adaptability was noted as a feature of Armidale's housing market, where properties can shift between short - and long-term rentals based on demand trends, especially during high-occupancy cycles tied to university schedules.

Accommodation providers, including motels and short-term rental operators, have expressed a willingness to accommodate longer-term stays if given adequate notice and coordination support. They indicated that the summer period, typically a slower season for motels due to lower worker and tourist numbers, could provide added capacity for the project's workforce. With the area traditionally accustomed to handling transient workforces and seasonal labour, Armidale has a foundation of resilience to fluctuating demand. Providers suggested that, with proactive planning and ongoing communication, adjustments could be made to align with the project's construction schedule.

A review of anecdotal housing data (see Table 2) from mid-October 2024 suggests that suitable short-term accommodations are available in the area, although there is variability based on seasonal demands and current occupancy rates. Real estate agents emphasised that sufficient advance notice is critical to help them manage and optimise local housing resources to meet project needs without compromising availability for the community.

The proponent is actively evaluating accommodation options and intends to hire locally where feasible, which could alleviate some of the strain on housing and related services. The New Oxley Solar Farm has been successful in sourcing 80% of its workforce locally and support the skill development of workers for other renewal projects.

Primary data gathered from community consultations will be cross-referenced with Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and housing data to deepen our understanding of the project's potential social impacts on Armidale's housing market. With timely coordination and continued stakeholder engagement, the community seems to be prepared to absorb the project's workforce demands while maintaining accessibility and affordability in housing.