



The West at its Best.

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ABOUT WALGA

The Western Australian Local Government Association (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. WALGA uses its influence, support and expertise to deliver better outcomes for WA Local Governments and their communities.

We do this through effective advocacy to all levels of Government on behalf of our members, and by the provision of expert advice, services and support to Local Governments.

WALGA's vision is for agile and inclusive Local Governments enhancing community wellbeing and enabling economic prosperity.



The West at its Best.

State pride runs strong among West Australians. We embrace our isolation, take pride in our rich resources and maximise our downtime in our blessed natural environment.

However, whilst Western Australians know deep down that WA is a State like no other, the cost of living crisis, growing number of natural disasters, more extreme weather events, shifting demographic profile and desire to transition to a low carbon economy are putting pressure on families and vulnerable members of the community and ebbing away at our wellbeing.

The 2025 election presents an opportunity for the incoming Government to address the challenges facing Western Australia both now and into the future.

So WALGA presents initiatives and solutions to keep the State running at its best. To protect what we value, ensure continuity of what's working and change what isn't.

We want to see the West at its Best.

A State where families are financially secure, neighbourhoods are abundant with trees, roads are safe to drive on, public amenities are contemporary and accessible for all and we thrive in a low-carbon environment.

WALGA presents The West at its Best.

The West **at its Best.**

Where:

- ▼ Our **communities are safeguarded against the impacts of climate change**, including hotter days, extreme weather events and rising sea-levels.
 - ▼ We are **prepared and resilient in the face of the growing number of natural disasters** and extreme weather events, with comprehensive plans and resources in place to protect lives and property.
 - ▼ Communities thrive within a **low-carbon environment**; powered by clean energy sources that drive sustainable living and economic prosperity. We embrace innovative technologies and energy-efficient infrastructure, while committing to reducing carbon emissions.
 - ▼ Our **infrastructure** supports safe access to jobs, education, health services, recreation and other services as well as enabling a vibrant, internationally competitive business sector to thrive.
 - ▼ **Diversity, equity, and accessibility** are embedded in all aspects of community life, ensuring that everyone, regardless of background, circumstance or location, feels valued and has equal opportunities to fully participate and thrive in the community. Essential services and infrastructure are accessible to all residents, regardless of where they live.
- ▼ **Local Governments have the resources and flexibility** needed to fulfil their community responsibilities without unnecessary regulatory barriers. The important role of Local Government in the planning system is enhanced.

It's crucial that all Western Australians have a say in shaping this future. Local voices must be heard in discussions about their future.

WALGA's 2025 State Election Priorities outlines essential initiatives identified by Local Governments and their communities to achieve these goals. These initiatives aim to enhance community well-being and foster economic prosperity, aligning with our collective aspirations for a better future.

WALGA and its member Local Governments welcome the opportunity to work with the next State Government to realise this vision of a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient Western Australia.

**Together, we
can realise these
opportunities and
turn the aspirations
of our communities
into reality - enabling
what we love most -
The West **at its Best.****

COMMUNITIES OF THE FUTURE

Climate Resilient

The West at its Best.

URBAN TREE CANOPY

How the West reaches its Best:

- ▼ Expand funding for the Urban Greening Grant Program
- ▼ Develop and implement a comprehensive, Statewide Urban Forest Strategy to guide the planning and management of the urban canopy across Western Australia, including the setting of a tree canopy target of 30% by 2040 for the Perth and Peel regions and measures to retain trees on private land
- ▼ Appoint a lead agency responsible for overseeing and coordinating the implementation of the Strategy

Planting trees and increasing native vegetation in urban areas are vital strategies for both mitigating and adapting to higher temperatures, more extremely hot days, and longer, more intense heatwaves associated with climate change. Trees reduce urban heat, cooling local environments by up to 10°C, enhance stormwater infiltration, provide food and shelter for wildlife, and improve human health and wellbeing.

Perth has the lowest tree canopy cover of any Australian capital city, at just 16%, and approximately 41% of Local Governments have reported significant canopy loss. Between 2011 and 2020, Perth lost a quarter of its urban canopy, mainly due to the clearing of private land for development. Only 22% of suburbs in the metropolitan area have more than 20% canopy cover.

Local Governments are making concerted efforts to reduce tree loss on private land and are implementing extensive tree planting programs in street verges, parks, and other public areas. The State Government is also contributing by enhancing the urban canopy through its Urban Greening Grant Program delivered by WALGA and its commitment to developing an Urban Greening Strategy for the Perth and Peel regions.

A long-term funding commitment and investment in tree planting through an expansion and extension of the Urban Greening Grant Program is required to increase urban canopy and support existing Local Government tree planting efforts. \$40 million over the next decade will support the planting of at least 150,000 trees and 500,000 understorey plants. Funding should cover the full lifecycle costs of planting and maintaining trees, recognising that most expenses arise from activities supporting growth, establishment, and juvenile tree care.

Tree planting is only one component of what needs to be a comprehensive and strategic approach to growing and managing our urban tree canopy. While the State Government has committed to an Urban Greening Strategy for Perth and Peel, this should be expanded to cover urban areas across the State.



Streetscape City of Nedlands



Polyphagous Shot-Hole Borer damage, City of Perth

The Strategy should aim for a minimum tree canopy target of 30% by 2040 for the Perth and Peel regions. It should also focus on tree retention, as 80% of urban trees are on private land and are being lost at a rate that planting on public areas cannot offset. The current State planning system lacks the guidance, policy mechanisms, and tools to adequately regulate trees on private land, often allowing development applications to proceed without considering tree removal. An effective and efficient State Government regulatory mechanism is needed to enable Local Governments to treat the removal or alteration of a tree as a form of development requiring approval.

The appointment of a lead agency with responsibility for delivery of the Strategy is crucial. This agency should manage coordination, resourcing, funding mechanisms, program evaluation, partnership facilitation, and planning policy review.

Infrastructure WA considers investing in urban tree canopy as a key infrastructure need and priority, making the following recommendation in the State Infrastructure Strategy:

Contribute to infrastructure and community resilience in the urban environment and support the equitable provision of an interconnected network of cover by developing an overarching urban forest program, including:

- Assigning a lead State agency to provide overarching coordination, resourcing and funding mechanisms.
- Embedding program evaluation to ensure it remains fit for purpose.
- Extending the existing Urban Canopy Grant Program to increase the urban tree canopy across the Perth and Peel regions, and other major regional urban centres.
- Partnering with Local Governments, community groups and other land managers in the rollout.
- Further reviewing existing planning policy settings with regards to the treatment of trees in new greenfield and infill development.

RESPONDING TO THE POLYPHAGOUS SHOT-HOLE BORER BIOSECURITY EMERGENCY

How the West reaches its Best:

- ▼ Provide additional State Government funding to escalate the response to the spread of the Polyphagous Shot-Hole Borer
- ▼ Develop a PSHB Recovery Plan to commence recovery immediately, including funding for replanting and research into alternative treatment methods

The Polyphagous Shot-Hole Borer (PSHB) is a biosecurity emergency which is having a devastating impact on tree canopy across the Perth metropolitan area.

With no effective chemical treatments for PSHB currently available, tree pruning and removal of infested trees is the only way to contain the borer. More than 3,000 mature trees have been removed so far, many of which are located in the most iconic and important areas of Perth, including Kings Park, Rottnest Island, Perth Zoo, Hyde Park and around Lake Claremont, as well as suburban streets, parks and reserves.

The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) is responsible for responding to PSHB as part of a nationally coordinated and funded biosecurity response. Local Governments are allocating significant resources to support the response effort, including through undertaking surveillance programs to detect early signs of infestation, informing and providing educational material to their communities, tree management and facilitating removal as required.

Despite these efforts the infestation is still growing. We are now at a critical tipping point. Without an urgent and substantial increase in resourcing to escalate the response and remove bureaucratic hurdles that are hampering the response, the PSHB will not be eradicated, or even contained. Not only will this further decimate our already shrinking urban tree canopy, but it also puts agricultural crops, such as avocado and citrus and our native forests, at risk.

While the focus remains on responding to PSHB, it is also essential that we begin the recovery process now. The State Government should establish a PSHB Recovery Plan, which would include funding for replanting lost trees with a diverse mix of PSHB and climate-resistant species and investment to accelerate the development of alternative prevention and treatment methods to combat the borer and build the resilience of our urban tree canopy.

MORE THAN 3,000 MATURE TREES HAVE BEEN REMOVED SO FAR, MANY OF WHICH ARE LOCATED IN THE MOST ICONIC AND IMPORTANT AREAS OF PERTH

DISASTER-RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE

How the West reaches its Best:

- ▼ Establish a \$10 million annual reserve fund for the disaster-resilient reconstruction of essential public assets to ensure that critical infrastructure can be quickly restored and made more resilient to future disasters

More frequent and severe disasters due to climate change come at a growing cost to the economy and communities. In 2020, natural disasters cost the Australian economy \$38 billion annually, a figure projected to reach \$73 billion by 2060.

WA has experienced 38 declared disasters since 2020, impacting 80 of 139 Local Government areas. Over \$39 million was spent on essential public asset reconstruction through Category B of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) in WA in 2022-23 alone.

WA HAS EXPERIENCED 38 DECLARED DISASTERS SINCE 2020, IMPACTING 80 OF 139 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS

The creation of a dedicated betterment fund will enable Local Governments to rebuild essential public assets to a more resilient standard to withstand the impacts of future natural disasters and save money for all levels of Government in future disasters.

Under the current DRFA in WA, Local Governments receive funding for emergency works and reconstruction on a like-for-like basis only. A lack of funding to upgrade essential assets to improve resilience against future disasters leaves infrastructure vulnerable to repeated damage in subsequent disasters. A dedicated fund for resilient reconstruction would supplement DRFA investment, assisting Local Governments to rebuild essential assets to a more resilient standard and potentially leveraging further investment from the Australian Government.

The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements recognised the significance of betterment funding, recommending the 'build back better' principle be incorporated more broadly into Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.

This approach has been adopted in Queensland with positive results. Since 2013, 531 betterment projects have been completed, with 81% experiencing little to no damage in subsequent disasters. This approach has delivered clear financial benefits with savings of \$397.5 million estimated in avoided reconstruction costs, compared to an investment of \$174 million over a decade.



The West under stress.

FITZROV RIVER BRIDGE DAMAGE, SHIRE OF DERBY, WEST KIMBERLEY



The West at its Best.

FITZROY RIVER BRIDGE RESTORED, SHIRE OF DERBY, WEST KIMBERLEY



Bunbury Back Beach

City of Greater Geraldton



55 COASTAL EROSION HOTSPOTS HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED TO REQUIRE ACTION WITHIN THE NEXT 25 YEARS

COASTAL MANAGEMENT

How the West reaches its Best:

- ▼ Extend, expand and restructure CoastWA to protect coastal communities and assets from erosion and inundation
- ▼ At least \$150 million is needed for coastal adaptation over the next five years

Coastal erosion and inundation from more intense storm surges, storm tides and sea level rise associated with climate change pose a serious threat to critical infrastructure like ports and roads, public assets, homes and ecosystems in coastal communities.

In 2019 the State Government identified 55 coastal erosion hotspots—15 in metropolitan areas and 40 in regional areas—where coastal erosion is expected to impact on public and private physical assets and require management and adaptation action within the next 25 years. An additional 31 locations are on a watch-list for future consideration. In 2019, the State Government estimated that managing the identified erosion hotspots would cost \$110 million over five years, with more funding needed over the longer term. The State Government is also currently mapping coastal inundation hotspots, which will identify additional areas requiring management and adaptation action.

Local Governments are tasked with managing coastal hazards through State Planning Policy (SPP) 2.6, which requires a sea level rise of 0.9m by 2100 to be considered in coastal planning (noting that this sea level rise factor is currently under review and is likely to increase), but do not have sufficient financial or technical capacity to do so.

It is essential that long-term funding is provided to support Local Governments' efforts to plan and implement significant and more complex adaptation projects. While some additional funding was allocated through CoastWA in 2020-21, this level of investment is well below the State Government's own estimate of what is required to effectively manage the identified hotspots and does not include funding for inundation management and adaptation. This is reflected in the 2023-24 Coastal Adaptation and Protection Grant Program, which was over-subscribed, with only half of the project applications receiving funding.

An expanded and extended CoastWA Program (currently only funded to 2025-26) is needed to ensure our coastal hotspots are protected. Funding of at least \$150 million over the next five years is required to cover future adaptation needs for both erosion and inundation, and take into account rising construction costs, newly identified hotspots, and increasing risks.

Changes to CoastWA funding parameters are also needed:

- Timeframes for implementation of projects should be extended. It is unrealistic to expect large scale construction projects to be implemented within one financial year.
- Maximum grant funding should be increased to allow for large-scale projects to be funded from CoastWA. For example, Stage One of the Port Beach erosion project – at a cost of \$3.25 million – could not be funded from CoastWA.
- CoastWA grant funding rounds should be aligned with Australian Government funding opportunities to support larger scale projects. This will allow Local Governments to use CoastWA funding as part of their co-contribution to Australian Government funded projects.
- Co-contribution requirements for smaller Local Governments should be reduced. Large scale coastal adaptation projects can be very costly and smaller Local Governments with a lower rate base may not be able to provide a 50% co-contribution.

Disaster

Ready

The West at its Best.

