



Flying Minute: 2024-25 State Budget Submission

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That WALGA's 2024-25 State Budget Submission be endorsed.

RESOLUTION 237.FM/2023

CARRIED

Executive Summary

- Each year, WALGA prepares a submission to the State Government outlining the sector's priorities for the upcoming budget.
- Given the 2024-25 Budget will be the last before the State election and the State's financial position is strong, WALGA is seeking funding for a wider range of initiatives than in previous years.
- WALGA's draft 2024-25 State Budget Submission sets a range of priority funding initiatives in the areas of road safety, emergency management, climate change, community services, infrastructure and governance.

Attachment

- 2024-25 WALGA State Budget Submission

Policy Implications

The submission aligns with related WALGA policy positions.

Background

Each year, WALGA prepares a submission to the State Government outlining the sector's priorities for the upcoming budget.

WALGA's submission in advance of the 2024-25 Budget sets out a number of initiatives that the Local Government sector considers to be priority areas of spending. These initiatives are consistent with the sector's aspirations to enhance community wellbeing and enable economic prosperity.

The proposed initiatives in the submission are below.

Making Our Roads Safer

- Funding contribution for works identified in the Business Case for Regional Road Network Safety Improvements on high-speed Local Government Roads
- Additional funding to enable Local Governments to incorporate cost-effective road safety enhancements into rural road preservation projects
- Reduce danger to children and Traffic Wardens by converting 30 Children's Crossings on multi-lane, high-speed, high-volume roads to signalled pedestrian crossings

Community Infrastructure that Meets the Needs of a Growing Population

- Provide funding for Local Governments to implement key connecting projects on the WA State Government's Long-Term Cycle Network
- Increase the Community Sport and Recreation Facilities Fund (CSRFF) to \$25 million per annum to meet the needs of the State's growing population, and publish a 10-year regional-level sporting plan
- Establish a long-term grant funding program for the construction and maintenance of arts and cultural infrastructure across WA

- Provide funding to Local Government to improve the physical accessibility of community facilities and infrastructure

Taking Action on Climate Change

- Additional funding to support Local Governments to complete and implement coastal hazard risk assessment and adaptation plans (CHRMAP) to address coastal erosion and inundation
- Expand the Urban Greening Grant Program to plant 100,000 trees and develop a State Urban Forest Strategy
- Expand the Regional Climate Alliance (RCA) Program

Accelerating the Transition to a Circular Economy

- Full hypothecation of the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Levy (WARR Levy) to waste initiatives focusing on waste avoidance and maximising resource recovery

Disaster Resilient Communities

- Increase Local Government Grant Scheme (LGGS) funding to meet the current and future needs of Local Government volunteer Bush Fire Brigades (BFB) and State Emergency Service (SES)
- Expand the Community Emergency Services Manager (CESM) to all Local Governments to bolster local emergency management capability across prevention, preparedness, response and recovery
- Increase funding and expand the scope of the Mitigation Activity Fund Grants Program to include all bushfire risk reduction activities
- Implement the Local Emergency Management Arrangements (LEMA) Improvement Plan and provide funding to Local Governments for emergency management planning to build community disaster resilience.
- Create a reserve fund for disaster resilient reconstruction of essential public assets following a natural disaster
- Address existing high-risk road access in bush fire prone areas to improve community safety in line with the requirements of the State Bush Fire Planning Framework

Addressing Gaps in Services to Communities

- Ensure the sustainable funding of public libraries to deliver service levels that meet community need, and to support the implementation of the WA Public Library Strategy 2022-2026
- Establish a Local Government Primary Healthcare program to assist with the costs incurred by Local Governments to secure and support the delivery of essential primary services for their local communities
- Creation of a dedicated Local Government training program for 110 town planning, building surveyor and environmental health officers (EHOs)

Better Governance and Oversight

- Fund the establishment of a Chief Inspector of Local Government and Office of the Local Government Inspector
- Prioritise the establishment of a Child Safeguarding Independent Oversight Body to oversee and support the implementation of the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

Comment

The State Budget Submission is an important opportunity to put forward priority issues for Local Governments, and to demonstrate the sector's willingness to work collaboratively with the State Government.



