



POLICY PRIORITIES

2023





INTRODUCTION

WALGA is an independent, member-based, not for profit organisation representing and supporting the WA Local Government sector. Our membership includes all 139 Local Governments in the State.

Our vision is for “agile and inclusive Local Government enhancing community wellbeing and enabling economic prosperity”. WALGA believes that all Western Australians - regardless of where they live - should have the opportunity to enhance their quality of life and wellbeing, allowing individuals, families and communities to thrive. Local Governments play a critical role in achieving this objective and should be empowered to govern in the best interests of their communities.

WALGA amplifies the voice of Local Government and brings sector concerns and perspectives directly to key decision makers, particularly State and Federal Government. We do this by delivering strong, evidence-based recommendations and advocacy in support of sector positions.

WALGA’s policy positions are derived from research, consultation and collaboration with Local Governments and other key stakeholders. WALGA works with the State Council, Elected Members, Local Government Executives, Officers and other stakeholders such as industry groups and subject matter experts to identify and take action to address current and emerging challenges for Local Governments and their communities.

While there are a wide range of issues facing the sector, it is important that WALGA focuses on those of most importance, to avoid diluting our effectiveness in influencing key decision-makers and to maximise sector outcomes.

WALGA has developed a *Strategic Policy Register* which outlines the policy areas that will be our priority for 2023.

The Register aims to:

- Ensure that WALGA Members are informed and can contribute to ongoing policy development
- Target resources to areas of greatest impact for the Local Government sector collectively
- Improve coordination of activities and advocacy strategies across the sector.

An overarching focus for 2023 will be to ensure that WALGA has relevant, contemporary and fit for purpose policy positions to support our advocacy across all priority areas.

The issues included in the register are of state-wide concern to Local Governments and their communities. They range in their stage of development, from emerging issues that require research and the collation of evidence to underpin a robust policy position on behalf of the sector; to those that are long standing positions.

It is important to note that new issues may arise, or current issues may evolve significantly during 2023, which may require an advocacy response from WALGA on behalf of Local Governments in Western Australia. This register may be updated to allow for reprioritisation, amendment, and addition to accommodate changes over the course of 12 months, as directed by Members.

WALGA will develop an advocacy strategy for identified policy priorities, including actions, engagement, timeframes, and outcomes sought.

The advocacy activities will include:

- Engagement with government, including Members of Parliament, Ministerial Advisers and State and Federal agencies
- Submissions to government reviews and inquiries, and pre-Budget submissions
- Participation in committees and working groups
- Collaboration, consultation and information-sharing with other stakeholders and industry groups
- Media / social media campaigns, events
- Research, evidence-gathering, building of case studies
- Working with the Australian Local Government Association on national issues and priorities
- Consultation with Local Governments
- Support, advice and information to Local Governments



AGILE AND EMPOWERED LOCAL GOVERNMENT

We're working for

- Local Government to be empowered to govern in the best interests of their communities
- A principle-based legislative framework that provides for good governance and accountability
- Local Government to have the resources needed to deliver on their responsibilities

Why this matters

Local Government undertakes functions most appropriately implemented at the local level in the best interests of local communities. Local Governments provide a range of services and infrastructure that affect the daily lives of all people and businesses, including roads, waste collection, libraries and cultural facilities, building services and planning and development approvals. It is also responsible for important regulations to protect the community, including public health, noise control and animal management.

All Local Governments strive to provide efficient services and effective democratic representation on behalf of their constituents and communities. Over time, the services provided by

Local Governments have expanded to fill gaps in service delivery from other spheres of Government or the private sector, and to align with changes in social structures and community expectations.

To enable Local Governments to operate efficiently and provide high quality services, the legislative framework governing the sector must be appropriate and based on the underpinning principle of 'general competence' – that Local Governments have broad discretion to make any decision they think necessary to provide for good government to their communities. The sector also needs access to adequate resources and an appropriate revenue raising capacity to ensure that it can deliver its expanding range of responsibilities.

