



# RUSSIAN SPY

ELECTRONIC PRESS KIT

## CONTACT

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A Russian-Australian Cinematographer travels to Albany to find out about the time that a 19th Century town at the end of the world was put on high alert of a Russian Invasion.



## Synopsis

Russian Spy is an exploration of identity, otherness and the importance of learning from our past.

In 2022, the news cycle is filled with stories of the Russian-Ukrainian war, and social media is saturated with anti-Russian sentiment and fear of an unspecified Russian threat. Amidst this uncertainty, Russian-Australian cinematographer Dasha Melnik learns about a series of encoded messages sent from British Intelligence to Albany in 1885, warning the local officials to be on the lookout for Russian spies.

While trying to figure out why a tiny 19th Century town at the end of the world would be under threat from Russia, Dasha explores the relationship between truth and perception, building identity through fear, and just how to navigate life when you're straddling two worlds, and whether anything has really changed.

As a cinematographer, Dasha Melnik is a kind of spy, observing the world around her to share it with others. As a Russian-born Australian, she is a character out of place, living across two cultures from opposite sites of the equator.

With input from Damien Hassan, Senior Archivist at State Records Office WA, and Malcolm Traill, an Albany legend and renowned historian, *Russian Spy* invites you to uncover a moment in WA's history that's been buried in time.





## JENNIFER 'JP' PIPER

Jennifer Piper is a multidisciplinary, cross-media storyteller whose award-winning writing includes plays, cabaret, essays, radio, series and film.

2021 films *The Golden Rollers* and *Fine Bone China* continue to be well-received by audiences and industry, with *The Golden Rollers* closing out Revelation International Film Festival 2022 and the Reel Shorts program for Melbourne Women in Film Festival 2023. *POND*, a scientifically-correct allegorical music video, inspired by astrophysicist Dr Linqing Wen's research into binary coalescence, was released in celebration of the 7th anniversary of the discovery of gravitational waves.

In 2022, JP was one of four AIDC Leading Lights invited to pitch a factual project. The factual format series *Old Enough To Know Better* is currently in development.

JP's plays are available via Australian Plays Online, with cabaret *At Home with Anne Zieté* shortlisted for the Midsumma Queer Playwriting Award. JP's essay 'Undyingly Queer' appears in *Queering the Vampire Narrative*, published by Brill Sense.



## DASHA MELNIK

Dasha Melnik is Russian-Australian cinematographer who employs a unique visual language to tell compelling stories.

Originally from Saint-Petersburg, Dasha was a journalist for more than 12 years before moving to Australia. It was in Perth that she discovered her deep passion for photography.

Now an established photographer, with various exhibitions both locally and internationally, cinematography was a natural evolution. Dasha is now fully immersed in filmmaking.

Drawing inspiration from classic literature, Dasha aims to use her skills to express the different and often difficult truths of every individual experiences.





## DAMIEN HASSAN

SENIOR ARCHIVIST, STATE RECORDS OFFICE

Damien Hassan is a Senior Archivist at the State Records Office of Western Australia, where he has been employed since the 1990s. Damien has also worked in senior project roles at the WA Museum and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

Damien has been responsible for managing many large scale digitisation projects involving government archives, including the award-winning RetroMaps website. He is passionate about the use of government archives to support all forms of research, creative output and the fundamental rights of groups and individuals.

Damien has a regular interview spot on ABC radio's "History Repeated" show where he discusses unusual or little known facets of our State history, based on items in the State archives collection.



## MALCOLM TRAILL

HISTORIAN AND AUTHOR

Malcolm Traill is an Albany-based historian and university tutor who has worked for many years as a librarian, researcher and museum professional. In 2020, he won the Individual Professional Contribution prize in the WA Heritage Awards.

Currently he is working on a compilation of his many articles published in the local media, for publication next year, as well as on major historical projects for Southern Ports and the City of Albany Bicentenary commemorations.