The 2024-25 Budget will be the last budget handed down before the election. This Budget will likely contain commitments for new spending initiatives that will set the Government up for its election campaign. Given the state's strong fiscal position, there is considerable capacity for the Government to commit to new initiatives.

In light of this, WALGA is seeking funding for a wider range of initiatives than would be the case at other stages in the electoral cycle.

Once the submission has been endorsed by State Council, WALGA will undertake advocacy linked to the key milestones associated with the State Government's process for developing the Budget and target a number of audiences including the Minister for Local Government, Premier/Treasurer, key members of the Expenditure Review Committee, other relevant Ministers and heads of agencies.

There will also be traditional and digital media promotion of the key initiatives included in the submission.

FLYING MINUTE OUTCOME

Poll created: 09/10/2023 at 14:49

Poll closed: 16/10/2023 at 9:00

The submission was endorsed.

Following feedback from State Councillors during the Flying Agenda process, minor changes were made to the *Accessing primary health services in regional, rural and remote areas* item in the submission. The changes emphasise that:

- Commonwealth and State governments, who have responsibility for primary health care, need to do more to address systemic issues in the provision of regional health services in the regions, and develop and fund innovative solutions; and
- until these systemic issues are addressed, regional Local Governments need to be compensated for the funding support they are providing for primary health services in their communities.

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.

INTRODUCTION

The 2024-25 State Budget will once again be delivered in a challenging economic environment.

While Western Australia has benefited from the recent economic turbulence with an export-oriented economy delivering record surpluses, low unemployment and economic growth, the global economy is forecast to slow in coming years, which will impact the domestic and WA economies.

Soaring living costs, fuelled by historically high inflation and a steep rise in interest rates, continue to take a toll on households. Many WA households have been forced to tighten their belts, as can be seen in the decline in retail spending and the slowdown in housing activity.

Business and Governments are also feeling the impacts of high inflation and labour shortages. The State Government has experienced rising costs of program and infrastructure delivery, and challenges to progress its asset investment program within the expected timeframe.

Local Governments have faced a similar challenge, reflected in the Local Government Cost Index (LGCI) which peaked at 6.4% over the year to June 2022, and grew a further 4.4% over the year to June 2023. Construction costs have been a key pressure point for the sector in recent times, growing at double-digit rates.

Further, Local Governments are seeing new cost pressures emerging in the form of wages and employee costs, which represent around a third of the sector's total cost base. A significant number of Local Governments are reporting demands for pay increases well above the Wage Price Index as part of recent enterprise bargaining.

These escalating costs and labour market constraints are making it particularly difficult for Local Governments to deliver on the community's growing needs and expectations.

In this environment, it is more important than ever that all levels of Government direct spending to services, programs and infrastructure that provide real value and make a positive difference to the community.

The State Government's strong budget position provides significant capacity to address immediate and long-term challenges. The latest estimates contained in the 2023-24 Budget show that WA is expected to record a budget surplus of \$2.3 billion in 2024-25, with similar strong surpluses recorded across the remaining forward estimates.

WALGA's submission in advance of the 2024-25 State Budget contains initiatives that Local Governments, and the communities they represent, consider to be priority areas for investment. These initiatives are consistent with the sector's aspirations to enhance community wellbeing and enable economic prosperity, and seek to contribute towards the following important outcomes:

- Making our roads safer
- Community Infrastructure that meets the needs of a growing population
- Taking action on climate change
- Accelerating the transition to a circular economy
- Communities that are prepared for, and resilient to, disasters
- Improved services
- Better governance and oversight

WALGA and its Member Local Governments welcome the opportunity to work with the State Government to progress these critical objectives.