CONSOLIDATED EMERGENCY SERVICES ACT

How the West reaches its Best:

- ▼ Release the *Consolidated Emergency Services Act* (CES Act) Exposure Draft Bill for consultation as a priority
- ▼ CES Act must address key issues identified by Local Governments including mechanism to transfer control of Voluntary Bush Fire Brigades
- ▼ New or expanded responsibilities for Local Government under the CES Act must be funded

Successive State Governments have recognised the need to consolidate WA's outdated emergency services legislation. The long overdue consolidation of the *Fire Brigades Act 1942*, *Bush Fires Act 1954*, and *Fire and Emergency Services Act 1998* into a single piece of legislation, the *Consolidated Emergency Services Act* (CES Act), is essential to provide a strong and integrated foundation for effective emergency services management in the future, improve community safety and provide better support for emergency services workers.

Local Government has long supported a review of the emergency services legislation. The CES Act is important for Local Governments, who have a critical role under the *Bush Fires Act 1954* for the prevention, control, and extinguishment of bushfires, as well as the establishment and management of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades and the appointment of Bush Fire Control Officers.

It is essential that Local Governments are involved in the development of the new Act and its associated regulations and supporting materials. The draft of the Exposure Bill is currently in progress and should be released for consultation as a priority.



Capel Shire President and Volunteer Firefighter Cr Doug Kitchen

Areas that must be addressed in the CES Act include:

- A clear definition of roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders in emergency management, including Local Governments.
- An efficient mechanism to enable Local Governments to transfer responsibility of Volunteer Bushfire Brigades to the State Government should they choose to do so.
- Improved processes to transfer control of bushfires between Local Governments, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) and the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA).
- Consistent and locally relevant standards for Bush Fire Brigade training and doctrine that recognise the volunteer context and impact.
- The State Government to be required to comply with the same obligations under the CES Act as other landholders.

Ensuring there is funding available to support the implementation of the new Act is essential. The State Government should conduct a comprehensive costing analysis of the new Act, providing details of the financial implications for Local Governments before the release of any Exposure Draft Bill. Any new or expanded responsibilities for Local Governments under the CES Act must be matched with funding and resources so they can fulfill their obligations effectively.

EMERGENCY SERVICES FUNDING

How the West reaches its Best:

- ▼ Review and redesign the Local Government Grants Scheme to ensure it can meet the current and future needs of Local Government Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades and the State Emergency Service
- ▼ Conduct an audit of buildings, facilities, appliances, vehicles and major items of equipment for Local Government VBFBs and the SES to inform the preparation of a Comprehensive Asset Management Plan
- ▼ Provide an interim increase to the quantum of State Government funding to provide resources necessary for the safe and efficient operation of Local Government VBFBs
- ▼ Increase the Mitigation Activity Fund and expand its scope to all bushfire risk reduction activities

Local Government Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades (VBFBs) and State Emergency Services (SES) play a critical role in WA's emergency and disaster response capabilities. Across the State, Local Governments manage 563 VBFBs with approximately 20,000 volunteers, and oversee funding for both VBFBs and SES. Local Governments are responsible for the initial fire response over 91.8% of the Western Australian landmass.

The Emergency Services Levy (ESL) is used to raise funds to support emergency services provided by Government and volunteer organisations. It supports essential activities to ensure the community is prepared for and able to respond to emergencies, including frontline services, emergency response capability and reducing community exposure to risk.

The 2017 Economic Regulation Authority (ERA) Inquiry into the ESL recommended that the State Government should continue to raise funds for emergency services through the ESL, but that the distribution of funds should be made more transparent and independent. It also recommended that services funded from the ESL should be clearly defined, provided in a cost-effective way, and targeted towards the greatest need.

These recommendations have not been implemented but remain a priority to ensure all emergency services have the resources to protect the community.

In 2022, the Office of the Auditor General's Report on Funding of Volunteer Emergency and Fire Services found that the ESL funds around 82% of DFES' operating costs compared to 68% when it was introduced in 2003.

Improving the operation and transparency of the ESL remains a priority, including:

- Expanding the ESL to fund Local Government emergency management activities across prevention, preparedness and response.
- Administration of the ESL by an independent organisation that is funded through consolidated revenue, with regular independent reviews of expenditure and assessment of the effectiveness of ESL funding expenditure to support prevention, preparedness and response activities.
- Fully compensating Local Governments for administering the ESL.
- Public disclosure of the allocation and expenditure of the ESL.

Local Government Grants Scheme

Despite their important role in keeping our communities safe, the funding provided to VBFs through the Local Government Grant Scheme (LGGS) is not sufficient to meet their needs. There are several factors that have contributed to funding pressures for VBFs:

- Rising costs for buildings, equipment, materials, and labour.
- More stringent Work Health and Safety standards.
- Changing composition of the volunteer workforce, including the need for facilities that accommodate the increasing number of female volunteers.
- Higher insurance premiums.

To ensure that our emergency volunteers have the necessary facilities and equipment, the LGGS must be reviewed and redesigned to create a sustainable, modern, and equitable grants program that funds Local Government emergency management activities across prevention, preparedness, and response.

Demand for capital funding through the LGGS has consistently exceeded the available resources, and this gap is widening. In 2017-18, the shortfall between total funding requested and funding approved was \$3.4 million. By 2022-23, this gap had grown to \$23.2 million. For the 2023-24 period the total LGGS budget was \$32.3 million, including fleet, facilities and operating grants. This included funding already committed to the Fleet Assets Annual Build Program. 148 capital grant applications were received totalling \$48.7 million. Only 37 capital applications totalling \$3.9 million were successful, leaving a shortfall of \$45 million, including

89 applications totalling \$26 million that were not funded, despite meeting the grant criteria.

Recent reviews have highlighted the need to ensure Local Government emergency management activities are appropriately funded:

- The 2017 ERA review of the ESL called for increased transparency and accountability in how it is administered and distributed.
- The Office of the Auditor General's 2022 Performance Audit on the Funding of Volunteer Emergency and Fire Services recommended that DFES work with Local Governments to adopt a Statewide strategic approach to Grants Scheme funding, based on a thorough understanding of long-term operating and capital costs.
- Recommendation 11.1 of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements found that State and Territory Governments should take responsibility for the capability and capacity of Local Governments to which they have delegated their responsibilities in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from natural disasters, to ensure Local Governments are able to effectively discharge the responsibilities devolved to them.

To inform the re-design of a strategic funding approach, objectives for the LGGS should be developed based on past experiences, current and future trends related to climate change and increasing bushfire risks, demographic changes, and financial and other resources.

A comprehensive asset management plan is also needed to ensure that funds from the LGGS are allocated efficiently and to better forecast the emergency response needs of communities over the next decade. An audit of buildings, facilities, appliances, vehicles and major items of equipment for Local Government VBFs and the SES should be undertaken as a first step to inform the preparation of a Comprehensive Asset Management Plan.

Redesigning the LGGS should also remove the ineligible and eligible list.

Until these broader reforms are undertaken, the quantum of State Government funding needs to be increased to provide all resources necessary for the safe and efficient operation of Local Government VBFs, in accordance with obligations under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2020*. It is estimated that at least \$45.5 million to clear the existing backlog of capital requests, and a further \$2.8 million annual increase to the LGGS operating grant budget is required.

Expand Mitigation Works in areas of High Bushfire Risk

WA's changing climate is making fire seasons longer, hotter and more dangerous. Fire suppression is becoming more difficult, making bushfire mitigation and management even more important to reduce the risk and increase the resilience of our communities and firefighters.

Under the State Hazard Plan – Fire, the Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner oversees bushfire risk prevention and mitigation, while property owners are responsible for fire prevention on their own land. Local Governments have a supporting role in preventing and mitigating bushfire risk.

The Mitigation Activity Fund (MAF) Program provides grants to Local Governments with an endorsed Bushfire Risk Mitigation Plan (BRMP) to assist with undertaking physical mitigation treatments on Crown land they manage. The program promotes an integrated approach to bushfire risk management across all land tenures, complementing efforts by the State Government and private property owners.

Since 2017-18, DFES has allocated approximately \$53 million in mitigation funding to Local Governments, enabling over 6,800 mitigation treatments such as building fire breaks, reducing fuel loads, and conducting hazard reduction burns. However the MAF Program has not kept pace with:

- The increased number of Local Governments with a BRMP, which has more than doubled from 35 in 2019 to 83 in 2023, with 95 currently participating in the BRMP program, or
- The increasing complexity and cost of implementing critical bushfire mitigation treatments due to limited access to contractors and machinery, shorter weather windows, and multiple demands on BFB Volunteers' time.

To address these challenges, funding for the MAF Program should be increased and the scope expanded to support activities that support physical mitigation works such as educating private property owners about risk and responsibility, building community resilience, developing and implementing BRMPs, and supporting the purchase of assets needed for mitigation works.

The cost of an expanded MAF Program covering all Local Governments with BRMPs is estimated to be \$15 million per annum.



Firefighters, City of Swan

**OUR COMMUNITIES
DEPEND ON
VOLUNTEER
BUSH FIRE
BRIGADES TO
KEEP THEM SAFE,
BUT FUNDING
ISN'T SUFFICIENT
TO MEET THEIR
NEEDS**

MORE COMMUNITY EMERGENCY SERVICE MANAGERS (CESMS)

How the West reaches its Best:

- ▼ Expand the Community Emergency Services Manager Program to all Local Governments to bolster local emergency management capability across prevention, preparedness, response and recovery

Community Emergency Services Managers (CESMs) are an important resource which allows Local Governments to improve their ability to perform all-hazard preparedness, prevention, response, and recovery (PPRR) initiatives within their communities.

CESMs are particularly valuable to smaller regional Local Governments with responsibility for VBFs that lack the financial resources to sustain a dedicated emergency management officer. CESMs bridge this gap by:

- Providing advice on Bush Fire Brigade operations.
- Providing advice on LGGS funding, as well as preparation of LGGS applications.
- Bridging the gap with relationships to other key agencies, in addition to DFES.
- Increasing bushfire awareness, potential mitigation and response measures amongst Local Government staff.

The CESM Program is partially funded by the ESL and includes 34 CESMs working across 57 Local Governments. Metropolitan CESMs are fully funded and employed by DFES, whereas country CESMs are employed by Local Governments under differing cost-sharing models with DFES. Not all Local Governments that manage VBFs have a CESM and many other Local Governments have expressed keen interest in joining the Program.

The Office of the Auditor General's 2022 Report into Funding of Volunteer Emergency and Fire Services found that in the absence of a CESM it might be challenging for some Local Government entities and volunteer groups to keep on top of their responsibilities, including the necessary administrative tasks and strategic planning.

The CESM Program should be expanded to ensure that all Local Governments that need a CESM can access one, and to address pay disparity amongst CESMs. This will require:

- Full funding from the State for existing Local Government-employed CESMs, estimated at an additional \$2.7 million annually.
- Incremental expansion of the program, consisting of:
 - The creation of 27 positions to serve the remaining 54 Local Governments managing VBFs, estimated at \$5.4 million annually.
 - The establishment of 13 additional positions to comprehensively address PPRR responsibilities for the remaining 26 Local Governments, at an estimated cost of \$2.6 million annually.

Once these changes have been made, the anticipated annual expenditure for the CESM Program is approximately \$14.9 million per annum. This should be funded from ESL revenue.



The West **under stress.**

FIRE DAMAGE, CITY OF SWAN



The West at its Best.

VOLUNTEER BUSH FIRE BRIGADE PROTECTING THE COMMUNITY



Damage after Cyclone Seroja



Kimberley Floods

EFFECTIVE LOCAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

How the West reaches its Best:

- ▼ Implement the Local Emergency Management Arrangements (LEMA) Improvement Plan to enhance the effectiveness and resilience of emergency management at the local level
- ▼ Replace the All West Australians Reducing Emergencies competitive Grants Program with an enhanced funding program to better support Local Government emergency management efforts

Under the *Emergency Management Act 2005*, WA Local Governments must develop and maintain Local Emergency Management Arrangements (LEMA). However, many Local Governments, particularly smaller ones and those in remote areas, lack the capacity to effectively maintain their LEMA.

A comprehensive 2022 review of LEMA by WALGA and DFES, which included feedback from 100 Local Governments and State Hazard Management Agencies, highlights the urgent need for reform and ongoing support for Local Governments in emergency preparedness and response.

The State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) has endorsed a five-year implementation plan for LEMA reform, but it is currently unfunded.

Implementing these improvements is a priority that supports SEMC's 2022 to 2025 goal of enhancing community resilience through strong local emergency management. A minimum of \$1 million per annum will be required over five years to implement this plan.

Local Governments require additional funding to assist with emergency planning and preparedness. However, the only available funding stream is the All West Australians Reducing Emergencies (AWARE) competitive Grant Program, which does not meet this need. The funding for the AWARE Program has not changed since 2014 and has restrictive application criteria and low project funding limits. Additionally, cash or in-kind contribution requirements are challenging for many Local Governments to meet.

AWARE should be replaced with a more robust, sustainable program that better supports Local Government emergency management capabilities. This enhanced program should:

- Broaden the scope of activities eligible for funding to include comprehensive emergency preparedness, response, and recovery initiatives.
- Raise funding caps to ensure that Local Governments have sufficient resources to effectively manage emergencies based on their specific risks and needs.
- Provide flexibility for Local Governments to allocate resources according to their capacity, risk profile, and community-specific emergency management priorities.

A minimum investment of \$9 million per annum should be made available for this new program.

Other States recognise the importance of supporting Local Governments in emergency management. For instance, Victoria allocates \$4.9 million annually to a similar Local Government emergency management planning system, with funding levels ranging from \$40,000 to \$120,000 per year based on each Council's capacity and risk profile.

