

President's Report

March 2026

Introduction

As I put pen to paper for my last report as WALGA President, I pause and reflect on what has been an exhaustive but incredibly rewarding four years in the role. It is an extraordinary privilege to represent the State's 139 Local Governments and one that I have never taken for granted. In preparing these reports, I have often reflected that they never adequately capture the scope and relentless nature of the role. However, the work has never bothered me given the opportunity to leverage outcomes that benefit our entire State – something that I have relished so much.

I'd like to thank every one of the Elected Members and Officers that I have engaged with – not just as your President but as WALGA Deputy President and State Councillor. You do amazing work, often under trying conditions and with very little recognition of your efforts. Know that I see this and appreciate everything you do. I will continue to champion Local Government and the importance of what you do well after I step away from this role. Local Government is often derided and the target of critics. For those of us who live and love the institution of Local Government, we know the importance of what we do, as do our communities. I look forward to seeing the sector continue to thrive as we face new and exciting challenges together.

Political Engagement

WALGA's political engagement activities have moderated in the past two months as Parliament rose for the year, with efforts focused on reviewing and refining the Association's strategic approach for 2026.

Since the last State Council meeting, WALGA has met with Hon Julie Freeman MLC to discuss key sector issues relevant to her portfolios of Road Safety and Arts and Culture.

Further meetings have been held with Hon Merredith Hammat MLA, Minister for Health and Mental Health, and Hon John Carey MLA, Minister for Planning; Lands; Housing and Works; and Health Infrastructure.

In response to the current political environment, WALGA has refreshed its political engagement strategies for 2026, prioritising the maintenance of strong relationships with key Ministers while also strengthening engagement with influential backbenchers and Opposition spokespeople.

A key priority for the first quarter of 2026 is to brief decision-makers on WALGA's State Budget Submission.

Federal Budget Submission

The Federal Assistant Treasurer has recently invited submissions for the 2026–27 Budget.

Each year, ALGA prepares a national submission on behalf of the Local Government sector. WALGA has provided a complementary submission seeking commitments to address several priority issues of particular importance to Western Australian Local Governments, including:

- Additional ongoing, formula-based targeted funding streams for Local Governments to provide certainty and enable effective planning for community needs
- A Commonwealth funding contribution to match the Western Australian Government commitment to apply proven road safety countermeasures on 1,474km of regional roads, representing the prioritised sections of the proposed Regional Road Safety Program.
- A dedicated Coastal Hazard Adaptation program to support Local Governments in managing coastal risks.
- Funding support to address the gaps in the Long-Term Cycle Network
- Dedicated mitigation and resilience funding for councils across Australia build their capacity and capability to respond to emergencies in our communities.
- Support for rural and remote Local Governments in Western Australia to offset the costs of providing essential primary healthcare services until long-term funding and workforce solutions are established.

WALGA's submission has been provided to all WA Members of Federal Parliament to highlight these priority initiatives.

Media Engagement

As the authoritative voice for Western Australian Local Government, WALGA continues to engage proactively with the media to advocate on behalf of our Members to drive better outcomes for Local Governments and their communities.

Since the last report, I have undertaken a number of media interviews to promote WALGA's 2026-27 State Budget Submission. This has included an interview with ABC Radio's Geraldine Mellet on the Mornings Program highlighting WALGA's Emergency Management funding requests and 6PR's Russell Collett about important measures to boost and protect WA's tree canopy.

WALGA commentary has been featured in The Sunday Times on several occasions including calls for funding to grow WA's tree canopy and stop the spread of the Polyphagous Shot-Hole Borer, calls for an independent organisation to undertake a broad review of rating exemptions, and the important measures required to assist Local Governments deliver more active transport infrastructure, interventions, and supporting initiatives around schools.

Urban Greening Strategy

Following sustained WALGA advocacy it was pleasing that the State Government has finally released the long awaited Urban Greening Strategy for Perth and Peel. While the Strategy does not deliver on all of WALGA's priorities – notably effective measures to reduce tree loss on private land – it does align with WALGA's 30% by 2040 target. Much more will be required to reach this target and WALGA has been clear on the sector's continued commitment to increasing tree canopy in urban areas across the State.

WALGA Training

The 2026 WALGA Training Calendar is now available on the WALGA website, offering a comprehensive range of professional development opportunities for Elected Members and officers across the sector.

I particularly encourage Members to engage with the Council Member Essentials (CME) program, which all newly elected members are required to undertake in the first 12 months of being elected. For the first time since the training was introduced, those who were re-elected last year may also be required to complete the CME unless one of the exemptions in the Regulations applies.

The legislative amendments that came into effect on 1 January 2026 introduced a new requirement for Elected Members to provide a declaration to the CEO that they have either passed the CME assessments or were exempt from the requirement to do so within one month of the completion deadline. The CEO must now also notify the Local Government Inspector if an Elected Member fails to do so.

In closing

It is with both a sense of pride and a tinge of sadness that I sign off this report as my final one as your President. I am proud that I leave WALGA in a position where it is respected and valued by its members and stakeholders. This has been achieved by the outstanding leadership of our CEO, Nick Sloan, and the commitment of every single member of the WALGA team who endeavour at all times to support our members. The WALGA team truly is amazing.

I will never forget what a privilege it has been to serve you, and I will treasure the memories.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Deputy President, Paul Kelly for his unwavering support and to Nick Sloan for not only supporting me, but for his friendship.

For every kind word, smile and handshake offered to me during my tenure, I thank you, it has been welcomed and very much appreciated.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karen Chappel', written in a cursive style.

President Cr Karen Chappel AM JP
WALGA President

President's Contacts

The President's contacts since 3 December 2025 and scheduled before 4 March 2026 are as follows:

State and Commonwealth Government Relations

- National Emergency Management Ministers Meeting
- Hon Paul Papalia MLA, Minister for Emergency Services; Corrective Services'; Defence Industries; Veterans; Racing and Gaming
- Australian Government Black Spot – WA Consultative Panel Meeting
- Hon Meredith Hammat MLA, Minister for Health, Mental Health

Zone Meetings

- Northern Country Zone
- Kimberley Zone
- North Metropolitan Zone
- East Metropolitan Zone
- South West Country Zone

Local Government Relations

- **State Council Meetings**
 - State Council Meeting, 3 December
 - Strategic Forum, 3 December
 - Corporate Governance Charter Workshop
 - State Council Information Forum, 4 February
 - Local Government House Trust
 - Finance and Services Committee
- **ALGA**
 - Board meeting, 11 September
 - Board Strategic Planning Sessions, 11-12 February
- **LGIS**
 - Internal Audit Workshop
 - JLT Management Committee Meeting
 - Risk and Compliance Meeting
 - Board Meeting, 30 January
- The Role of Mayors and Presidents
- WALGA Wrap 2025
- Shire of Augusta Margaret River, President Julia Jean Rice and CEO, Andrea Selvey
- Lord Mayor's Distress Relief Fund Board Meeting and Annual General Meeting
- City of Joondalup Mayor Daniel Kingston and CEO, James Pearson
- A WALGA Cheers
- WALGA Certificate 3 Virtual Graduation