Priorities for 2023

- Implementation of the new *Local Government Act*
- Fair rating exemption categories
- A review of planning fees and charges set under the *Planning and Development Regulations 2009* to enable cost recovery by Local Governments
- Removal of fees and charges from legislation
- Greater access to grant programs for Local Governments



RESILIENT, CAPABLE AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

We're working for

- Collaboration between Local and State Government on important community issues including health, safety, access and inclusion, public health planning, family and domestic violence, housing and homelessness, early years, and public libraries
- Efficient, effective and equitable planning and building systems that preserve the important role of Local Government
- Access to essential services in regional, rural and remote areas
- Local Government to have positive relationships with their Aboriginal communities

Why this matters

All Western Australians deserve the opportunity to enhance their quality of life and to live in safe and vibrant neighbourhoods.

Local Governments play a significant role in creating local identity, community wellbeing and social cohesion.

Through its planning functions, Local Governments look to ensure the built environment has a positive impact on wellbeing through activity levels, contact with nature and social interaction. The sector also provides services and facilities such as recreation and community facilities, events, and social services.

Priorities for 2023

- Implementation of child safeguarding recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse relevant to Local Government
- Implementation of the *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act*
- Supporting Local Governments to develop their capability and knowledge in Aboriginal engagement
- Improving access to primary health services in regional, rural and remote areas
- Addressing the critical gaps in telecommunications infrastructure power supply resilience
- Input into the review of the *Disability Services Act*
- Implementation of the Western Australian Development Index project
- State Government Planning Reform including regulatory and policy changes to create more consistent local planning frameworks and the Design WA suite of policies by the state government
- Review of *Development Control Policy 2.3 Public Open Space in Residential Areas* and *Liveable Neighbourhoods*
- Implementation of the State Government's response to the *Building Confidence Report*



CLIMATE ACTION

We're working for

- Collaboration between Federal, State and Local Governments to address climate change and the impact on local communities, businesses and infrastructure
- Assisting Local Government to meet their climate change objectives, such as achieving net zero emissions targets
- Funding support for Local Government emissions reduction and adaptation actions

Why this matters

Addressing the causes and impacts of climate change requires a collaborative effort across all three levels of Government, businesses and the community.

The Climate Change policy landscape has and is continuing to evolve with both the Commonwealth and State Governments making clear commitments to reducing emissions. The Commonwealth Government has legislated a national emissions reduction target of 43 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030 and net zero by 2050. The State Government has announced it will introduce climate change legislation this year to establish a framework for

emissions reductions to meet Western Australia's goal of net zero by 2050 and will release a new climate adaptation strategy in 2023.

This presents an opportunity for Local Governments to be more fully engaged in a Whole of Government agenda to prepare for climate change and reduce emissions. Local Governments are actively working to reduce their own greenhouse gas emissions and are undertaking a range of climate change mitigation and adaptation activities. They also play an important role in educating and supporting their communities about how they can reduce their carbon footprint and prepare for the impacts of climate change. To date, 50 Local Governments have signed WALGA Climate Change Declarations.

Priorities for 2023

- Review of the 2018 WALGA Climate Change Policy Statement
- Expansion of the Regional Climate Alliance Program to cover all WA Local Governments
- Creation of a State Urban Forest Strategy and expanding the Urban Canopy Grant Program
- Supporting Local Governments to accelerate their transition to electric vehicles, including funding for vehicle purchase and electric vehicle charging stations
- Implementation of the National Trajectory for Low Energy Buildings



COMMUNITIES THAT ARE PREPARED, SAFE AND RESILIENT FROM NATURAL DISASTERS

We're working for

- A simple and streamlined State Emergency Management Framework that supports Local Governments to undertake their emergency management responsibilities
- A shift in Government focus and spending from response and recovery to resilience and preparedness
- The engagement of Local Government as a partner in policy and legislative reviews that impact Local Government emergency management roles and responsibilities
- A sustainable grant funding model for Local Government in emergency management
- Future management regime for Bush Fire Brigades that recognises the changing risk environment, takes account of differing circumstances in Bush Fire Brigades across the State and adequate and equitable resourcing through the Emergency Services Levy
- Relief and recovery arrangements that are timely, efficient and support increased resilience against future events

Why this matters

WA Local Governments have a significant role in emergency management. Both Commonwealth and State Government policy identify Local Government as a key player in community disaster resilience, preparedness and response.