MAKING OUR ROADS SAFER

Saving lives and reducing serious injury on high-speed Local Roads

Funding contribution for works identified in the Business Case for Regional Road Network Safety Improvements on high-speed Local Government Roads

Funding Required

- \$110 million over five years from 2024-25, as a 20% co-contribution towards the total program cost of \$552 million

Program Benefits

- A reduction of 138 deaths and 489 serious injuries over 30 years
- Improvement in road safety reflected in an average 23.6% improvement in the road Star Rating Score (relative risk safety improvement)
- Contribute to the achievement of National and State road safety goals

Between 2017 and 2021, over 500 people lost their lives, and more than 2,900 suffered serious injuries on regional roads in WA. Shockingly, one out of every two of these incidents occurred on Local Government roads, equating to approximately 300 people losing their lives per year. In 2022 the fatality rate in regional WA stands at 18.7 per 100,000 population, in stark contrast to 2.84 per 100,000 population in the Perth metropolitan area.

Over 70% of all fatal and serious injury crashes in regional WA result from run-off-road or head-on collisions. Improving safety in this context poses significant challenges due to the extensive, remote, and lightly trafficked nature of this road network.

A Business Case led by the RAC in partnership with WALGA and Main Roads WA, with support from ARRB (National Transport Research Organisation), 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 network - and provides a process for selecting appropriate, proven, cost-effective countermeasures, a safety assessment and a return-on-investment analysis.

To assess the program's effectiveness, assessments were conducted to quantify its impact, including before-and-after comparisons of star safety ratings and estimates of KSI reductions resulting from the addition of countermeasures. The analysis indicates the following road safety benefits:

- A reduction of 138 fatalities and 489 serious injuries over the 30-year lifespan of the countermeasures,
- An average before Star Rating Score of 38.4 is reduced to 29.1 after implementing the countermeasures,
- An average 23.6% improvement in the Star Rating Score (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 the emphasis on regional roads in Driving Change, Road Safety Strategy for WA 2020 – 2030. Reducing fatalities and serious injuries on Local Government-managed roads is crucial to achieving the State Government's target of a 50 – 70% reduction in such incidents by 2030.

Incorporating safety improvements into rural road preservation projects

Additional funding to enable Local Governments to incorporate cost-effective road safety enhancements into rural road preservation projects.

Funding Required

- \$2 million per year from 2024-25 to 2028-29

Program Benefits

- Efficient delivery of proven safety improvements at minimal additional cost
- Reduced run-off road crashes on rural roads
- Contribute to the achievement of National and State road safety goals

Preservation projects typically involve resealing the road to maintain its condition, essentially replacing like with like. There is an opportunity to incorporate low-cost road safety improvements into preservation projects that are programmed or already underway. However, there is currently no designated funding source for this crucial work.

Low-cost road safety improvements such as adding audible edge-lines, paved shoulders, improvements to skid resistance, guideposts, and centrelines are proven to reduce run-off road crashes, which are the most significant crash type in regional WA. These improvements can be delivered more cost-effectively if undertaken in conjunction with preservation works and will typically cost less than 10% of the total road preservation project cost. Implementing road safety improvements with preservation works, which typically occur at the end of the useful life of a road, also ensures that investment in existing roads is maximised.

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

To facilitate the incorporation of low-cost road safety improvements during preservation works, it is proposed to establish a grant program to fund these safety treatments on a case-by-case basis. Funding would be provided for up to an additional 10% of the total project cost per project. The funding would be provided under the governance of Regional Road Groups and would be administered by WALGA and Main Roads WA.

Safer Student Crossings

Reduce danger to children and Traffic Wardens by converting 30 Children's Crossings on multi-lane, high-speed, high-volume roads to signalled pedestrian crossings.

Funding Required

- \$5 million between 2024-25 and 2028-29

Program Benefits

- Enhanced safety for children walking or cycling to school
- Reduced risk and reliance on Traffic Wardens and greater flexibility to redeploy Wardens to less dangerous or unmanned crossings
- Supports a safer, more connected pedestrian network
- Enable and encourage more children to use active transport to travel to school

Manned Children's Crossings are designed to provide a safe location for students to cross roads during their school commute. However, high traffic speed and volumes can create unsafe conditions for both students and Traffic Wardens.

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

Responsibility for implementing and maintaining the necessary infrastructure for Children's Crossings lies with both Main Roads WA and Local Governments. WA Police, schools or other relevant groups provide Traffic Wardens, depending on the specific crossing. WA Police maintain the Children's Crossings Unit, which administers the Children's Crossings program.