ADDRESS GAPS IN TELECOMMUNICATIONS COVERAGE AND RESILIENCE

How the West reaches its Best:

- Continue to co-invest with the Australian Government and Industry in strategic opportunities to maximise federal and industry investments to improve telecommunications in WA

Every community in WA should have access to affordable, reliable telecommunications services to ensure their safety, connectivity, and economic participation.

Reliable telecommunications are critically important, especially during emergencies. Telecommunications provide an essential lifeline during extreme weather events like storms, cyclones, bushfires, and floods. However, the reliability of these services is dependent on electricity supplies, which are vulnerable in these situations.

Mobile telecommunications carriers frequently highlight their extensive coverage, claiming to serve over 99% of Australia's population. Yet, coverage maps reveal that vast areas of WA remain without coverage, even those near significant population centres and along major roads.

To better understand these gaps, the Australian Government has committed \$20 million to undertake an independent audit. Early findings from this initiative have uncovered numerous areas lacking essential mobile services. Completing this audit and publishing its findings is crucial.

A comprehensive understanding of where these shortfalls exist will allow for targeted solutions to be identified and implemented.

However, developing effective solutions for difficult-to-service areas is becoming increasingly challenging. Telecommunications carriers have shifted their business models, outsourcing infrastructure ownership to third parties.

With rapid advancements in communications technology, such as Low Earth Orbit Satellites, the State's Digital Inclusion Strategy should be reviewed to consider where these technological advancements present an important opportunity to overcome existing challenges and identify innovative solutions to enhance coverage and ensure that all Western Australians have access to reliable mobile telecommunications wherever they live or work.

Telecommunications is primarily the responsibility of the Australian Government, which has shown a commitment to co-investing with carriers and State Governments through a number of different programs including:

- Mobile Black Spot Program.
- Peri-urban Mobile Program.
- Telecommunications Disaster Resilience Innovation Program.
- Mobile Network Hardening Program.
- Regional Connectivity Program.

While these programs are making a difference in addressing coverage gaps, further investment is required. The State Government needs to build on significant investment over the past decade to set a strategy that includes the opportunities offered by new technologies, and will ensure all West Australians can reliably participate in the digital economy.



Shire of Cue



Telecommunications Tower, WA

EVERY COMMUNITY IN WA SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE, RELIABLE TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICES TO ENSURE THEIR SAFETY, CONNECTIVITY, AND ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

STATE GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR THE UNDERGROUND POWER PROGRAM

How the West reaches its Best:

- ▼ Provide financial support to households in low income areas and seniors to assist with the cost of connecting individual properties to the new underground power network to ensure equitable access

Western Power is working in partnership with local communities to create a stronger, underground power network in urban areas.

Replacing old overhead power lines with underground lines is best performed when the old equipment needs to be replaced. The State Government has promised \$3.4 million to help Western Power bring underground power to lower socio-economic areas. However, this funding doesn't cover the cost of connecting individual properties to the new underground network. This is a significant part of the total cost for those property owners that do not currently have an underground connection.

As construction costs in WA keep rising, it's becoming harder for communities to afford these projects. If the opportunity is lost, Western Power will have to replace old poles and wires with new ones above ground, leaving these areas with less reliable and outdated technology for the life of the new assets—more than 50 years.

Many households are under significant pressure from rising costs of living, including increasing interest rates. While financial help is available for some on fixed incomes there are many finding they are unable to meet the costs. The State Government offers support to people with Pension Concession Cards and State Concession Cards. There's also some help for those with both a Commonwealth Seniors Health Card and a WA Seniors Card.

To ensure these projects proceed, we need more financial support to include property connection costs, especially for those with low incomes. This way, we can ensure that we don't miss the chance to transform the power distribution network to be fit for future needs, including electrification of households in optimising use of distributed energy resources.

IF WE MISS THE CHANCE TO REPLACE OVERHEAD POWER LINES WITH UNDERGROUND LINES, COMMUNITIES WILL BE LEFT WITH OUTDATED TECHNOLOGY FOR 50 YEARS

Above ground power lines,
Perth Metro

Low Carbon

The West at its Best.

ENERGY

How the West reaches its Best:

- ▼ Drive the cost-effective adoption of low energy consuming LED streetlights in the Western Power and Horizon Power service areas
- ▼ Replace all old technology streetlights with LED luminaires to reduce carbon emissions and deliver a broader range of economic and social benefits to the community

Replacing WA's current fleet of old technology street light globes is an important way to reduce emissions and assist on the path to net zero.

Currently, the 288,000 standard streetlights operated by Western Power contribute over 90,000 tonnes of CO₂-equivalent emissions annually, making them the second-largest emission source for the utility. This is largely due to the large number of inefficient mercury vapour globes still in use, which constitute an estimated 38% of WA's street lighting network.

Western Power plans to convert all existing streetlights to LED technology, utilising both screw-in LED globes and purpose-built LED luminaires by 2029. This is expected to deliver a 50 to 60% reduction in CO₂ emissions and electricity consumption. Integrating smart lighting systems could yield even greater energy savings.

The approach Western Power has taken to date is to replace existing streetlights with LED globes if the old luminaire is still serviceable and to only install an LED luminaire if the old luminaire has failed. This compromise will likely result in higher maintenance costs over the network.

To realise the benefits of readily available, proven lighting technology sooner, the State Government should fund a program to replace all streetlights with LED luminaires.

This will deliver a range of economic and social benefits for the State, including:

- Significant reductions in lifecycle and maintenance costs, with maintenance expenses expected to drop by more than 50%.
- Reduction in the approximately 40,000 calls per year attended by Western Power address reported faulty streetlights.
- Improved service reliability due to the extended lifespan of LEDs, minimising outages and ensuring consistent lighting for communities.
- Improved lighting levels, which supports social outcomes such as reduced accidents in poorly lit areas and increased security by deterring nighttime crime.

CURRENTLY, THE 288,000 STANDARD STREETLIGHTS OPERATED BY WESTERN POWER CONTRIBUTE OVER 90,000 TONNES OF CO₂-EQUIVALENT EMISSIONS ANNUALLY

TRANSPORT: PUBLIC EV CHARGING INFRASTRUCTURE

How the West reaches its Best:

- ▼ Ensure all residents, regardless of their living situation, have access to convenient and reliable Electric Vehicle charging
- ▼ Expand the Electric Vehicle charging network in highly developed areas without off-street parking and in multi-residential unit developments where on-site charging isn't available
- ▼ Review and amend Regulation 49 of the WA Electrical Requirements under the Western Australian Electricity (Licensing) Regulations 1991 to facilitate kerbside Electric Vehicle charging in a safe way and provide guidance on locating and managing Electric Vehicle charging infrastructure in road reserves

The transition to Electric Vehicles (EVs) is a crucial part of the strategy for achieving a low-carbon economy, as the transport sector accounts for 18% of WA's emissions, mostly from road transport.

The State Electric Vehicle Strategy and the Sectoral Emissions Reduction Strategy for WA highlight the significant benefits of EVs in reducing emissions and improving air quality. Beyond environmental gains, EVs reduce the State's reliance on imported fossil fuels. Light vehicles, like cars, are expected to lead the switch to electric due to the well-developed and rapidly advancing technology. The number of EVs in WA is growing rapidly, with over 15,000 on the road by December 2023. To ensure this growth continues, we must eliminate barriers to EV adoption.

A critical step is to ensure there is adequate charging infrastructure. The State Government has invested \$23 million in the WA EV Network, providing fast charging stations on major routes and at tourist destinations. The Charge Up Grant Scheme also supports Local Governments by funding half the cost of installing EV chargers at selected destinations. These grants are available for both AC chargers (7 to 22kW) and DC chargers (25 to 350kW).

A focus should include expanding the network to provide charging opportunities for those living in highly developed areas without off-street parking and in multi-residential unit developments where on-site charging isn't available. Suburbs like Highgate, North Perth, Leederville, Fremantle, and South Fremantle are missing from the top 25 postcodes for EV registrations despite having similar socio-economic and demographic profiles to neighbouring areas with higher EV numbers. These higher density neighbourhoods often lack off-street parking, making charging difficult.

Other Australian capital cities are starting to address the lack of kerbside charging, which is common practice in European cities. The NSW Climate and Energy Action's Electric Vehicle Kerbside Charging Grants provide a valuable model, covering up to 80% of installation costs, up to \$10,000 per charger, and supporting EV charger software costs.

To make this happen in WA, we need to address regulatory issues that prevent kerbside chargers from being installed in safe, high-demand locations. Compliance with the WA Electrical Requirements (WAER) is mandatory under Regulation 49 of the Western Australian Electricity (Licensing) Regulations 1991. It is not clear whether installing EV chargers in the road reserve may be in conflict with application of section 9.7 of the WAER. To address this issue the WAER should be reviewed and amended to facilitate kerbside EV charging in a safe way. The provision of guidance regarding locating and managing EV charging infrastructure located in road reserves will also be necessary.

State Government funding for the installation of EV chargers will also be crucial. A \$2 million investment could fund 200 to 300 kerbside chargers, significantly enhancing charging options in parts of Perth without off-street parking. This will ensure all residents, regardless of their location, have access to convenient and reliable EV charging.

THE TRANSPORT SECTOR ACCOUNTS FOR 18% OF WA'S EMISSIONS, MOSTLY FROM ROAD TRANSPORT



EV fast charger



Drop & Go, City of Wanneroo

Recycling facility, Mandurah Regional Council

EXPANDING THE CONTAINER DEPOSIT SCHEME WILL SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASE MATERIAL RECOVERY IN REGIONAL AREAS AS WELL AS CREATING MORE JOBS

WASTE

How the West reaches its Best:

- ▼ Include wine and spirit bottles in the Container Deposit Scheme to boost recycling rates and reduce litter across WA
- ▼ Direct all revenue from the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery (WARR) Levy towards initiatives that enhance waste management practices, ensuring funds are used for their intended purpose to tackle our State's waste challenges
- ▼ Collaborate with other States to implement product stewardship schemes for electronic waste, tyres, mattresses, and packaging, to promote responsible disposal and recycling of these materials
- ▼ Develop and fund a comprehensive Waste Infrastructure Strategy tailored for regional WA, to improve waste management facilities and services in regional areas and improve waste management Statewide

Expand the Container Deposit Scheme

The WA Container Deposit Scheme has proven to be a success, more than doubling the number of containers recovered across the State. It has generated over 800 jobs, significantly reduced litter, and provided valuable opportunities for charities, social enterprises, and individuals.

Expanding the Scheme to include a broader range of containers (at a minimum, wine and spirit bottles) will increase these benefits. As well as creating additional jobs and further encouraging community recycling efforts, broadening the range of eligible containers is expected to lead to:

- Higher diversion rates of glass from kerbside recycling bins, resulting in cleaner streams of separated materials for processing.
- Reduced cost to households, given that glass is among the heaviest and most challenging materials to collect through kerbside recycling.
- Reduced community confusion about which items are accepted.

Expanding the Scheme is also expected to significantly increase material recovery in regional areas. WA's vast geography and the large distances between transport hubs means that it is often cost prohibitive to provide kerbside recycling services to regional and remote communities. There are currently 36 Local Governments in WA - primarily in the Wheatbelt, Goldfields-Esperance, Kimberley, Pilbara, Midwest, and Gascoyne regions - where domestic kerbside recycling isn't available.

However, 23 of these Local Governments have access to a Containers for Change collection point within their boundaries. The Scheme's minimum network standards require refund points to be within a maximum distance of 200km from townsites in remote and very remote areas. By expanding the Scheme to accept a wider range of beverage containers we can leverage the existing network and provide consumers with a greater incentive to recycle.



Waste heap,
Shire of Northam

USE 100% OF THE WASTE LEVY FOR WASTE INITIATIVES, NOT 25%

Use all of the Waste Levy for waste initiatives focussed on avoidance and maximising resource recovery

Investing more in waste management is an important way to help the State reach its net-zero goal by 2050 and accelerate the transition to a circular economy.

The Review of the Waste and Resource Recovery (WARR) Strategy acknowledges the positive impact of WARR Levy funding and signals a need for further investment in waste avoidance, commercial and industrial waste, and support for regional and remote areas.

We need more resources to invest in these important areas.

The WARR Levy is a key source of funding and should be used for its intended purpose—funding waste management initiatives, especially waste avoidance and resource recovery. All WARR Levy revenue should go towards waste management, however, this is not currently the case.

The WARR Levy generates around \$80 million annually. However, only 25% of this goes to waste-related activities, with the majority covering the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation's (DWER) operating costs. Out of the \$20 million allocated to waste-related activities, 40% is provided for departmental staffing, leaving \$12 million for waste management projects and activities.

This situation will become even more pressing once the Kwinana and Rockingham Waste to Energy Facilities start operating in late 2025, as lower levels of waste going to landfills will reduce the revenue collected from the WARR Levy. This expected fall in revenue will mean that a thorough review of funding for waste management and DWER will be needed.

Redirecting the entire WARR Levy revenue could fund a range of important activities to improve waste management and accelerate the transition to a circular economy, such as:

- Funding to cover Food Organics and Garden Organics (FOGO) implementation costs for all Local Governments.
- Household food waste avoidance programs to empower communities to reduce waste and costs.
- Investment in regional waste management planning and infrastructure to meet better practice standards by 2030.
- Upgrades to Material Recovery Facility infrastructure for better kerbside bin recovery.
- Increased funding for WasteSorted Bin Tagging Programs to educate and engage communities in resource recovery.
- Creation of a Commercial and Industrial Waste Program to assist businesses to reduce waste.
- Continuation of existing programs like the Household Hazardous Waste Program and waste education.

