

Half-price houses the new reality for Pilbara towns



Real estate agent Monique Anlezark in front of the \$1 million home that has given hope to Port Hedland property owners. Picture: Stacey Hambling

- The Australian
- 12:00AM June 14, 2017
- [Save](#)
- 7
- [PAIGE TAYLOR](#)

WA Bureau Chief
Perth
[@paigeataylor](#)

It is a tough real estate market when the sale of a house at half the original asking price triggers celebrations.

That is the reality in Port Hedland, the iron-ore town where speculators once gouged mining companies and their workers with extraordinary rents.

This week real estate agent Monique Anlezark is being congratulated in the street of her Pilbara hometown of Port Hedland after the house she auctioned at the weekend fetched \$1 million, the first time since October 2014 that a single home in the export hub has sold for seven figures.

It is a stark contrast to the heady days of the resources boom when 1000 people a week moved to Western Australia for work, often in the Pilbara, and

modest four-bedroom homes in the iron-ore towns of Port Hedland and Karratha rented for \$2400 a week.

Like so many of the houses on the market in the Pilbara since the end of the construction phase of the state's resources boom, the two-storey waterfront house sold by Ms Anlezark was in the possession of a mortgagee. It had been on the market in February 2015 for \$2m but failed to sell, and again last year for "offers invited".

Ms Anlezark moved to Port Hedland from the east coast of Australia five years ago with her partner, who got a job in the mining industry. She has watched the local real estate market peak, begin to cool at the start of 2015 before crashing spectacularly.

Affordable housing for mine workers created by the state government to ease pressure became available just as prices were plummeting, adding to the glut.



The Port Hedland house passed in at auction for \$360,000.

Perhaps the starkest example of the price dive [was a dilapidated 1960s fibro house on a 600sq m block that sold for \\$1.3m in Port Hedland in 2011](#) as investors heated the local market. In 2015, as landlords clamoured to get their money out of the Pilbara, the house was passed in at auction for \$360,000.

"Many of the property owners have been stung by the downturn," she said.

"This in turn has seen the majority of property owners have their properties repossessed by the banks."

In Karratha, 240km south, photographer Marg Bertling was once busy working for mines and the oil and gas industry but now much of her time is spent photographing houses for mortgagee sales.

“The market falls through the floor and then falls through another floor below that — it’s phenomenal,” she said.

Ms Anlezark says she hopes for her community’s sake the million-dollar sale can restore some confidence in her town.

“People have been coming up to me very excited — not just real estate agents but local workers as well — and they are saying ‘congratulations this is really good for Port Hedland if this continues’,” she said.

The house has been bought by a local couple who plan to live in it.

Ms Anlezark says that although the market is still difficult, locals are beginning to feel hopeful about new projects such as the Balla Balla mine, south of Port Hedland, that promises 3900 jobs during construction and 900 permanent jobs after that.

“People want the town to succeed because we love it here; we love the lifestyle and the sense of community” she said.

“It’s a very similar story for a lot of us — we came with a two-year plan which turned into a five-year plan and then you just go ‘well, we live here now’.”