WA Police data shows there is a chronic shortage of Traffic Wardens throughout Western Australia and that the average age of a Traffic Warden is 76. This shortage means 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 students.

To address these safety concerns and allow the redeployment of Traffic Wardens to less dangerous or unmanned crossings, a priority is to invest in the necessary infrastructure to convert 30 Children's Crossings on high-volume, high-speed roads to signalled pedestrian crossings.

This initiative will improve the safety of students' daily school commute and promote active transport. Additionally, by reducing the number of Traffic Wardens required to manage high-speed, high-volume traffic, Traffic Wardens can be redeployed to other safer crossings, which are currently unmanned due to the shortage of traffic wardens across WA.

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF A GROWING POPULATION

Address gaps on the Long-Term Cycle Network

Provide funding for Local Governments to implement key connecting projects on the State Government's Long-Term Cycle Network

Funding Required

- \$10 million between 2024-25 and 2028-29, to support competitive grant allocations totalling up to \$2 million per year

Program Benefits

- Address gaps in the network between key destinations such as railway stations, activity centres and Principal Shared Paths
- Support cross-boundary planning for Active Transport
- Contribute to the provision of a continuous network of Active Transport Infrastructure

The Long-Term Cycle Network (LTCN) is linked to the Perth and Peel @ 3.5 Million Strategy and provides an overarching plan for the provision of infrastructure for cycling, both in the Perth Metropolitan region and in regional areas.

While cycling infrastructure is provided by both State and Local Governments, a lack of a coordinated blueprint for cycling facilities between levels of government has led to an incomplete network throughout WA. In particular, gaps in the network persist between key destinations including railway stations, key community activity centres and Principal Shared Paths. The LTCN identifies many of these gaps and provides a framework to fill them.

Local Governments provided critical input into the development of the LTCN and into the identification of key routes for cyclists. Many of the key routes are on Local Government managed roads/land and will require funding for detailed studies, design, and consultation with residents to develop the projects as well as funding for construction.

Though some grant funding is available to construct bicycle facilities on the LTCN network (Western Australian Bicycle Network Grant Program), these grants also fund the preparation of bicycle planning documents and Active Transport Officer positions at the Local Government level. With the limited grant funding only addressing a fraction of the identified need, Local Governments also implement projects on the LTCN within the limitations of their works program budgeting.

To accelerate progress on the LTCN, an external grant program focused solely on project implementation will help Local Governments to leverage their limited funding resources to construct bicycle infrastructure and ultimately support the realisation of the LTCN much sooner.

By convening a competitive grant process with a one third (Local Government) to two thirds (State Government) split, the most important cycling infrastructure connections can be prioritised for rapid and effective implementation within Local Government budget constraints.

Meeting growing demand for sport and recreation facilities

Increase the Community Sport and Recreation Facilities Fund (CSRFF) to \$25 million per annum to meet the needs of the State's growing population, and publish a 10-year regional-level sporting plan.

Funding Required

An increase of \$5 million per annum in 2024-25 and an ongoing commitment of \$25 million per annum

Program Benefits

- Meet growing community demand for the provision of quality sporting facilities
- Improved community health, wellbeing and social inclusion
- Reduced health and welfare costs
- Generate economic activity and employment
- Increased youth engagement
- Protection of open space and natural areas

Sport and recreation facilities offer well-documented health and well-being benefits and serve as central community hubs, particularly in regional areas. Investment in these facilities leads to broader advantages, including reduced health and welfare costs, lower crime rates, increased employment opportunities, and economic growth.

These benefits were reflected in the 2022 SportWest study on the [social return on investment](#) of sport within WA, which found that:

- Organised sport in WA delivers an estimated gross benefit of \$10.3 billion per year,
- For every dollar of economic and social investment into sport, more than \$7 of economic and social benefit are fostered,
- Each participant in organised sport in WA realises a return of \$10,178 from their participation.

As well as supporting community health and wellbeing, CSRFF expenditure is also a generator of economic activity. The Department of Sport and Recreation report *More than Winning* estimated that every dollar invested by the State Government through the CSRFF generates \$2.36 in direct economic activity and \$6.51 in total economic activity¹.