Comprehensive product stewardship to ensure end of life costs don't fall to Local Government

Comprehensive product stewardship schemes are needed to reduce waste management costs and promote a sustainable, circular economy.

Product stewardship makes sure that producers have financial or physical responsibility for their products at the end of their life, which provides an incentive for products to be designed in a way that minimises waste generation and facilitates end-of-life recovery.

The State Government should work collaboratively with its counterparts in other States to encourage the Australian Government to implement effective product stewardship schemes for priority products. In the absence of any Australian Government scheme, the State Government should legislate for product stewardship.

The priority materials that need a product stewardship scheme include electronic waste, tyres, mattresses, and packaging. The current voluntary or co-regulatory product stewardship schemes for these materials do not adequately cover recycling costs, particularly in regional areas where transport costs are high. These products are often illegally dumped, causing environmental, social, and economic harm.

Funding and Support for Regional Waste Management

People who live in the regions often don't have the same opportunities to reduce waste as those in metropolitan areas. For instance, in some regional towns, there may be only one shop, limiting options for low-waste choices like bulk purchasing without packaging.

To achieve better waste outcomes for regional and remote communities, a regional waste infrastructure plan should be developed that includes all waste streams and focuses on local solutions. Dedicated funding to support the strategy will also be needed to improve basic waste management and offer communities opportunities to reduce, recycle, and reuse materials.

When developing waste reduction initiatives, it's crucial to assess the feasibility of the choices available to consumers within the current system. Effective waste reduction initiatives should not only educate the community on how to change their behaviour but also provide access to the resources and infrastructure to make those changes possible.

INDUSTRIES OF THE FUTURE

How the West reaches its Best:

- Establish a comprehensive, Statewide strategy to facilitate the development of large-scale renewable energy projects across WA, to manage the impacts and maximise the benefits of renewable energy for the State's communities, economy and environment

The push towards net zero emissions targets and policies for economic diversification are driving significant changes in our economy.

Project proponents are actively pursuing opportunities in many rural, remote, and regional areas, focusing on renewable energy projects such as wind and solar farms, tree planting for carbon offsets and biodiversity, and biofuel production.

However, planning and policy aren't keeping pace, resulting in projects being considered on an ad-hoc basis. There is no coordinated approach to integrating these investments into existing communities and industries, leaving individual Local Governments and their communities to 'reinvent the wheel' in their efforts to achieve the best outcomes for their communities.

We need a Statewide strategy to ensure that local communities benefit from these changes and that the industry maintains its social license to operate.

A key issue arising from the transition is conflict over land use between renewable energy projects and agricultural land. Addressing this is crucial to ensure a smooth transition towards our goal of net zero emissions by 2050 and to deliver positive outcomes for communities, the economy, and the environment.

The existing WA Planning Commission 2020 Position Statement for Renewable Energy Facilities is not adequate to guide the management and placement of these facilities. The Statement should be amended and elevated to a State Planning Policy to provide better guidance to Local Government, proponents and require local engagement and realisation of community benefits from the development of these facilities.

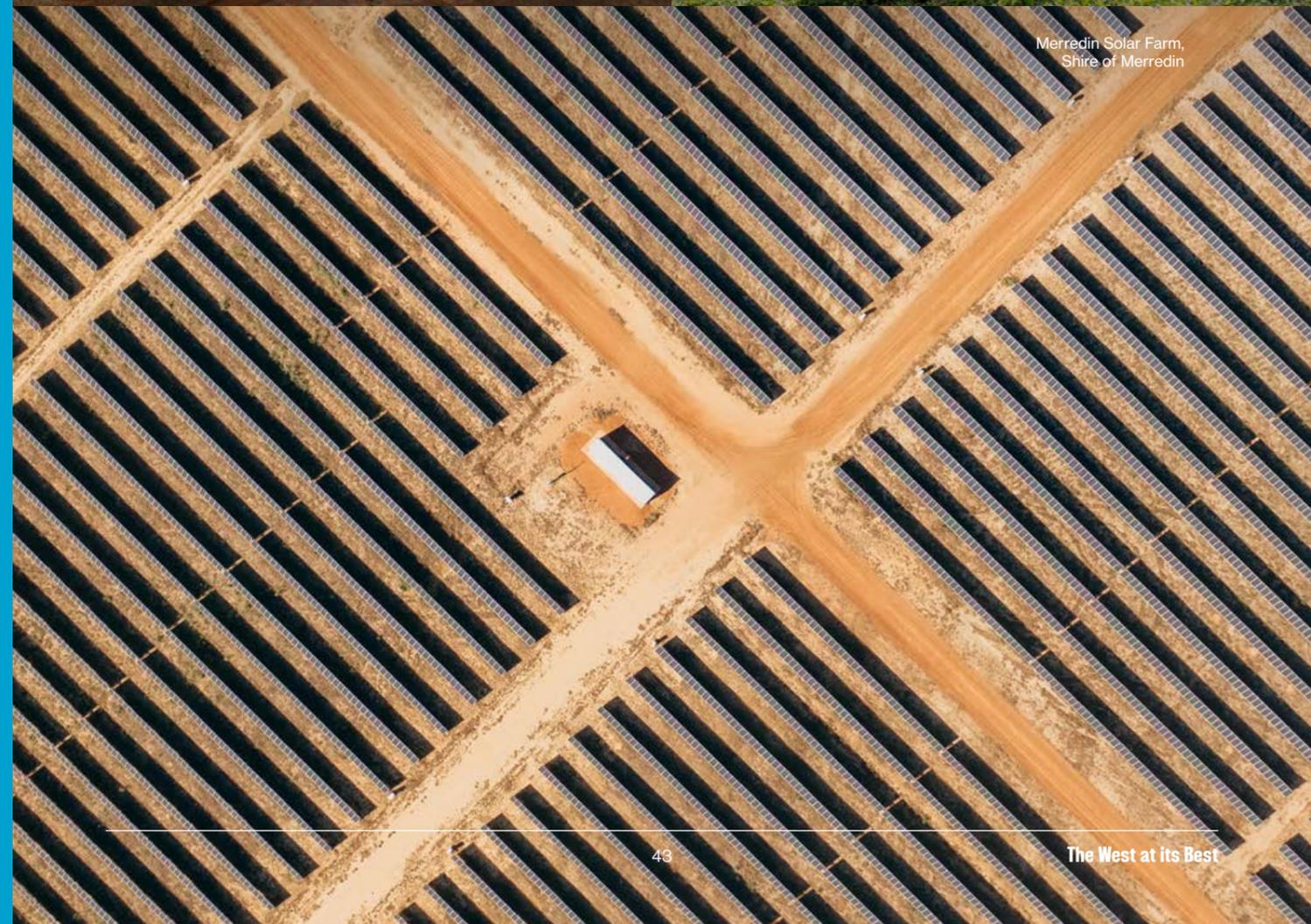
Local Governments are actively involved in the development, approval and regulation of major renewable energy projects, and must be part of this strategy to ensure both communities and the environment benefit from the energy transition.



Merredin Wind Farm, Shire of Merredin



Tree Planting, Perth Metro



Merredin Solar Farm, Shire of Merredin

Safer

Communities

The West at its Best.

**SAFER ROADS:
SAVE LIVES AND REDUCE INJURY ON
HIGH-SPEED LOCAL ROADS**

**How the West
reaches its Best:**

- ▼ Provide \$276 million over four years to fund the State's contribution to applying proven road safety countermeasures on 439 Local Government roads, totalling 8,208km

Reducing fatalities and serious injuries on Local Government-managed roads is essential to meeting the State Government's target of a 50-70% reduction in road trauma by 2030.

Between 2017 and 2021, more than 500 people lost their lives and over 2,900 were seriously injured on regional roads in WA. Alarming, half of these crashes happened on Local Government roads.

In 2022, the fatality rate in regional WA was 18.7 per 100,000 people, compared to just 2.84 per 100,000 in the Perth metropolitan area.

Over 70% of fatal and serious injury crashes in regional WA are due to run-off-road or head-on collisions. Improving safety on these roads is challenging because of their extensive and remote nature.

The \$855.7 million Regional Road Safety Program is delivering significant improvements in road safety on National and State Highways. Analysis across 163 Regional Road Safety Program projects over the last two years shows positive outcomes.

Compared to the previous five years a 50% reduction in fatalities and 35% reduction in serious injuries has been observed.

Significant benefits can be achieved by extending this approach to high-speed regional local roads.

**WITH INVESTMENT
WE COULD
SAVE 50% OF
FATALITIES AND
REDUCE SERIOUS
INJURIES BY 35%**



Shire of Kulin

OVER 70% OF FATAL AND SERIOUS INJURY CRASHES IN REGIONAL WA ARE DUE TO RUN-OFF-ROAD OR HEAD-ON COLLISIONS

A Business Case led by the RAC in partnership with WALGA and Main Roads WA, with support from the Australian Road Research Board (ARRB), proposes a program to reduce the disproportionately high rate of fatal and serious injury crashes on high-speed Local Government-managed roads in regional and peri-urban areas. This Business Case prioritises 439 high-speed Local Government roads covering 8,208 kilometres - approximately one-third of WA's sealed rural road network - and provides a process for selecting appropriate, proven, cost-effective countermeasures, a safety assessment and a return-on-investment analysis.

To support the implementation of this business case, co-funding from the Australian Government and State Government is required to a total \$552 million.

To evaluate the program's effectiveness, assessments were conducted that included before-and-after comparisons of star safety ratings and estimates of Killed and Seriously Injured (KSI) reductions. The analysis shows significant road safety benefits:

- A reduction of 138 fatalities and 489 serious injuries over the 30-year lifespan of the countermeasures.
- An average Star Rating Score improvement from 38.4 to 29.1 after implementing the countermeasures.
- A 23.6% improvement in the Star Rating Score, indicating a relative risk safety improvement.

The program aligns with both National and State road safety goals, particularly in WA's Road Safety Framework, focusing on "building safer roads and road systems" and emphasising the importance of regional roads in Driving Change, Road Safety Strategy for WA 2020 – 2030.



The West under stress.

GREENHILLS, SHIRE OF YORK



The West at its Best.

SAFER CHILDREN'S CROSSINGS

How the West reaches its Best:

- ▼ Prioritise converting children's crossings on 30 identified multi-lane, high-speed, high volume roads to signalled pedestrian crossings to make it safer for Traffic Wardens and students

Enabling children to safely walk and ride to local schools reduces car trips, congestion and parking pressure, as well as improving health outcomes through increased physical activity.

Manned children's crossings are designed to provide a safe location for children to cross roads on their way to school. However, high traffic speed and volumes can create unsafe conditions for both children and Traffic Wardens.

The State Government recently committed \$10 million to expand the 40km/h speed limit to all warden-controlled school crossings that fall outside of existing designated school zones. This decision is an important step toward making it safer for Traffic Wardens and children using the crossing during before and after school hours.

However, there is scope to further enhance the safety of children's crossings on high-speed and high-volume roads by investing in infrastructure to convert children's crossings on high-volume, high-speed roads to signalled pedestrian crossings. WALGA has identified 30 priority crossings that should be the immediate focus. Conversion of these crossings is estimated to cost \$15 million.

Conversion to signalled crossings will help to address the chronic shortage of Traffic Wardens. This issue is reflected in WA Police data and is expected to become an even greater challenge going forward given the average age of a Traffic Warden is 76. The shortage means that it is not possible to staff all crossings. High traffic and student volume crossings receive priority, while others remain unmanned. The absence of Traffic Wardens on short notice can also result in crossings being uncontrolled, increasing the risk to children.

Converting to signalled crossings will allow the redeployment of Traffic Wardens to less dangerous or unmanned crossings and reduce the number of Traffic Wardens required to manage high-speed, high-volume traffic.



Children's Crossing, Western Australia

CONVERSION TO SIGNALLED CROSSINGS WILL HELP TO ADDRESS THE CHRONIC SHORTAGE OF TRAFFIC WARDENS



Children's Crossing, West Leederville, Perth

Connected & Inclusive



The West at its Best.

RENEW OUR LIBRARIES

How the West reaches its Best:

- ▼ Ensure sustainable funding for public libraries to maintain and enhance service levels that meet the diverse needs of communities across WA and support the implementation of the WA Public Library Strategy 2022-2026

Public libraries are well-loved community facilities. WA is home to 233 public libraries with over 637,000 active members. Every year, these libraries help Western Australians borrow nearly 11 million physical items; over 3.4 million digital items; and welcome 7.6 million visitors - that's about three visits for every person in WA.

Public libraries are changing to meet the growing and diverse needs of our community. No longer just about books, libraries are places where people gather, share knowledge, and feel connected. Libraries play an important role supporting literacy, bridging the digital divide, and providing a range of services for those in need.

The shift in community expectations is placing pressure on public libraries. While the services provided have changed, funding has not. The State Government provides direct support for public libraries through the provision of funds for library resources, however this is out of step with the needs of modern libraries and is falling behind what is required to keep up with the growing population and inflation.

Additional State Government funding support is needed to ensure the ongoing sustainability of library services. It is estimated that this would require a funding commitment of \$30 million over four years.