He is also a City of Albany Councillor, as well as a purveyor of bespoke jams and preserves at the Albany Farmers Market each weekend!



**“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”**

- George Santayana (1905) Reason in Common Sense

**“To me it seems quite clear that it's all just a little bit of history repeating.”**

- Shirley Bassey w/ The Propellerheads (1997) History Repeating

Discovering this State Library of WA collection, in the context of the War in Ukraine and the messaging in our news cycle, had to lead me to phone my creative collaborator, Dasha Melnik, to suggest we explore this story in the context of identity and belonging – two things essential to human wellbeing, and two things so often compromised in the name of nationalism.

The opportunity to combine Dasha's incredible eye for cinematic storytelling with her own personal story of what it is to belong while straddling two cultures is a precious one. Combining Dasha's own view of the world, alongside the imagery of Dasha exploring one of the most beautiful parts of Western Australia as we dug into this

intriguing and strangely familiar part of the state's history, gave us a chance to really examine the idea that no collection of facts has a single version of truth.

When Ilya so generously allowed us to use his song, Bullet, for the closing credits, the poetry just seemed to fit so well with the idea of personal vs political. I'll forever be grateful for his generosity.

We want to invite you to look again at the neighbour whose family didn't come from here, reconsider whether your view of the world is shaped in fear, and to learn about a moment in WA's history that you might not have encountered before.

Jennifer Piper (JP) 2023



When we first encountered the story of Albany preparing for a Russian invasion at the end of the 19th Century, our first thought was that it seems beyond belief. Albany, still so isolated now, was a town at the edge of the world in 1885.

The Russian-British conflict is well-documented, with Britain on alert as Russia moved through Afghanistan, towards India and the British Raj, but how could we have been so ready to believe that an Emperor known as 'The Peacemaker' would travel all the way around the world? To arrive in Albany would have required a journey past Britain, Afghanistan and India, and Russia was not yet known for its naval force.

Of course, the decisions and views we make are based only on the information to which we have access.

For a small town on the outskirts of a small colony at the edge of an island still under colonial rule, that information came via a very narrow channel. Even with the access to information we currently enjoy, the potential to be misled is huge; there is a stark difference in the narrative from Australian, European and Russian media, and from the stories of family and friends caught up in the war.

So how do we take this strange little story, of preparations for invasion in 19th Century Albany, and use it to discover some truth about the world in which we live?

This is a deeply personal, entirely global story. We're so pleased to share it with you.

Dasha Melnik & Jennifer Piper (JP) 2023



# Credits

Directed by	Jennifer 'JP' Piper
Produced by	Jennifer 'JP' Piper
Written by	Jennifer 'JP' Piper Dasha Melnik
Co-Producer	Dasha Melnik (Даша Мельник)
Executive Producers	Cathy Henkel Mahmudul Raz
Associate Producer	Pia Husbands
Director of Photography	Dasha Melnik
Featuring	Damien Hassan Malcolm Traill Dasha Melnik
Editor	Jennifer 'JP' Piper
Consulting Editor	Alan Chambers
Second Cinematographer	Aref Rashidan
Drone Operator	Izzy Turner
Additional Camera	Jennifer 'JP' Piper Izzy Turner
Grip Assist	Aydin Helvaci
Sound Designer	Aref Rashidan
Sound Recordist	Izzy Turner Aref Rashidan
Unit Manager	Maya Fernandez
Colorist	Dasha Melnik
Title Design	Piper Does

Special  
Thanks  
Albany Historical Society  
City of Albany  
Raz Rentals  
The Allotment Cottage

Music  
**"Pictures at an ExhibitionVIII"**  
Written by Модест Мусоргский (Modest Mussorgsky);  
Performed by Skidmore College Orchestra;  
Courtesy MUSOPEN; CC-PD

**"Пуля" ("Bullet")**  
Written by Илья Разин (Ilya Razin);  
Performed by Полюса (Polyusa);  
Courtesy Илья Разин (Ilya Razin)

This project was funded through the WA Reflections Initiative supported by the State Library of Western Australia, Screenwest and Lotterywest.