Despite the benefits of sport and recreation for the community, the State Infrastructure Strategy² identified that there is a gap in the planning and delivery of regional-level sporting facilities necessary to cater to a growing population in the metropolitan area and major regional centres. SportWest's *Strategic Priorities for WA Sport* also highlights the need for greater investment in sporting infrastructure in response to increasing infill within the Perth metropolitan area and the phenomenal growth in women's and girl's sport participation.³

Addressing these gaps will require both an increase to funding and enhanced planning for sport and recreation facilities.

There has been some recognition in recent years of the need for additional funding for sport and recreation facilities, with additional funding provided for the CSRFF in the 2023-24 State Budget. However, the increase is only temporary for the 2023-24 and 2024-25 financial years. This will not be sufficient to keep pace with demand as our population continues to rise in coming years. The CSRFF already remains oversubscribed by millions each year, and also has not been

adjusted to reflect increases in construction and management costs that have occurred following the COVID pandemic.

As well as additional funding, there is also a need to improve forward planning to ensure equitable access to regional-level sporting infrastructure and inform investment priorities in the Perth and Peel regions and major regional centres.

The catchment areas for these facilities are large and often cross Local Government boundaries, and the infrastructure is expensive to build, operate and maintain.

The State Infrastructure Strategy recommended the development of a 10+ year regional-level sporting facilities plan to identify gaps in the current provision of regional-level sporting and recreation facilities. Opportunities for shared spaces, including multi-use and co-located spaces, should also be explored, for instance, with libraries, education facilities and activity centres. The Strategy implementation should be supported by dedicated funding.

The Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries has assessed the statewide need for public open space for the purposes of sport and recreation, with the next step being a gap analysis to determine the need for future provision in the sporting landscape. This work would inform the targeted effort required to plan for regional-level sporting facility infrastructure needs and locations, primary functions, ongoing operational responsibilities, as well as resulting land use and community infrastructure plans, and ultimately investment decisions.

Local Governments have a significant role to play in the planning, development and maintenance of regional-level sporting facilities and are an important stakeholder to engage in securing land, planning for and delivering these facilities.

Increase investment in arts and cultural facilities

Establish a Community Arts and Culture Facilities Fund for the construction and maintenance of arts and cultural infrastructure across WA.

Program Benefits

- Meet growing community demand for the provision of arts and cultural infrastructure across WA
- Address maintenance issues with existing arts and cultural infrastructure
- Enhance community well-being and community capacity-building
- Generate local and State level economic activity
- Improve liveability of regional areas

Funding Required

- \$25 million per year from 2024-25 to establish a Community Arts and Culture Facilities Fund

Summary

Local Government is an important provider of arts and cultural infrastructure across WA. This includes 233 public libraries and hundreds of cultural centres, performance spaces, theatres, galleries and museums.

Access to arts and culture promotes social cohesion, mental well-being and educational benefits for communities. The arts sector also drives growth through tourism and economic activity that is critical to communities, especially in the regions. Over 78% of the State's population participated in an arts and cultural activity from April 2022 to April 2023. However, there is a lack of sustainable State Government investment in arts and culture infrastructure.⁴

State and Federal funding for community arts and culture centres is predominantly grant-based with an oversubscription to current funding opportunities.⁵ Within WA, funding through Lotterywest and the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSC) is focused on delivery of one-off arts programs and performances rather than funding for cultural infrastructure. There are currently no funding programs targeted at directly reducing costs for Local Governments owning and operating community cultural and arts centres.⁶ Existing cultural assets are becoming run down due to long-term insufficient investment in cultural infrastructure maintenance.⁷

DLGSC's *Western Australian Cultural Infrastructure Framework 2030+* sets the ambition of positioning the State as the most culturally engaged State in Australia.⁸ However the Framework does not have dedicated funding for implementation, limiting the State's capacity to achieve that goal.