In the 10 years to 2022-23, State Government funding for public libraries has increased by just 4%, while WA's population has grown by 15%, and inflation by 28%. Funding for print and e-resources also lags behind other States. In 2021-22 expenditure for print resources in WA was only \$3.5 per capita, behind other States such as Queensland (\$4.3), South Australia (\$4.5) and Victoria (\$5.9).

The existing funding arrangements also do not take into account the cost of providing new services. For example, the growing use of digital resources is also adding to the cost of running libraries. In 2021-22, 3.4 million e-resources were borrowed, with an average cost of \$26.15 per e-book and \$80.38 per audiobook. Most of these e-resources licences expire after one year, which means public libraries need to continually repurchase them.

Local Governments are increasingly shouldering additional costs to ensure the service meets community expectations. The sector is contributing \$3 million in additional funding for print resources and \$1.4 million in additional funding for e-resources in 2021-22. Additional funding support from the State Government would allow Local Governments to redirect resources from covering the shortfall in library stock to focus on their main role to fund library operations and the services that the community expects from modern libraries.

Further investment in public libraries will also support the achievement of the goals set out in the WA Public Library Strategy 2022-26 and the State Government's Digital Strategy. These aim to strengthen communities, cement the role of libraries as important assets and ensure digital access for all. No funding has been made available for the implementation of these strategies. Without funding, these important goals remain out of reach.

NO LONGER JUST ABOUT BOOKS, LIBRARIES ARE PLACES WHERE PEOPLE GATHER, SHARE KNOWLEDGE, AND FEEL CONNECTED

MEETING GROWING DEMAND FOR SPORT AND RECREATION FACILITIES

How the West reaches its Best:

- ▼ Provide a long-term commitment to increase the Community Sport and Recreation Facilities Fund (CSRFF) to \$30 million per annum to meet the needs of the State's growing population
- ▼ Publish a 10-year regional level sporting plan to strategically guide investments in sports infrastructure across WA

Local sport and recreation facilities play an important role in supporting WA's active lifestyle. They provide a place where people of all ages, skills and abilities can enjoy the benefits of physical activity and social connection and deliver broader community benefits such as improved health, lower crime rates, more jobs, and economic growth.

With the State's population growing and a more diverse range of people participating in sport, we need to make sure the community has access to high quality facilities that meet their needs. One example is facilities to support the increasing participation of women and girls in sport, as highlighted by SportWest.

The Community Sport and Recreation Facilities Fund (CSRFF) is an important source of funding to support Local Governments and community sporting groups to invest in facilities. But the fund is oversubscribed each year, with many valuable projects missing out.

In the 2024-25 State Budget, a temporary funding boost was given to cover the costs of the 2023-24 CSRFF projects, which had seen an increase in demand. To keep up with the State's growing population, it is essential to commit to raising the CSRFF funding to \$30 million each year on a long-term basis.

As well as more funding for sport and recreation facilities, we also need to improve planning for regional level sporting facilities - a gap that was identified by the State Infrastructure Strategy. The catchment areas for sport and recreation facilities are vast and often cross Local Government boundaries, making infrastructure expensive to build, operate, and maintain. Better planning will ensure equitable access to regional-level sporting infrastructure and inform investment priorities in the Perth and Peel regions and major regional centres.

The Department of Local Government, Sport, and Cultural Industries (DLGSC) has assessed the Statewide need for public open space for sport and recreation, with the next step being a gap analysis to inform future provision in the sporting landscape. This work will inform planning efforts for regional-level sporting facility infrastructure requirements, locations, operational responsibilities, land use, community infrastructure plans, and investment decisions.

The State Infrastructure Strategy has recommended developing a 10+ year regional-level sporting facilities plan to identify gaps in current provision and explore opportunities for shared spaces. The implementation of this strategy is a priority and should be supported by dedicated funding.

Local Governments must be involved in the development of the Strategy. Local Governments play a major role in planning, developing, and maintaining regional-level sporting facilities and with their local area knowledge are crucial stakeholders in securing land, planning, and delivering these facilities.



Recreation Centre, Shire of Donnybrook Balingup



Geographe Leisure Centre, City of Busselton

INCREASE INVESTMENT IN ARTS AND CULTURAL FACILITIES

How the West reaches its Best:

- ▼ Establish a \$30 million per annum Community Arts and Cultural Facilities Fund to support the development and enhancement of arts and cultural infrastructure across WA

Arts and culture make our communities vibrant places to live, offering a range of benefits that contribute to overall well-being. Access to arts and culture fosters social cohesion, mental well-being, and education while also driving economic outcomes through tourism and generating activity.

The DLGSC Western Australian Cultural Infrastructure Framework 2030+ acknowledges these benefits and aspires to position WA as the most culturally engaged State in Australia. However, the ability to achieve this goal is being held back by the lack of dedicated funding for arts and cultural infrastructure. This issue was reflected in the 2022 State Infrastructure Strategy, which reported that only a small budget allocation is available for arts and culture, with no focus on regional needs.



ACCESS TO ARTS AND CULTURE FOSTERS SOCIAL COHESION, MENTAL WELL-BEING AND EDUCATION



Art Display, WA

The creation of an ongoing Community Cultural and Arts Facility Fund, similar to the CSRFF, would provide the necessary capital funding to support the ambition of the DLGSC's Cultural Infrastructure Framework 2030+ and drive positive social and economic outcomes across the State. Other jurisdictions already have dedicated funding streams for cultural infrastructure, such as the State Regional Cultural Fund in New South Wales and the Multicultural Community Infrastructure Fund in Victoria.

There also needs to be a greater focus on investing in arts and culture infrastructure in regional areas. While DLGSC's Strategic Directions 2016-31 outlines a vision for the WA arts and culture sector, many priorities are centred around the Perth CBD, neglecting community arts and cultural centres in wider metropolitan and regional areas.

Local Governments are providers and operators of a variety of cultural facilities, including almost all the State's Regional Arts and Entertainment Centres. But they need support to ensure that facilities are well maintained and meet community needs. There are no targeted funding programs to support Local Governments operating and maintaining community cultural and arts centres, with funding support primarily delivered through State and Australian Government grant programs - which are often oversubscribed. Funding for the arts and culture sector that is made available through Lotterywest and the DLGSC focuses on one-off arts programs and performances, rather than infrastructure.

As a result, existing cultural assets are run down. Research led by the Australian Local Government Association has reported a significant need for replacement of Local Government buildings and facilities, including cultural infrastructure, due to poor condition, function, and capacity.



Disability access,
City of Mandurah

**APPROXIMATELY 411,500
WESTERN AUSTRALIANS
LIVE WITH DISABILITIES,
WITH ONE IN THREE
FACING CHALLENGES
ACCESSING BUILDINGS**

MORE ACCESSIBLE COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

How the West reaches its Best:

- ▼ Provide funding to Local Government to improve the physical accessibility of community facilities and infrastructure, ensuring equitable access for all residents

Communities that are welcoming and inclusive enable people with disabilities or mobility issues and older individuals greater opportunity for participation, self-representation, and economic engagement. Approximately 411,500 Western Australians live with disabilities, with one in three facing challenges accessing buildings.

As our State's population grows and ages, our community infrastructure needs to ensure inclusive access. The Western Australian State Disability Strategy highlights infrastructure as a focus for creating inclusive communities. The Strategy's Second Action Plan outlines how State Government agencies can ensure that community infrastructure is accessible to everyone.

Local Governments play a vital role in the implementation of these efforts through Disability Access and Inclusion Plans (DAIP). These plans ensure people with disabilities have equal opportunity to access buildings and facilities, such as community centres, recreation facilities, parks, and playgrounds.

The DAIP Minister's Progress Report for 2021-2022 shows promising steps towards more inclusive communities, with several case studies from Local Governments showcasing positive change. However, further funding support from the State Government can help to speed up this progress.

In April 2023, WALGA partnered with the Office of Disability to facilitate consultation for the proposed reforms to the *Disability Services Act 1993* (DSA). Feedback from Local Governments during these consultations emphasised that a lack of funding is a major hurdle to make community facilities more accessible.

While new infrastructure projects are now incorporating universal access requirements, upgrading existing infrastructure is more challenging. It requires significant additional funding and specific planning for each case. Local Governments are increasingly raising rates to generate the necessary revenue for access upgrades. For example, the Town of Cambridge's 2023-24 budget includes a 2% rate increase to fund access upgrades to toilets at two recreation facilities.

ACTIVE TRAVEL

How the West reaches its Best:

- ▼ Provide funding to address gaps in the Long-Term Cycle Network to make it feasible and easier to travel by active modes

The Long-Term Cycle Network (LTCN) was developed in consultation with Local Governments on the basis of the Perth and Peel @ 3.5 million framework. It provides a blueprint for State and Local Governments to work together to deliver continuous networks to provide much needed active transport options. Once delivered this will improve active transport infrastructure and opportunities in Greater Perth.

Both State and Local Governments build and manage paths to encourage safe, attractive, active transport. However, there are missing links that hinder users being able to safely access important places like railway stations, community centres as well as reach the primary paths. The LTCN has identified these gaps. Now we need to address these.

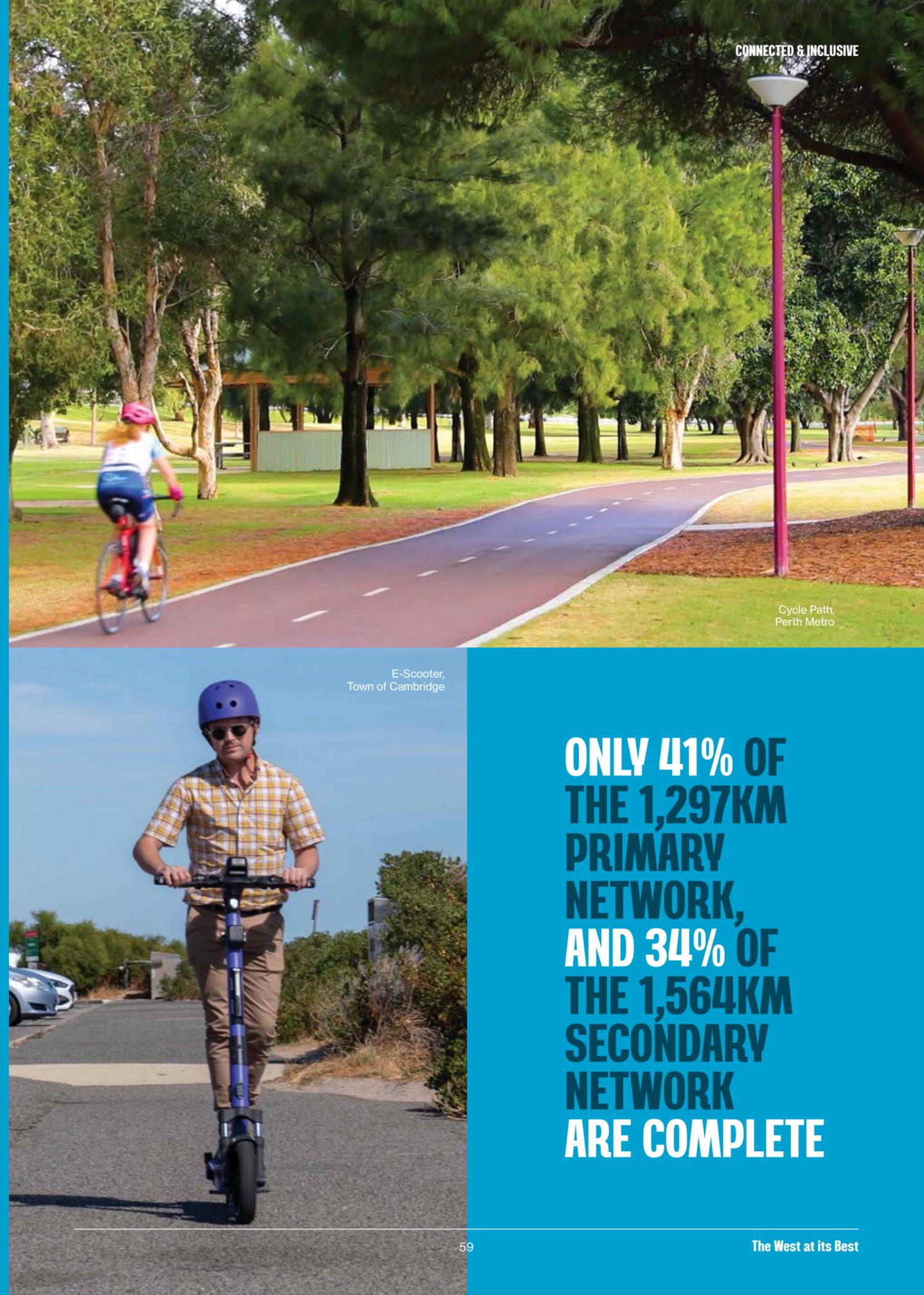
Local Governments played a crucial role in developing the LTCN by identifying key routes for cyclists, pedestrians and those using eRideables like eScooters. The LTCN identifies links that are non-existent, existing but need significant improvement and existing but needing some improvement to provide a fit-for-purpose level of service.

The State Government's Stage 1 submission to Infrastructure Australia identified that only 41% of the 1,297km of identified primary network, and 34% of the 1,564km of identified secondary network are complete. The remainder of these networks are either non-existing or require significant upgrades and replacement.

Additionally, the local active transport network requires significant investment, though this has not yet been clearly defined. Most of these routes are on local roads and land. A significant shift to active travel in urban areas will contribute to achieving the transport sector's emissions reduction targets. This will take time, and we need to start now by funding transport studies, design, and consultation with residents and other stakeholders to develop the projects, as well as funding for construction.