PRODUCED AND FILMED ON LOCATION IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Recorded and produced on Whadjuk, Binjarup, Bibulmam and Mineng Noongar Boodjar.

Always was. Always will be.

Produced with the assistance of Screenwest and Lotterywest

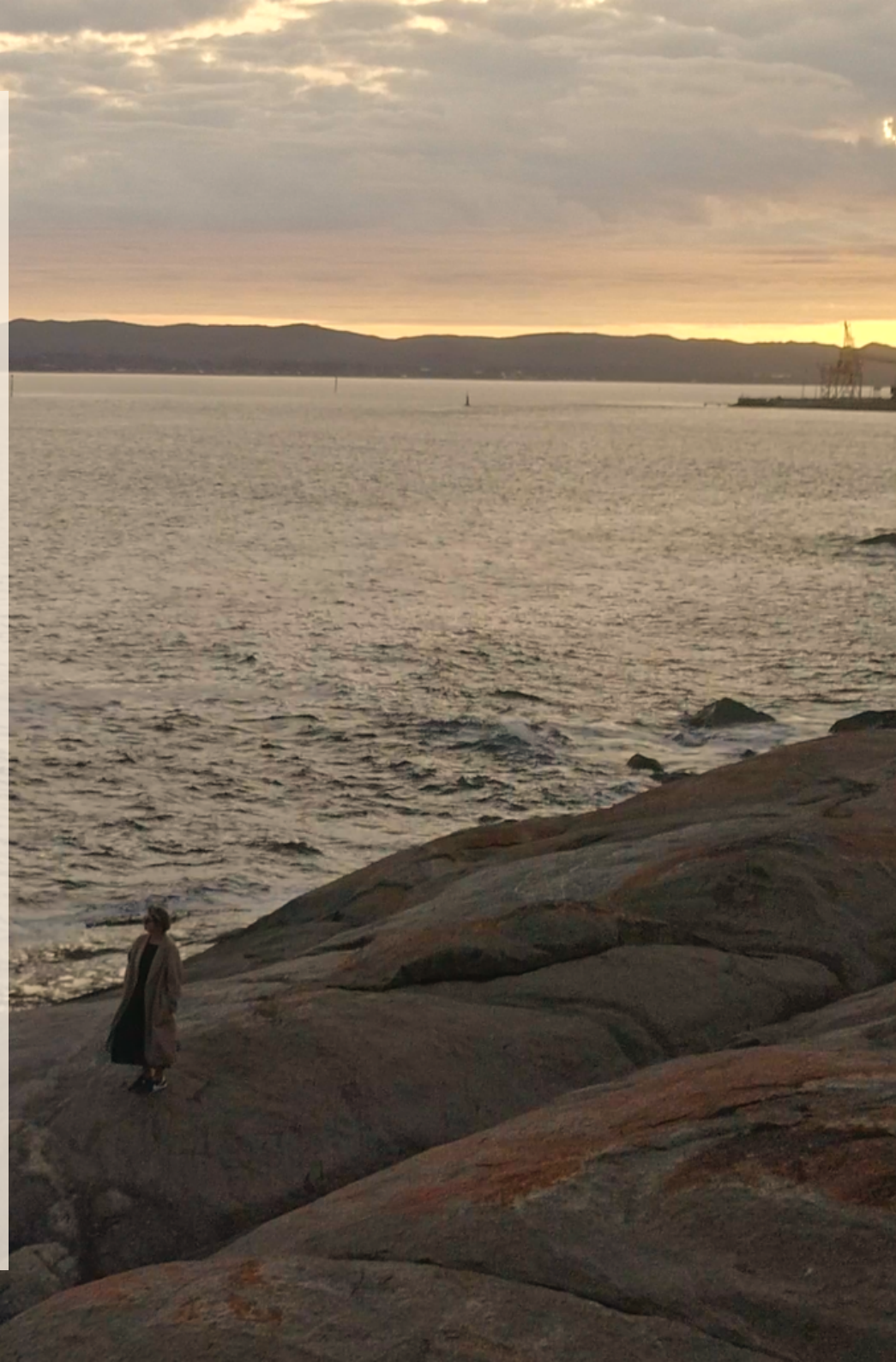
The State Library of Western Australia



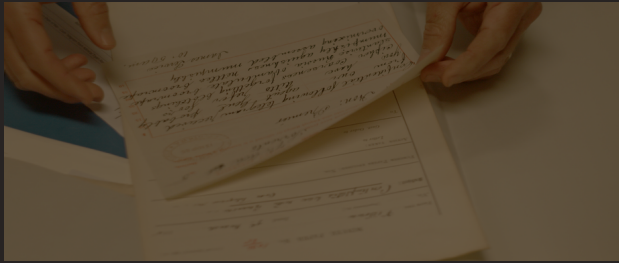


# Technical & Production Details

Title	Russian Spy
Producer/s	Jennifer 'JP' Piper [Producer] Dasha Melnik [Co-Producer]
Copyright	Jennifer Piper
Duration	00:05:00
Shooting Format	
Finished Format	3072 x 1620 2048 × 858 2K DCI
Aspect Ratio	2:39
Finished Audio Format	Stereo
Country of Production	Australia
Locatons of Filming	Perth, Western Australia (Whadjuk Boodjar) Albany, Western Australia (Mineng Boodjar)
Language/s	English Russian (subtitled to English)
Shooting Start	17 October 2022
Shooting Finish	24 November 2022
Post-Production Finish	20 February 2023
Release Date	April 2023







A still from Russian Spy  
RussianSpy\_KeyArt\_02.png  
A secret, coded telegram  
from 1885 put Albany on the  
lookout for Russian spies  
State Archives, Perth WA  
© Jennifer Piper



A still from Russian Spy  
RussianSpy\_KeyArt\_03.png  
Senior Archivist Damien  
Hassan discusses the coded  
telegrams of 1885  
State Archives, Perth WA  
© Jennifer Piper