Local Government also has statutory obligations for recovery following an emergency affecting their community. The roles assigned to Local Governments under the *Bush Fires Act 1954* provide responsibilities for the management of bush fire brigades, bushfire preparedness and risk mitigation and enforcement measures for non-compliance.

The *Emergency Management Act 2005* prescribes further responsibilities to Local Governments including requirements to:

- Undertake Emergency Risk Management assessments;
- Establish and chair a Local Emergency Management Committee;
- Develop and maintain local emergency management arrangements;
- Manage Recovery following an emergency; and
- Appoint a Local Recovery Coordinator.

The changing climate means that WA is already experiencing more frequent extreme weather events. Some 74 WA Local Governments have been impacted by 27 declared disasters in the past three years alone, primarily relating to flood, cyclone damage and bushfires. These disasters have significant, long-term impacts on the community. Local Governments report that the process to secure financial support after a natural disaster is excessively bureaucratic and does not effectively support timely recovery.

With the predicted increase in extreme weather events in WA, there's a pressing need to enhance community preparedness for disasters and emergencies, provide emergency services personnel the necessary equipment to respond to incidents, and ensure that relief and recovery arrangements are timely, efficient and support increased resilience against future events.

Focussing on mitigation and adaptation will reduce the risks faced by communities, and the need for repair and recovery funding after a disaster has occurred.

Priorities for 2023

- Consolidation of current emergency services legislation into a single *Emergency Services Act*
- Implementation of the review of Local Emergency Management Arrangements
- Review of the State Recovery Framework
- Review of the WA process for Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements Category B payments
- Review of the National Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements
- Review of *State Planning Policy 3.7: Planning in Bushfire Prone Areas*
- Expanding the scope and quantum of the Local Government Grants Scheme and Mitigation Activity Fund
- Expansion of the Community Emergency Services Manager Program
- Development of a comprehensive asset management plan for Local Government emergency services facilities and equipment
- Assisting Local Governments to prepare and implement coastal hazard risk management and adaptation plans



SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

We're working for

- Environmental and waste management legislation that is proportionate and protects the environment while minimising the regulatory burden on Local Governments
- Funding and financial certainty for Local Governments to support implementation of the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Strategy and changes to the *Environmental Protection Act*
- Ensuring Local Governments have the tools and resources to meet their statutory obligations
- Increasing Producer Responsibility for waste to incentivise waste minimisation, reduce costs to the community and increase resource

Why this matters

Local Governments perform key environmental protection, regulatory and management functions, including:

- Planning for the retention, conservation and management of local biodiversity
- Managing biosecurity threats and incursions on their own land, developing and enforcing pest management local laws and supporting community groups to implement management actions for pests and diseases
- Using water to meet community needs, such as public open space

Local Government has responsibilities under the *Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Act 2007*, which allows for Local Governments to provide waste services in accordance with the requirements of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986*.

It is important that the legislative and policy frameworks that govern

environmental protection and management are appropriate and are based on best practice. Local Governments need access to clear guidance to assist them to meet their compliance obligations and funding support to deliver environment and waste services.