The Perth component of the WA Bicycle Network Grants Program provides around \$3 million per year and includes funding for related activation activities. This is a small fraction of what is required to deliver safe and attractive active transport opportunities at a scale that can transform how people move around their neighbourhoods and the city.

To accelerate progress filling gaps in the LTCN, new funding is needed to realise its full potential. An initial investment of \$20 million per year over four years should be allocated to initiate this program.



Cycle Path, Perth Metro

E-Scooter, Town of Cambridge

ONLY 41% OF THE 1,297KM PRIMARY NETWORK, AND 34% OF THE 1,564KM SECONDARY NETWORK ARE COMPLETE

HOUSING

How the West reaches its Best:

- ▼ Create a comprehensive, long-term strategy to address the entrenched shortage of social, affordable and key worker housing, including:
 - Measures to increase the availability of temporary accommodation solutions to address immediate housing challenges
 - Working with Local Governments to efficiently unlock underutilised Government-owned land for housing initiatives
- ▼ Reviewing the Government Regional Officers Housing (GROH) Program to improve coordination and responsiveness to regional housing needs and provide Local Governments with greater scope to invest in GROH housing
- ▼ Review the role and operations of Development WA to support housing developments in areas where private developers will not enter
- ▼ Fund a dedicated Local Government training program for key skills shortages in Town Planning and Building Surveyors, including allowing access funds from the Construction Training Fund

THE SHORTAGE OF SOCIAL, AFFORDABLE, AND KEY WORKER HOUSING PRESENTS A CRITICAL CHALLENGE FOR COMMUNITIES ACROSS WA

and material shortages, and an increase in activity because of Australian Government and State Government housing stimulus programs.

However, housing shortages in WA are not just a recent issue. Housing shortages in WA stem from prolonged underinvestment in social, affordable and key worker housing.

Addressing this entrenched problem requires a comprehensive, long-term strategy to ensure lasting solutions across the entire housing pipeline. We must focus on getting the policy settings right to not only address the current housing shortage, but also to secure an adequate supply of social and affordable housing, diversify the housing stock, and create well-designed neighbourhoods for the future.

Collaboration among all levels of Government, industry stakeholders, and community organisations is essential to develop effective solutions. The Treasury Housing Supply Unit will play a central role in leading this agenda. A review into the WA housing market will be an important part of the long-term solution, to ensure that these issues do not recur in future years.

The extent of the housing crisis is reflected in a recent WALGA survey which found:

- 100% of respondents view housing as a major challenge in their Local Government area.
- 87% perceive the supply of housing for purchase in their Local Government area to be 'worse' or 'much worse' than five years ago.
- 95% consider the supply of rental housing in their Local Government area to be 'worse' or 'much worse' than five years ago.
- 87% regard the affordability of housing in general in their Local Government area to be 'worse' or 'much worse' than five years ago.

The situation is acute in rural and regional areas, where construction costs are up to 60% higher than in metropolitan areas. This severe shortage of housing makes it difficult for businesses to attract and retain staff, limiting economic development opportunities.

The State's housing challenges have largely been attributed to COVID-19, which has added to the cost and time to build new homes due to severe labour

THE SITUATION IS ACUTE IN RURAL AND REGIONAL AREAS, WHERE CONSTRUCTION COSTS ARE UP TO 60% HIGHER THAN IN METROPOLITAN AREAS

ADDRESSING HOUSING SUPPLY

Temporary Housing Solutions

Given that many of the strategies to boost the supply of housing will take time to take effect, we need to look at interim measures to increase the availability of housing in the near term such as temporary accommodation solutions.

An example is Tiny Homes on Wheels (THOWs), which are emerging as a new type of affordable housing that can help address the immediate housing shortage. However, they don't easily fit into current regulations, causing uncertainty for those wanting to use them as their homes.

Currently, THOWs that can be moved on their own wheels are classified as caravans and are regulated under the *Caravan Parks and Camping Grounds Act 1995* and its accompanying 1997 regulations. This classification exempts them from being treated as buildings, which means they aren't subject to the same planning and building rules as other types of housing.

Under the Regulations, a person can only live in a caravan or sleep in a vehicle on private property for three days within any 28-day period. Local Governments can extend this to three months, and the Minister for Local Government can extend it up to 12 months. While a 3-month approval may suit some circumstances, it can be insufficient, particularly in the context of long-term rental shortages being experienced in regional areas. The option of delegating the capacity to issue 12-month approvals to Local Government has been investigated but is not possible under the current legislation.

To address this, Part 2 of the *Caravan Parks and Camping Grounds Regulations 1997* should be amended to allow Local Governments to:

- Permit camping on private property for longer than three months.
- Establish policy to guide approvals for stays longer than three months, ensuring that such arrangements are appropriate for their communities and suitable for circumstances where caravans, predominantly in the form of Tiny Homes On Wheels, can be occupied on a more permanent basis.

The goal is not to allow caravans to become permanent fixtures on private lots, but rather to use them as temporary housing solutions for longer periods to help ease the current housing crisis.

These amendments would enable Local Governments to 'opt in' by creating policies for longer-term THOW use on private land, while not forcing any Local Government to do so if they don't want to. Local Governments could stipulate through policy that THOWs would be an appropriate form of accommodation for longer term occupation, compared to traditional caravans or other temporary accommodation, which might still be better suited for short-term use.

Unlocking development-ready land

In recent years, the State Government has indicated that it will make 'lazy land' available to develop mixed use tenure housing developments as a key strategy to address WA's land supply shortage.

The State Government and Local Governments can work together to build on this program and unlock land for housing initiatives. Local Governments hold substantial land assets, much of which is earmarked for development. In bringing this land to market, Local Governments are committed to making sure that the lots meet their strategic objectives, particularly for housing affordability and diversity. Profits from land sales are reinvested back into the community.

Local Governments also have a thorough understanding of 'lazy land' within their communities that is owned by the State Government and could be used to address housing needs.

A starting point for this discussion should be an audit of development-ready land in each local area. This audit should identify Local and State Government-owned land that is vacant, zoned, and serviced. It could also identify vacant properties available for spot purchasing by Local or State Governments to inject into the market.

Having a single point of contact within the State Government for Local Governments to engage with on identified opportunities and proposals would also help advance these initiatives.



New home construction,
City of Bunbury

87% PERCEIVE THE SUPPLY OF HOUSING FOR PURCHASE IN THEIR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA TO BE 'WORSE' OR 'MUCH WORSE' THAN FIVE YEARS AGO

Address the shortage of GROH Housing in regional areas

Ensuring there's enough housing for essential Government employees, like teachers, police officers, and health workers, is essential to the sustainability of regional and remote communities in WA.

The Government Regional Officer Housing (GROH) Program provides housing for these essential workers, but it's currently not meeting the needs of regional communities. According to WALGA's housing survey, 64% of respondents believe that the lack of GROH housing is "very challenging" or "extremely challenging" for their local area.

In many cases, efforts to address the shortages of GROH housing through the State Government's Spot Purchase Program are placing extra pressure on local housing markets.

With WA's regional population forecast to grow by 18% by 2031, addressing the need for adequate GROH housing is urgent.

A LACK OF GROH HOUSING MEANS A LACK OF ESSENTIAL WORKERS THAT ARE VITAL TO REGIONAL COMMUNITIES ACROSS WA

The State Government has invested additional funding into the GROH Program, most recently through a further \$43.8 million in the 2024-25 State Budget. However, funding alone will not address the broader issues with GROH Program design, which go beyond the provision of dwellings. Recommendation 74 of the 2022 State Infrastructure Strategy highlights the need for a review of GROH to include responsiveness to the needs of agencies, tenants, and regional locations, as well as the appropriateness of models to specific regional property markets.

Although a GROH review was undertaken in early 2023, the findings have not yet been released and should be made public as a priority to help inform solutions to housing challenges in the regions.

A place-based and collaborative approach to GROH will provide a more agile service that better meets the needs of tenants and the wider community and ensure faster delivery. Increased strategic planning and collaboration could be achieved by transferring GROH policy and development to the Treasury Housing Supply Unit.

Greater collaboration and early engagement with Local Governments in providing GROH housing is critical to ensure the program meets the community's needs. Local Governments are key partners in providing accommodation in regional areas due to their understanding of the unique needs of local communities, and can help to identify and address existing shortages, and plan for the future.

Local Governments can also directly invest in housing to lease to the State Government through the GROH Program. This is already occurring, for example, the Shire of Broomehill-Tambellup invested \$1.55 million for three GROH properties, the Shire of Koorda \$350,000 for one property, and the Shire of Kojonup \$1.15 million for three GROH properties. However, the sector's capacity to invest is limited by the prohibitive costs of headworks GROH build specifications and leasing terms. These requirements should be reviewed to give regional Local Governments more opportunity to invest in GROH housing to support their communities.

Role of Government in housing development

The public sector plays a critical role in stepping in where the market fails, through the State's land development agency, Development WA. The role and operations of Development WA to support housing developments in areas which will deliver a benefit to the community should be examined as part of the solution to the housing crisis in WA.

In regional WA, housing development projects are often not commercially viable. Limited land availability, high costs associated with water, wastewater, and power supply headworks, and the high cost of construction often means that building a house can cost more than its market value once complete. This leads to a shortage of privately developed land, resulting in insufficient housing stock. Consequently, it can be difficult to secure accommodation in regional areas, and businesses face challenges in attracting the necessary workforce.

Similar issues occur for many infill projects in the metropolitan area, which often do not proceed as the significant costs associated with upgrading infrastructure such as water and sewerage, and the higher land costs mean that they are not financially viable for commercial developers, compared to greenfield developments.

Development WA can play an important role to ensure these projects that deliver a benefit to the community can proceed. Development WA's requirement to operate at a profit and exceed a hurdle rate of return should be reviewed. There may be broader benefits in using parcels of land held by the State Government and Development WA in a strategic manner to facilitate exemplar examples of medium and high-density housing and meet urban infill targets, as well as strategic housing projects in regional WA. These projects may deliver significant economic and social benefits at break-even point, even though they don't meet the required hurdle rate.

Development WA can play an important role to progress projects that benefit the community but are not viable for private developers.

To fully harness this potential, Development WA should consider a broader mandate including outcomes for the community, not just financial returns.

Consideration of Development WA's required rate of return could also assist with smoothing the release of land across the economic cycle. Under the current arrangements, Development WA faces similar challenges to private developers during economic downturns. Development WA could play a role to ensure the continued release of land and help the construction industry maintain confidence in the development pipeline, avoiding workforce shortages and housing construction gaps when the economy shifts.

Regional Development Assistance Program (RDAP) should also be examined to ensure it is delivering on its intentions to support Local Governments with headworks and other land development costs in regions constrained by a lack of housing, where private development is not viable. The level of funding for this program was increased to \$7 million per annum in the 2023-24 Budget, which was an important step to align the funding available with the expanded scope of the program to include larger regional cities.

Further improvements to the program could be made by:

- Reducing headworks charges in some or all regional areas for affordable housing development, taking into account local land markets and economic conditions.
- Separating projects in smaller towns from projects in larger towns and cities.
- Funding a broader range of projects of regional significance, administered through Voluntary Regional Organisations of Councils and Regional Subsidiaries.



New home construction, City of Bunbury

THERE IS A CRITICAL SHORTAGE OF TOWN PLANNERS AND BUILDING SURVEYORS, WHICH ARE ESSENTIAL TO DELIVERING MORE HOMES

This shortage will also hinder the implementation of proposed building and planning reforms which are designed to speed up the process to bring houses to market.

To tackle these skills gaps, we need more funding for training, education, and professional development in these crucial professions.

Funding should be provided for a dedicated Local Government training program for town planners and building surveyors, to support education and professional development in these key areas, helping to build a more resilient and capable workforce for the future. Allowing Local Governments to access the Construction Training Fund (CTF) to support the recruitment and training of building surveyors would also provide valuable support to address this growing area of skills shortage.

OVERCOMING HOUSING WORKFORCE CONSTRAINTS

In WA, the shortage of construction trades workers has been a persistent challenge, driving up costs and delaying the completion of much-needed homes.

However, skills shortages in the housing sector extend beyond trades, and includes a range of critical professions that are also important for housing development.