A still from Russian Spy  
RussianSpy\_KeyArt\_04.png  
Senior Archivist Damien  
Hassan and DOP Dasha  
Melnik descend to the  
archives  
State Library of Western  
Australia, Perth  
© Jennifer Piper



A still from Russian Spy  
RussianSpy\_KeyArt\_05.png  
DOP Dasha Melnik walks  
along the shore of Shoal Bay  
Shoal Bay, Albany WA  
© Jennifer Piper



A still from Russian Spy  
RussianSpy\_KeyArt\_06.png  
Flying into Point King  
Lighthouse Ruins, with Mount  
Clarence radio tower in the  
background.  
Frenchman's Bay, Albany WA  
© Jennifer Piper



A still from Russian Spy  
RussianSpy\_KeyArt\_07.png  
A lightkeeper (or seagull) view  
of Frenchman's Bay. No  
Russian Ships today.  
Point King Lighthouse Ruins,  
Albany WA  
© Jennifer Piper



A still from Russian Spy  
RussianSpy\_KeyArt\_08.png  
Historian Malcolm Trill and  
DOP Dasha Melnik ponder  
how many Russians are in  
Albany.  
Point King Lighthouse Ruins,  
Albany WA  
© Jennifer Piper



A still from Russian Spy  
RussianSpy\_KeyArt\_09.png  
Historian Malcolm Trill looks  
out at Frenchman's Bay from  
inside the lighthouse ruins.  
Point King Lighthouse Ruins,  
Albany WA  
© Jennifer Piper



A still from Russian Spy  
RussianSpy\_KeyArt\_10.png  
DOP Dasha Melnik  
experiences Frenchman's Bay  
for the first time.  
Mount Clarence, Albany WA  
© Jennifer Piper