The need to prioritise investment in cultural infrastructure is also raised in the *2022 State Infrastructure Strategy*. The Strategy reports that arts and culture received a proportionally small budget of \$177 million (or 2 percent) of the total \$7.5 billion Asset Investment Program, with no focus on regional needs.⁹

DLGSC's Strategic Directions 2016-31 set out a long-term vision for the WA arts and culture sector. However, many achievements do not have financial backing to be implemented or are Perth CBD-centric, passing over community arts and cultural centres in the wider metropolitan and regional areas.¹⁰

Other jurisdictions have dedicated funding streams for cultural infrastructure. The New South Wales Government launched the first round of the State Regional Cultural Fund in 2018 to support regional arts and cultural organisations invest in infrastructure. The fund has received increased funding each round with over \$100 million shared across 146 projects across the state.¹¹ In 2016, the Victoria Government launched their Multicultural Community Infrastructure Fund, which has funded over \$4.5 million worth of projects in 2021-22 alone.¹²

Local Governments invest heavily in the ongoing management of many cultural facilities, including all but one of the State's Regional Arts and Entertainment Centres.¹³ The Australian Local Government Association has reported that over \$91 billion worth of local government buildings and facilities needed replacement with many in poor condition, poor function and with poor capacity. With increasing competing pressures on ratepayer income, the sectors' ability to prioritise spend on arts and culture will reduce.

The creation of an ongoing Community Cultural and Arts Facility Fund, similar to the Community Sports and Recreation Facilities Fund (CSRFF), would provide the capital funding commitment to underpin the ambition of the *Cultural Infrastructure Framework 2030+* and drive positive social and economic outcomes across the State.

More accessible community infrastructure

Funding to Local Government to improve the physical accessibility of community facilities and infrastructure.

Funding Required

- \$10 million per year from 2024-25 for Local Government infrastructure access improvement projects, including parks and playgrounds, administration buildings, community centres and recreation facilities

Program Benefits

- Improved access and inclusion for people with a disability and older people
- Increased economic activity and employment

Accessibility of community infrastructure such as community centres, recreation facilities, parks and playgrounds are vital to creating inclusive, welcoming communities that enable participation, self-representation, and economic opportunities for people living with disability and older people.

In WA there are around 411,500 people living with disability¹⁴, with one in three experiencing difficulty accessing buildings.¹⁵ The need for improved accessibility is set to continue to increase with WA's growing and ageing population.

The *Western Australian State Disability Strategy* highlights infrastructure as a strategic priority for achieving inclusive communities. The Strategy's Second Action Plan includes actions for State Government agencies to achieve outcome five, 'Community infrastructure is accessible to all'.¹⁶ With Local Government being the level of government closest to the community, they are uniquely positioned to support the State Government to implement this commitment.

The *Disability Services Act 1993* (DSA) requires Local Governments to develop and implement Disability Access and Inclusion Plans (DAIP), including addressing the specific outcome that '*people with disability have the same opportunities as other people to access buildings and facilities*'. The *Disability Access and Inclusion Plan Minister's Progress Report 2021-2022* references multiple Local Government case studies as positive examples of progress towards delivering inclusive communities.¹⁷

New infrastructure projects take into consideration universal access requirements, however retrofitting accessibility features to existing infrastructure requires considerable additional funding as well as planning on a case-by-case basis.

In April 2023, WALGA partnered with the Office of Disability to facilitate consultation activities as part of the proposed DSA reforms. Local Government feedback highlighted that lack of funding is a barrier to improvement of accessibility of community facilities.

To ensure access to key infrastructure for all community members, Local Governments are increasing rates to raise the required revenue. For example, the Town of Cambridge's 2023-24 budget includes a 2% increase to rates for access upgrades to toilets at two recreation facilities.

The Australian Local Government Association 2021 National State of the Assets Report identified that buildings and facilities make up 16% of total Local Government infrastructure and 40% are in

very poor to fair condition. These results are consistent with the 2018 report, indicating a plateau of investment in community infrastructure maintenance.

TAKING ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Managing Coastal Erosion and Inundation

Additional funding to support Local Governments to complete and implement coastal hazard risk assessment and adaptation plans (CHRMAP) to address coastal erosion and inundation.