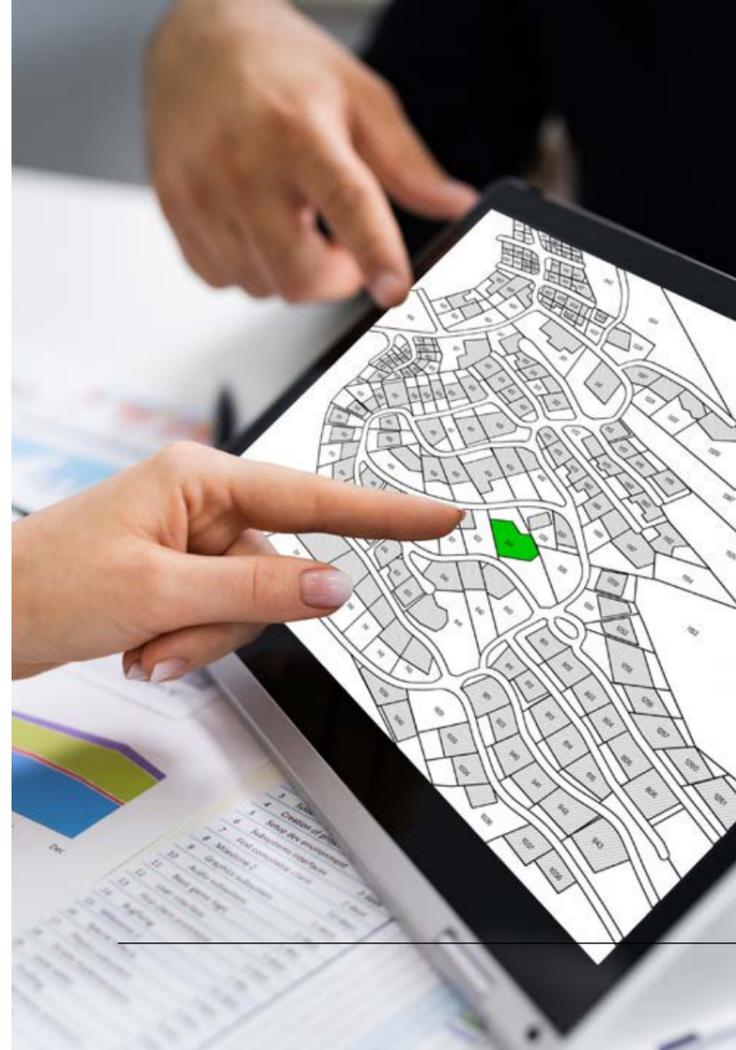
We need to take a broader look at the skills needed to ensure we have well-planned neighbourhoods with adequate supply of affordable houses into the future.

Town planning and building surveyor positions are amongst the hardest positions to fill in WA. These roles are essential to ensure Local Governments can efficiently perform important planning and regulatory functions to protect the wellbeing of the WA community, including facilitating approvals for new housing developments, assessing sites, engaging with the community and planning our

suburbs. The WA Department of Training and Workforce Development has listed them as top priority occupations on the Skilled Priority Occupation List due to high demand and persistent recruitment challenges.

These issues are expected to persist in the coming years. The extent of the issue was highlighted in a WALGA survey which revealed that more than half of existing building surveyors plan to leave the profession within the next 10 years. This will create a significant knowledge gap, with many of those remaining being unregistered cadets or requiring supervision.

Without enough town planners and building surveyors, delays may be experienced as Local Governments will struggle to provide essential services and meet legal obligations that are vital for the community's wellbeing and housing development.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT FOR THE FUTURE

Local Government Reform

The West at its Best.

REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES

How the West reaches its Best:

- ▼ Remove fees and charges from legislation and regulation and allow Local Governments to set fees for their services

Setting appropriate fees and charges is a fundamental Local Government function and should be a careful decision made by the Council.

These fees and charges provide important revenue for Local Governments and cover various services like dog registration, building approvals, and swimming pool entry.

Currently, these fees are determined by legislation or regulation, with an upper limit set by law or by the Local Government itself.

However, fees set by legislation sometimes do not keep pace with the actual costs of providing the service. This can be due to lack of regular updates, indexation, or clear guidelines for setting fees. As a result, taxpayers may end up subsidising certain activities without input into fee decisions or receiving direct benefits from the services provided.

While cost recovery should be considered when setting fees and charges, Local Governments might choose to subsidise some services to promote activities that benefit the community as a whole.

An independent review should be undertaken to remove fees and charges from legislation and regulation, allowing Local Governments to set these fees for their services. In the absence of an independent review, fees and charges set by State Government regulations, especially planning fees, should achieve cost recovery and be regularly reviewed with input from Local Governments.

SETTING APPROPRIATE FEES AND CHARGES IS A FUNDAMENTAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUNCTION AND SHOULD BE A CAREFUL DECISION MADE BY THE COUNCIL

RATING EXEMPTIONS

How the West reaches its Best:

- Undertake an independent review of all rate exemptions to ensure equity and fairness among ratepayers in the community

Rating exemptions have a significant impact on Local Government revenue and their ability to provide essential community services. When properties are exempt from rates, the revenue shortfall must be made up by other ratepayers or by cutting back on services. This issue applies to both Australian Government and State level rate exemptions.

One of the most concerning exemptions is for charitable purposes. Originally meant for genuine charities, this exemption has expanded to include commercial activities of not-for-profit organisations. This broad interpretation dilutes the intended purpose of the exemption. For instance, Independent Living Units, which can be more expensive than average homes, often qualify for rate exemptions. This results in Local Governments losing millions in revenue, which then needs to be covered by other ratepayers—many of whom cannot afford such properties themselves.

Other exemptions that pose challenges include:

- Properties leased by the Department of Housing to Charitable Organisations.
- Government Trading Entities.
- Projects under the State Agreement Act.
- State-Owned Unallocated Crown Land.

Addressing these exemptions is crucial to ensuring fair and equitable distribution of rates among all property owners, while still supporting legitimate charitable activities. Clarifying the definition of charity and reviewing these exemptions can help ensure they serve their intended purpose without placing undue financial burden on other ratepayers.

INDEPENDENT LIVING UNITS OFTEN QUALIFY FOR RATE EXEMPTIONS, THIS RESULTS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS LOSING MILLIONS IN REVENUE



Customer service at the City of Swan



Independent Living, WA

Efficient Regulation

The West at its Best.

ABORIGINAL HERITAGE

How the West reaches its Best:

- ▼ Provide guidance and capacity building to ensure Local Governments and other parties have the skills, resources, and understanding to meet their statutory obligations

In 2023, the *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2021* was introduced and later repealed, reinstating the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972* (AH Act) with amendments. These legislative changes have created significant uncertainty for Local Governments and other stakeholders.

Local Governments are the third-largest group seeking approvals under Aboriginal Heritage legislation, following the mining industry and the State Government.

As landowners, managers, developers, regulators, and representatives of Aboriginal community members, Local Government's interactions with Aboriginal heritage legislation are more varied than any other stakeholder. Many of Local Governments' core activities, such as delivery of road and other infrastructure projects, public open space and natural area management, tree planting, and fire mitigation works have the potential to affect Aboriginal cultural heritage.

Clear guidance and support from the State Government is needed to ensure that Local Governments have the necessary skills, resources, and understanding to navigate this complex legislation and that projects are not subject to unreasonable additional costs and delays.

Native title parties, prescribed body corporates and knowledge holders have varying levels of capacity to engage on heritage related matters. It is essential that they are resourced appropriately and have the capacity and capability to provide heritage services and respond to the engagement, consultation and service delivery needs of proponents.

Challenges are particularly acute for smaller regional Local Governments with limited rate revenue. In 2017-18, 79 of WA's 139 Local Governments had rate revenue of under \$5 million per annum, with 35 collecting less than \$2 million. To cover the increased costs of their activities, many Local Governments can only raise additional funds by increasing rates or reducing services.

CHALLENGES ARE PARTICULARLY ACUTE FOR SMALLER REGIONAL LOCAL GOVERNMENTS WITH LIMITED RATE REVENUE

BIOSECURITY

WA's economy, environment and the community are at risk from new and established pests, weeds and diseases. A significant overhaul of the State's biosecurity system is needed to ensure these risks can be managed now and into the future.

A statutory independent review of the *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007*, was completed in December 2023, making a range of recommendations to reform WA's biosecurity system to ensure WA can effectively respond to escalating pest and disease threats.

The Government should consider and respond to the recommendations of this review as a priority.

WALGA considers that a reformed biosecurity system should:

- Be adequately, sustainably and equitably funded.
- Provide for effective management of pests and weeds on State Government managed land.
- Be underpinned by a strategic framework, developed in collaboration with stakeholders, that establishes priorities for biosecurity threats in geographically defined regions, sets measurable targets and guides investment in biosecurity activities.
- Have a greater focus on environmental biosecurity, through the increased recognition and management of pest species that have significant ecological impacts.
- Ensure that the criteria and process for listing of declared pests is evidence-based, timely and transparent.
- Have an increased emphasis on compliance through education and enforcement activity.
- Facilitate the use of new technologies, strategic monitoring, and the establishment of data management systems to inform biosecurity investment decisions and support adaptive management.
- Improve the community's understanding, awareness and action in relation to biosecurity to assist with threat surveillance and timely response to incursions.



Red Ants



Avocados

**A SIGNIFICANT
OVERHAUL OF
THE STATE'S
BIOSECURITY
SYSTEM IS NEEDED
TO ENSURE THESE
RISKS CAN BE
MANAGED NOW
AND INTO THE
FUTURE**

NATIVE VEGETATION

The clearing of native vegetation in Western Australia is principally regulated under Part V of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* (EP Act) and its subsidiary legislation administered by the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER).

Local Governments require clearing permit approvals associated with road maintenance and construction (also infrastructure and gravel extraction). Many of these projects have a significant component of State or Australian Government grant funding and are being undertaken for the benefit of the community and industry.

DWER's performance target is to determine 80% of clearing permit applications within 60 business days. However, despite increased resourcing, only 40% of applications were finalised within this target in the first quarter of 2023-24.

Excessive delays in obtaining a clearing permit, coupled with the increasing complexity and cost of securing appropriate environmental offsets impacts Local Governments' capacity to deliver these projects within agreed timeframes and budget.

Appeals against the clearing permits add considerable additional delay and expense to Local Governments seeking to undertake clearing activity. The 2023 Vogel-McFerran Review of environmental approvals commissioned by the State Government recommended that the Government consider moving appeal rights under Part V to the State Administrative Tribunal.

Regional biodiversity plans and a strategic approach to native vegetation restoration and offset requirements should be urgently progressed. These were identified as priority actions in the State Government's 2022 State Native Vegetation Policy and in the Vogel-McFerran Review, in particular:

Recommendation 28a: Review the WA Government's Offsets Policy in terms of its overall effectiveness and application across Government, including the Australian Government, in moving towards nature-positive outcomes.

Recommendation 28c: Use the existing Perth/ Peel strategic assessment information, research and work to progress as a priority, a Regional Plan for the Perth and Peel region in collaboration with the Commonwealth as part of the Nature Positive reforms.

Recommendation 39: DWER and Office of the EPA to commission a review of *Environmental Protection Act 1986 Part V* clearing regulations in relation to their timeliness, complexity and interaction and consistency with Part IV.

The 2022 State Infrastructure Strategy also recommended that the current system of acquiring environmental offsets separately be replaced with a coordinated bioregional approach, including:

- Identifying priority conservation areas for protection, acquisition and on-ground management.
- Regenerative projects and/or research projects where State agencies, and Government trading enterprises can direct funds to meet environmental offset requirements.
- Implementing and administering centrally coordinated funds consistent with the principles and operation of other pooled environmental offset funds.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Local Government plays a vital role in promoting public health and mental wellbeing in Western Australia through inclusive community services, events, and free wellbeing programs.

With the commencement of Stage 5 of the *Public Health Act 2016*, Local Governments are required to formalise their efforts by developing local Public Health Plans by 4 June, 2026.

These plans are required to consider the State Public Health Plan priorities, aiming to improve health, wellbeing, and quality of life across the State. Local Governments, with their connection to the community and local knowledge, are uniquely positioned to implement initiatives to address specific community needs and turn plans into tangible outcomes.

Local Governments require support to meet the June 2026 deadline. While the State Government has committed to developing a Local Government Guide to Public Health Plans, collaboration with the sector will be essential to ensure the guide will cater to Local Government's diverse range of public health needs, capability and experience.

A critical aspect of this initiative is ensuring adequate resources for Health Service Providers and WA Country Health Services, who will support Local Governments on behalf of the Department of Health. This support is crucial, especially regarding the new priority of responding to climate change, where access to relevant data is pivotal. Efforts should focus on improving access to tools, resources, and partnerships that Local Governments can utilise in preparing their public health plans.

Access to funding for Local Governments to implement the actions outlined in their public health plans will also be important to their success. This will be particularly important in smaller regional Local Governments with limited financial resources. Grants should be made available to these councils to access external support needed to develop their local public health plans effectively and implement priority initiatives identified under these plans.

**IT IS VITAL
THAT SMALLER
REGIONAL LOCAL
GOVERNMENTS
RECEIVE FUNDING
TO IMPLEMENT
AND REALISE
THEIR PUBLIC
HEALTH PLANS**



Public Health Campaign,
City of Vincent

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT PLAYS
A VITAL ROLE IN PROMOTING
PUBLIC HEALTH AND MENTAL
WELLBEING IN WESTERN
AUSTRALIA THROUGH PROVIDING
INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY
SERVICES, EVENTS, AND
FREE WELLBEING PROGRAMS**

Local Planning

The West **at its Best.**

LOCAL PLANNING

How the West reaches its Best:

- ▼ Reforms to the planning system should be informed by robust data and evidence, and support long-term positive outcomes for the community and facilitate appropriate consideration of local context and character in planning decisions
- ▼ Further reform of the Development Assessment Panel system to boost local representation and enhance community engagement in planning and decision-making
- ▼ Strategic planning for Public Open Space (POS) and a review of 10% POS for new residential land
- ▼ Expedite the review of the Metropolitan Regional Scheme (MRS) to align with the Peel Region and Greater Bunbury Region Schemes, reduce the regulatory burdens on Local Government and clarify requirements for the public

A well-functioning planning system is critical to creating better places to live and work for all Western Australians through the development of policy and planning decisions for the long-term benefit of the community.

While the planning system has many similarities across WA, the State is vast and there are a range of unique economic, social, environmental and cultural factors that requires planning to consider the local context. Local Governments have innate understanding of their areas and communities and is uniquely placed to manage growth and development and make planning decisions that consider local needs under the umbrella of the State planning system.