Priorities for 2023

- Review of the *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act*
- Review of *Environmental Protection Act 1986 Regulations* and securing funding to assist the sector in meeting any new requirements
- Support Local Governments to deliver on their statutory obligations related to native vegetation clearing, including development of a strategic biodiversity offset framework as part of the implementation of the State Native Vegetation Policy

- Review of the WARR Strategy, certainty on the trajectory for the WARR Levy and the provision of appropriate regulatory settings and guidelines that assist Local Governments to meet WARR Strategy targets
- Development of a WALGA circular economy policy position
- Implementation of comprehensive and effective product stewardship for products such as electronic waste, packaging, mattresses and tyres
- Expansion of the Container Deposit Scheme, to include wine and spirit bottles as a minimum
- Specifications and guidelines to facilitate use of recycled materials in civil infrastructure construction
- Drive the cost effective adoption of low energy consuming LED streetlights in the Western Power and Horizon Power service areas



INFRASTRUCTURE TO MEET THE NEEDS OF OUR ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES

We're working for

- Local Government to be recognised as a key partner with Commonwealth and State Governments in infrastructure planning, co-ordination and delivery.
- Quality roads that meet the needs of communities, enhance safety and support local economic development.
- Community and cultural infrastructure that is fit-for-purpose, inclusive and sustainable.
- Sustainable funding support for Local Governments to manage, improve and maintain local infrastructure.

Why this matters

Infrastructure is a fundamental enabler of economic and productivity growth and essential to support community cohesion and connection.

Ongoing investment in appropriate infrastructure is important to ensure that the WA economy can unlock new industries and create jobs over the longer term.

All levels of Government have an important role in the provision of infrastructure. For Local Government, this is largely centred on the provision of roads, and community infrastructure. Local Governments are responsible for the maintenance and improvement of 127,000km of roads amounting to 87 per cent of the public road network, and provide important community infrastructure such as sport and recreation facilities, libraries, community centres, airports, boat harbours, camping grounds and parking facilities.

Local Governments have significant responsibilities for the provision of local infrastructure but are constrained in their ability to fund future obligations for infrastructure replacement due to restrictions on the ability to raise own-sourced revenue. This has been exacerbated by the rising cost of construction materials, which has added to overall project costs and extended delivery timeframes.

Priorities for 2023

- Funding and support for Local Government infrastructure provision.
- Negotiation of a new State Road Funds to Local Government Agreement
- Support for Regional Road Groups to deliver on the commitments and objectives of the State Road Funds to Local Government Agreement, including the development of a harmonised project prioritisation methodology.

- Policy guidance to Local Governments on emerging issues including road safety, freight management, and E-Rideables.
- Deliver resources, speed limit setting policy change and programs that will enable creation of a significantly safer Local Government road network
- Assist Local Governments with best practice infrastructure delivery.
- Program design detail and State Government funding for the Underground Power Program
- Land development for housing in regional areas where private development is not viable



THRIVING ECONOMIES AND LOCAL JOB OPPORTUNITIES

We're working for

- Greater collaboration and alignment between Commonwealth and State economic development agencies and Local Governments
- Local Governments' role in supporting Economic Development to be enshrined in legislation
- Thriving local business communities and local job creation
- Availability of key skills to support sustainable economic growth and development

Why this matters

The Local Government sector is an important partner for the State to achieve a strong and diversified economy delivering secure and quality jobs.

The sector has a broad range of responsibilities and functions that affect the economic and business environment, including the provision of infrastructure, regulatory activities and local level leadership and planning. Local Governments can also play a key role in driving local projects that stimulate job creation and economic growth and support businesses to survive in a more diversified economy.

A whole of Government approach is needed to deliver on the State's economic

development goals and to overcome barriers to economic development such as infrastructure and housing constraints. This will require alignment, collaboration and partnership across all three levels of Government. There is scope to improve in this area, with collaboration on economic development activities often ad hoc or piecemeal, or in some cases not occurring at all.

There is also a need to focus on removing barriers and constraints that prevent the WA economy from reaching its potential. Reforms that improve the productivity and competitiveness of the economy and create a more enabling business environment will be important, alongside addressing capacity constraints, including skills shortages.

Priorities for 2023

- Update the 2019 WALGA Economic Development Framework
- The provision of tools and assistance for Local Governments to undertake economic development activities
- Local Government involvement in the State Government's Economic Development agenda
- Identifying and addressing critical skills shortages for Local Governments





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