

LET THEM JUMP, FISH: HOW TOWN'S YOUTH CRIME PROBLEMS COULD BE EASED

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Long-term closure of all jetties and wharves at Port Augusta has hampered attempts to curb youth crime, community leaders say.

Port Augusta residents have been without a jetty or wharf since the council was forced to close the town's last remaining jetty, on the west side of the harbour, in 2019.

Mayor Linley Shine said youngsters had been robbed of the chance to swim, jump or fish off the town's jetties – pastimes enjoyed by previous generations.

“The culture of this community, and our young people, has been to utilise our marine infrastructure,” she said.

“Taking that away ... I definitely think that (youth crime) has been a part of the impact (of having no jetties or wharf).

“These areas being closed off would have made a huge impact. Until somebody shows me any stats to say that wouldn't be the case, I would be definitely be saying that is the case.”

Teenagers surveyed by SA's Commissioner for Children and Young People, Helen Connolly, in November, placed reopening of Port Augusta Wharf high on their list of priorities.

One year 9 student told Ms Connolly: “A good place to live has wharves and jetties in use. A good place to live should be safe at all hours. A good place to live doesn't have yelling and violence.”

More than 100 children, including some as young as 10, have been charged with serious criminal offences during a recent youth crime wave in Port Augusta. Most of the town's state government-owned wharf has been closed since 2019 and is fenced off from public access.

The east-side jetty was dismantled in 2019 – the same year the west-side jetty, a council-owned asset, was also closed. The council is also in the process of dismantling the Great Western Bridge.

The state government has allocated money to replace the east-side jetty with a pontoon – a project the council hopes to complete before next summer.

Council chief executive John Banks agreed a lack of marine infrastructure played a role in the town's youth crime problem. The city of more than 13,000 people that once boasted at least nine working jetties now has none.

“Within Helen Connolly's report, time and time again, the kids themselves mentioned the lack of access to jetties and wharves, and these fences being up,” Mr Banks said. “If you think about the age of the children, for most of their lives they've had no access to the wharf.

“And that was an area that would have been used by their parents – for jumping off, or fishing, for cheap recreational purposes and just to go get fresh air and enjoy the vistas.

“These kids haven't had access to that, and they are nominating the inability to experience that as impacting how they feel about life.”

Port Augusta councillors have identified reopening the town's west-side jetty as its priority marine infrastructure project and has allocated \$150,000 to create some concepts to put forward for community consultation.

Mr Banks said the west-side jetty rebuild was likely to cost about \$4m – and the council would investigate borrowing money and obtaining help from the state government to pay for the project.

He has joined other local government leaders calling for a [statewide strategic review](#) as jetties across the state reach the end of their lifespan.

“In our case, we had timber assets in water that were designed with a 50-year lifespan and we are now 154 years into their life,” he said.

“But they're still critically important to the communities.”

Ms Shine said the closure of the wharf and jetties in Port Augusta had taken away much of the town's identity and had affected “just about everybody in the community”.

“We are a port city and our marine infrastructure has always been part of our identity,” she said.

“For communities like ours, which have had no access to our marine infrastructure for six, seven years, it’s just not sustainable. We have to do whatever we can to get these fences down.”

Robin Sharp, who ran the Top ‘O’ The Gulf Marine tackle shop for 30 years, said the demise of the wharf and jetties meant a generation of children was missing out on activities such as jumping and fishing.

“It’s a bit sad that that’s all gone,” he said.

A state government spokesman said the Department for Infrastructure and Transport was examining options to restore the Port Augusta wharf and was liaising with the council and federal government.