A still from Russian Spy  
RussianSpy\_KeyArt\_11.png  
DOP Dasha Melnik walks the  
rocks in front of Point King  
Lighthouse Ruins.  
Frenchman's Bay, Albany WA  
© Jennifer Piper





Russian Spy behind-the-scenes at State Library of Western Australia  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_01.png  
Director Jennifer 'JP' Piper and Second Cinematographer Aref Radhidan check the shot at State Archives  
State Library of WA, Perth  
Image by Aydin Helvaci  
© Jennifer Piper



Russian Spy team creating POV magic  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_02.png  
(L-R) Sound Recordist Izzy Turner, DOP Dasha Melnik, Second Cinematographer Aref Rashidan and Director Jennifer 'JP' Piper at State Archives  
State Library of WA, Perth  
Image by Aydin Helvaci  
© Jennifer Piper



Russian Spy creators at SLWA  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_03.png  
(L-R) DOP Dasha Melnik and Director Jennifer 'JP' Piper at State Archives  
State Library of WA, Perth  
Image by Aydin Helvaci  
© Jennifer Piper



DOP Dasha Melnik finds creative ways to deal with monitor glare  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_04.png  
Co-Producer and DOP Dasha Melnik hides under a jacket to check the shot on a sunny day in Albany  
Mount Clarence, Albany WA  
Image by Pia Husbands  
© Jennifer Piper



The Drone follows Dasha Melnik along the bank of Shoal Bay  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_06.png  
Co-Producer and DOP Dasha Melnik walks alongside Shoal Bay, followed by a drone.  
Shoal Bay, Albany WA  
Image by Pia Husbands  
© Jennifer Piper



Russian Spy behind-the-scenes inside Point King Lighthouse Ruins, Albany  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_07.png  
DOP Dasha Melnik, Cinematographer Aref Radhidan and Director Jennifer 'JP' Piper at Point King Lighthouse Ruins, Albany  
Point King Lighthouse Ruins, Albany  
Image by Pia Husbands  
© Jennifer Piper



Russian Spy behind-the-scenes inside Point King Lighthouse Ruins, Albany  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_08.png  
DOP Dasha Melnik and Director Jennifer 'JP' Piper talk story, rocks, oceans and spies inside Point King Lighthouse Ruins, Albany  
Point King Lighthouse Ruins, Albany  
Image by Pia Husbands  
© Jennifer Piper



POV in a lighthouse full of stories  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_09.png  
DOP Dasha Melnik capturing the beauty of Point King Lighthouse Ruins, Albany  
Point King Lighthouse Ruins, Albany  
Image by Jennifer Piper  
© Jennifer Piper



Wired for sound at State Library of Western Australia  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_13.png  
DOP Dasha Melnik and Sound Recordist Izzy Turner prepare for an adventure in the archives at State Library of WA  
State Library of Western Australia, Perth  
Image by Jennifer Piper  
© Jennifer Piper



Drone's eye view at Shoal Bay, Albany  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_14.png  
DOP Dasha Melnik, Drone Operator Izzy Turner and Director Jennifer 'JP' Piper monitor the drone at Shoal Bay, Albany  
Shoal Bay, Albany WA  
Image by Pia Husbands  
© Jennifer Piper





Russian Spy behind-the-scenes at a hidden gun emplacement.  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_05.png  
DOP Dasha Melnik, Director Jennifer 'JP' Piper and Second Cinematographer Aref Rashidan in Albany, WA  
Gun Emplacement, Albany WA  
Image by Pia Husbands  
© Jennifer Piper



Aref Rashidan looks up in Albany for Russian Spy  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_15.png  
Second Cinematographer Aref Rashidan on the streets of Albany, WA  
Image by Dasha Melnik  
© Jennifer Piper



How to plan a shot for Russian Spy  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_16.png  
DOP Dasha Melnik and Second Cinematographer Aref Rashidan outside a red phone booth in Albany, WA  
Albany, WA  
Image by Izzy Turner  
© Jennifer Piper