**LOCAL
GOVERNMENTS
HAVE AN INNATE
UNDERSTANDING
OF THEIR AREAS
AND COMMUNITIES
ARE UNIQUELY
PLACED TO
MANAGE GROWTH
AND DEVELOPMENT**

WALGA's Performance Monitoring Project demonstrates the consistently high performance of Local Government in undertaking its strategic and statutory planning functions.

In 2022-23, 43 Local Governments, representing 90% of WA's population and 94% of the State's population growth:

- Determined Development Applications (DAs) worth \$5.7 billion, with 98% of applications approved,
 - 97% of DAs were determined by officers under delegation,
 - 92% of all building permits were determined within statutory timeframes, and
 - 83% of all DAs were determined within statutory timeframes.

WALGA has a demonstrated, long-held commitment to supporting the underlying goals of planning reform to make the planning system more transparent, efficient, consistent and easier to navigate while ensuring appropriate consideration of local context and character.

It is essential that planning reforms are informed by evidence and data and that the impact of reforms are monitored to ensure that the intended benefits are being realised. The State Government's decision to assume more planning powers from Local Governments as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and more recently in response to the housing crisis has reduced community input into planning and decision-making. Without providing evidence to support these policy decisions, community confidence and public trust in the planning system has been eroded.



Planning Department,
City of Swan

PLANNING REFORMS MUST BE BASED ON EVIDENCE AND HARNESS LOCAL GOVERNMENT KNOWLEDGE AND COMMUNITY INSIGHTS

Development Assessment Panels (DAP)

The DAP system was intended to improve the planning system by providing more transparency, consistency and reliability in decision making on complex development applications, streamlining the approval process and striking an appropriate balance between local representation and professional advice in decision making.

Both justifications questioned the suitability of Local Government to continue their long held role as decision makers for development proposals and insinuated that these tasks have become less efficient and ineffective in recent years.

While the DAP system has undergone extensive reform and modification, WALGA's analysis indicates that DAPs are not delivering on its objectives. DAP determination timeframes have ballooned in recent years, and the complexity of DAP proposals has declined, with 25% of all applications having a value between \$2 million to \$3 million.

Recent reforms to the DAP system that remove the mandatory DAP threshold, allowing proponents to take proposals with a value of greater than \$10 million to a Local Government have been

positive. Local Governments report that many proponents are now choosing to have proposals determined by them over a DAP indicating trust in Local Government decision making processes remain strong.

However, further reform is needed to ensure that the DAP system is achieving its intended objectives:

- Allowing Third Party Appeal Rights on DAP decisions by Local Governments on decisions made by DAPs where it varies from the recommendations of the Local Government.
- Raising the DAP project value threshold from \$2 million to \$5 million to reflect increasing construction costs and to reduce the proportion of low-cost applications from the DAP system.
- Adjusting the composition DAPs to ensure equal representation of Specialist Members and Local Government Members.
- Improving the transparency of DAP processes and decisions to ensure the community retains trust in the planning system.



Public Open Space,
Port Coogee,
City of Cockburn

THE REQUIREMENT FOR 10% OF RESIDENTIAL LAND TO BE DESIGNATED AS POS NO LONGER WORKS WITH A SHIFT TO HIGHER DENSITY HOUSING

Public Open Space (POS)

In recent years, changes in housing development has seen a shift towards larger houses on smaller blocks of land. However, the current requirement for 10% of new residential land to be designated for POS has not changed, which means that POS is in high demand. There are a range of competing demands on available public space, including leisure and recreation, biodiversity preservation, and enhancing tree canopy.

New subdivisions and developments should include appropriate Public Open Space or POS contributions to provide environmental benefits and meet the community's needs. The State Government should lead the strategic planning of POS, working closely with Local Governments.

Some of the priorities to enhance the planning and provision of POS include:

- Reviewing the requirement for a minimum of 10% of all new residential land to be designated as POS to determine if this metric is still appropriate.
- Developing a long-term regional sporting facilities plan (10+ years) to identify and address gaps in regional sporting facilities, ensuring timely acquisition and funding of regional open spaces, particularly sporting facilities, in line with population growth.
- Streamlining the process for collecting and spending cash-in-lieu contributions by delegating these functions to Local Governments.
- Broadening the scope of how cash-in-lieu funds can be used, allowing for a wider range of works beyond the current limitations.
- Allowing for the collection of cash-in-lieu contributions at the development application stage and for all types of subdivisions, including two-lot subdivisions or developments.
- Investigating the option of a standard fixed-rate contribution fee per lot or dwelling when contributions are intended for public open space upgrades.

Metropolitan Region Scheme (MRS) modernisation and delegations

The Metropolitan Regional Scheme (MRS) is outdated and should be updated to align with the Peel Region Scheme and Greater Bunbury Region Scheme, especially concerning exemptions to development approval and delegation protocols.

Efforts to streamline the current planning framework within the metropolitan area should aim to ensure that decision-making processes, delegation of authority, and tools within the MRS are up-to-date and foster greater consistency across all three regional schemes.

The State Administrative Tribunal (SAT) decision in the matter Shalom Group Inc. and City of Joondalup [2003] WASAT 63, highlighted the need for clarity regarding exemptions under local planning schemes and approvals under the MRS. This matter determined that where development approval under the relevant local planning scheme is not required by way of an exemption, a separate approval is required under clause 26(1) of the MRS.

The Western Australian Planning Commission (WAPC) attempted to address this issue through the Position Statement: Exemptions under the Metropolitan Regional Scheme, but the guidance provided remains limited. Individual Local Governments are still largely required to determine whether a Development Application (DA) is required under the MRS, leading to inconsistencies and confusion.

It is acknowledged that the MRS review has begun, which should be expedited to reduce the regulatory burdens on Local Governments and clarify requirements for the public.

The current process of assessing exemptions under the MRS and potentially processing a DA for MRS approval is inefficient, and has potential legal risks. This approach contradicts recent efforts to streamline planning processes, and simplify the planning system.

Addressing these issues through a comprehensive update of the MRS is crucial to achieving a more efficient and transparent planning process that meets the needs of both stakeholders and the broader community.

THE MRS REVIEW SHOULD BE EXPEDITED TO REDUCE THE REGULATORY BURDENS ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT



Workforce Development

The West at its Best.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

How the West reaches its Best:

- ▼ Create a comprehensive workforce development plan for the Local Government sector that includes a focus on recruitment, retention and training for current and emerging areas of skills shortages
- ▼ Fund a dedicated Local Government training program for key skills shortages in Local Government

- Mismatch of Skills: There are difficulties in securing the right mix of skills, which affects productivity not only in Local Governments but also in local economies. Professions with the greatest shortages include building surveyors, risk managers, engineers, and town planners, impacting nearly a quarter of all Councils. Customer service workers, labourers, and truck drivers also face high shortages, affecting around a third of WA Local Governments.
- Operational Impact: Skills shortages are already disrupting Local Government operations. 59% of respondents reported project delivery delays due to vacancies, skills gaps, or training needs. As a result, Local Governments are increasingly hiring less skilled applicants for key roles such as governance and risk managers, community development officers, customer service workers, and truck drivers.

A comprehensive workforce plan needs to be developed for the Local Government sector, that includes a focus on recruitment, retention and training for current and emerging areas of skills shortages. This should include funding for a dedicated training program for priority skills such as Environmental Health Officers, Town Planners and Building Surveyors.

Local Governments are a major employer in WA, with 22,600 FTE employees across the State. Local Governments employ workers across the whole State, and in some cases are the major employer in some regional towns.

Like other sectors of the WA economy, skills shortages are a key issue facing Local Governments. Workforce planning support from the State Government to address these shortages is crucial to ensure Local Governments can continue to effectively serve their communities.

In 2022, SGS Economics and Planning conducted a survey for the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) to understand the workforce needs and priorities of Australia's Local Government sector. The survey revealed several longstanding issues that hinder workforce development:

- Persistent Skills Shortages: Local Governments are struggling with shortages in many occupations, worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change impacts, and the rapid adoption of technology. In 2021-22, 90% of WA Local Governments reported skills shortages, a significant increase from 47% in 2018.
- Recruitment and Retention Challenges: Finding and keeping skilled staff is a major problem, with ongoing issues of employee attrition and an ageing workforce.

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Housing



Suburban street,
Western Australia



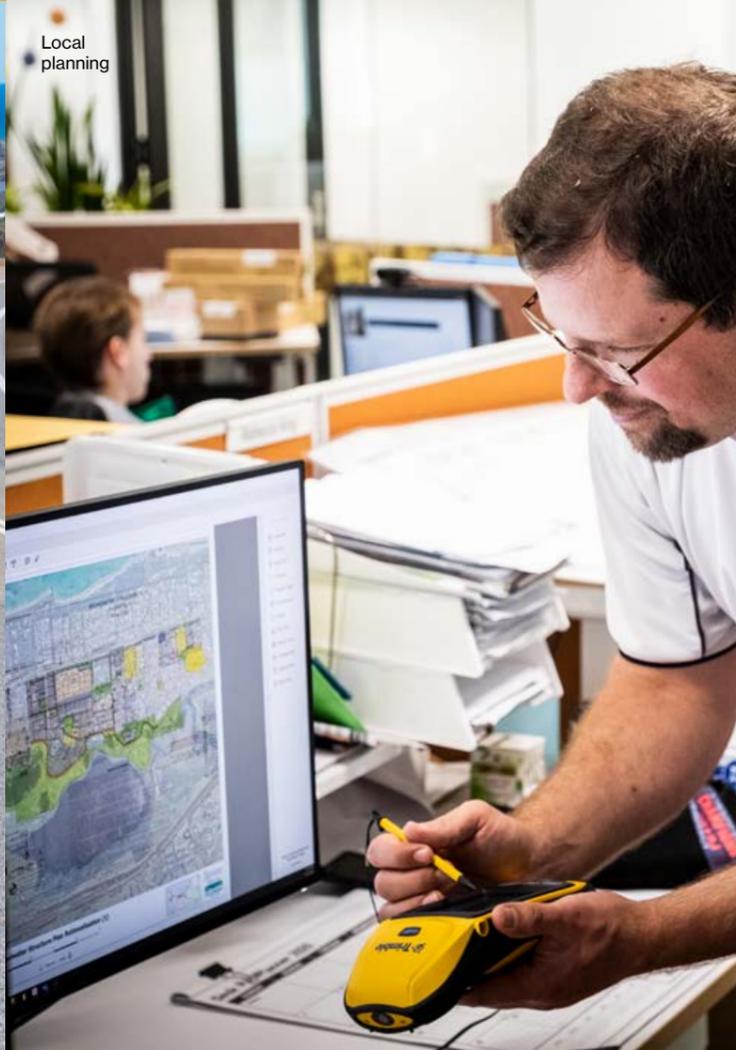
Outdoor cinema,
Broome



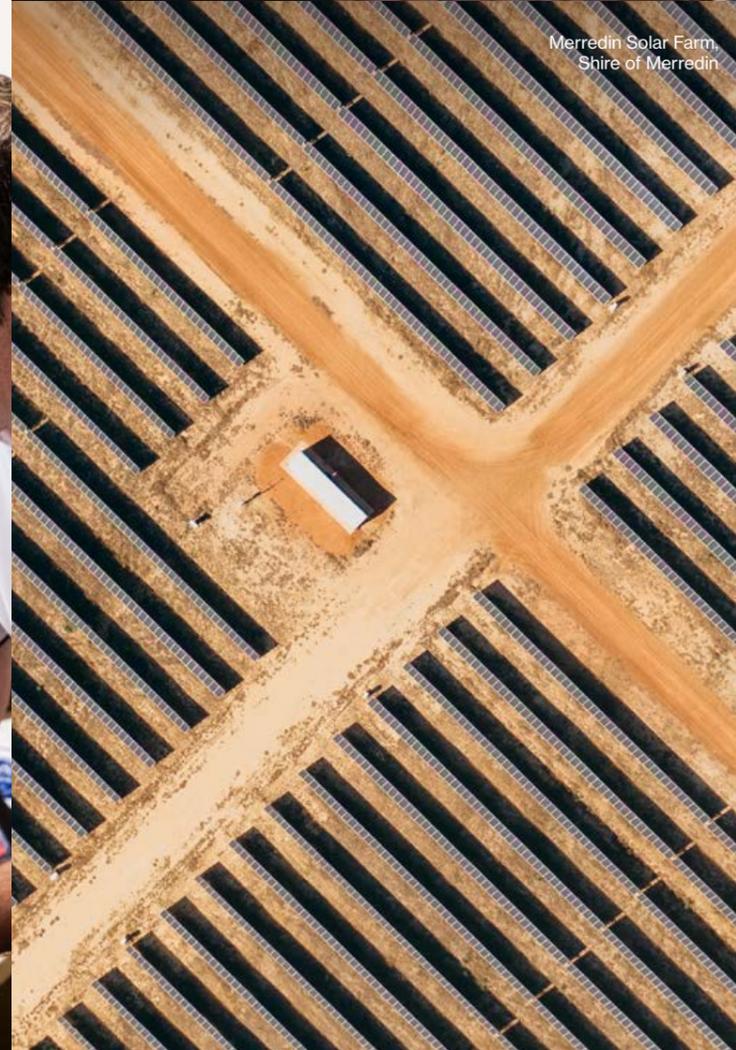
Tree planting,
Perth Metro



Kalbarri Road,
Northampton



Local
planning



Merredin Solar Farm,
Shire of Merredin



Capel Shire President and
Volunteer Firefighter
Cr Doug Kitchen

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WALGA

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