Associate Producer at the ready  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_17.png  
Associate Producer Pia Husbands keeping warm at Point King Lighthouse Ruins, Albany  
Point King Lighthouse Ruins, Albany WA  
Image by Jennifer Piper  
© Jennifer Piper



The joy of being in the library before it opens  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_18.png  
Director Jennifer 'JP' Piper lives out a childhood dream, by being inside State Library of WA before it opens.  
State Library of WA, Perth  
Image by Dasha Melnik  
© Jennifer Piper



From which directions would the Russians have arrived?  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_19.png  
Director Jennifer 'JP' Piper figures out which way invading ships would have arrived.  
Mount Clarence, Albany  
Image by Pia Husbands  
© Jennifer Piper



Russian Spy behind-the-scenes at Point King Lighthouse Ruins, Albany  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_20.png  
DOP Dasha Melnik outside Point King Lighthouse Ruins, Albany  
Point King Lighthouse Ruins, Albany  
Image by Jennifer Piper  
© Jennifer Piper



Russian Spy behind-the-scenes at Point King Lighthouse Ruins, Albany  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_21.png  
DOP Dasha Melnik outside Point King Lighthouse Ruins, Albany  
Point King Lighthouse Ruins, Albany  
Image by Jennifer Piper  
© Jennifer Piper



Russian Spy behind-the-scenes at Point King Lighthouse Ruins, Albany  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_28.png  
Historian Malcolm Traill at Point King Lighthouse Ruins, Albany  
Point King Lighthouse Ruins, Albany  
Image by Jennifer Piper  
© Jennifer Piper



Discussing spies, secret files and invasion in WA State Archives  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_29.png  
(L-R) Director Jennifer 'JP' Piper, Senior Archivist Damien Hassan and DOP Dasha Melnik discuss coded telegrams from 1885 State Archives, Perth  
Image by Aydin Helvaci  
© Jennifer Piper





On location in Albany for Russian Spy  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_27.png  
Point King Lighthouse Ruins  
Frenchman's Bay, Albany  
Image by Jennifer Piper  
© Jennifer Piper



On location in Albany for Russian Spy  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_26.png  
Historic buildings on the streets of Albany  
Albany, Western Australia  
Image by Dasha Melnik  
© Jennifer Piper



On location in Albany for Russian Spy  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_25.png  
The not-quite-famous gun emplacement has  
a great view of the bay, if you can find it.  
Frenchman's Bay, Albany, WA  
Image by Pia Husbands  
© Jennifer Piper



On location in Albany for Russian Spy  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_23.png  
The stairs to a war memorial  
Mount Clarence, Albany  
Image by Pia Husbands  
© Jennifer Piper



On location in Albany for Russian Spy  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_24.png  
Frenchman's Bay, Albany  
Image by Pia Husbands  
© Jennifer Piper



On location in Albany for Russian Spy  
RussianSpy\_BTS\_22.png  
Frenchman's Bay, Albany  
Image by Pia Husbands  
© Jennifer Piper



Available as:

- Print-ready PDF, 300dpi, A2, CMYK
- Low-resolution PDF, 150dpi, A2, CMYK
- High-resolution PNG, 300dpi, A2, RGB



### **STATE RECORDS OFFICE**

Region: Perth

Contact: State Records Office (08) 9427 36000

Address: Alexander Library Building, James St,  
Perth WA

### **POINT KING LIGHTHOUSE RUINS**

Region: Albany

Contact: City of Albany (08) 6820 3000

Address: 37 Duke Street, Albany WA

### **MISERY BEACH**

Region: Albany

Contact: Department of Biodiversity,  
Conservation and Attractions (08) 9210 9000

Address: Misery Beach, Torndirrup WA

### **THE ALLOTMENT ALBANY**

Region: Albany

Contact: Louise Everett 0417 234 319

Address: 38 Cuthbert Street Albany WA