Funding Required

- \$28 million between 2024-25 and 2025-26 to increase funding for CoastWA
- Changes to CoastWA to maximise the return on State Government investment
- Extension of the Coast WA program beyond 2025-26 to meet ongoing erosion and inundation management needs

Program Benefits

- Better protection and management of valuable coastal infrastructure that enables recreation, tourism and other economic activities
- Promotes a strategic, long-term approach to coastal erosion management and coastal adaptation across WA
- Management and adaptation to coastal hazard threats and pressures in line with the WA Coastal Zone Strategy and State Planning Policy

Climate change induced sea level rise presents a real and direct threat to the liveability of our communities. Appropriate planning and action are required now to ensure WA's coastal cities, towns and regions remain resilient to these challenges.

Sea level in WA is projected to be at least 0.9m higher in 2100 compared to 1990 levels, meaning that coastal settlements are increasingly vulnerable to both coastal erosion and inundation. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report indicates that even if warming is limited to 1.5°C, sea levels will still rise by about two to three metres globally.¹⁸

The intensity of storm events will also increase, leading to acute erosion and inundation events along the coast. Most of WA's urban centres are found on the coast and coupled with the low lying and sandy nature of the Swan Coastal Plain, population centres in the South-West are particularly vulnerable to storm tide inundation. Historical development trends also mean that erosion and inundation are significant threats to critical infrastructure including ports and roads, public assets, private dwellings and natural coastal ecosystems.

A total of 55 locations (15 metropolitan and 40 regional) have been identified as 'coastal erosion hotspots' by the State Government. Hotspots are where coastal erosion is expected to impact public and private physical assets and require management and adaptation action within 25 years. An additional 31 locations (eight metropolitan and 23 regional) have been placed on a watch-list for future consideration. The State Government is also currently mapping coastal inundation hotspots.

Local Government has a significant role in planning for and addressing predicted erosion and inundation hazards. State Planning Policy 2.6 requires Local Governments to prepare coastal hazard risk management and adaptation plans (CHRMAP) to address coastal erosion and inundation. However, the cost to manage these hotspots is well beyond the financial and technical capacity of Local Government.

In 2019, the State Government estimated the cost of managing the 55 hotspots at \$110 million over the next five years, with greater funding required over the medium to long-term. Other locations that were not identified as a hotspot but are experiencing erosion and require management were not included, nor did the funding adequately reflect the significant cost of managing and adapting to coastal inundation.

In 2020-21, additional funding for CoastWA was approved, representing a State Government investment of \$33.5 million over five years from 2021 to 2026.

However, this level of investment remains insufficient, with the amount available to local coastal managers well below the State Government's own estimate of what is required to effectively manage the identified hotspots and create climate resilient communities. This has been reflected in the 2023-24 CoastWA grant programs, which were all over-subscribed, with only half of the project applications receiving funding.

As impacts on our coastline increase and Local Governments have to ramp up their management efforts and plan and implement significant and more complex adaptation projects, it is essential that funding keeps pace.

In the 2024-25 Budget, WALGA is seeking increased funding of \$28 million for the last two years of CoastWA, with most of this increase to be allocated to CoastWA grants.

In addition, it is imperative that the CoastWA program is extended beyond its existing five years (2026-27 onwards) and is adequately resourced on an ongoing basis to reflect the true costs of adapting to future erosion and inundation hazards.

To maximise the return on the State Government's investment, the administration of CoastWA funding needs to be amended to support the scale and complexity of projects including:

- Extending timeframes for implementation of projects. It is unrealistic to expect large scale construction projects to be implemented within one financial year.
- Increasing maximum grant funding 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
- Align CoastWA grant funding rounds to leverage Federal Government funding to support larger scale projects. This will allow Local Governments to use CoastWA funding as part of their co-contribution to Commonwealth funded projects.
- Reduce co-contribution requirements. 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. Consideration should be given to reducing the co-contribution required for smaller Local Governments.

Cooler cities and shadier suburbs

Expand the Urban Greening Grant Program to plant 100,000 trees and develop a State Urban Forest Strategy

Funding Required

- \$20 million between 2024-25 and 2027-28 to expand the Urban Greening Grant Program
- \$1 million in 2024-25 for the creation of a State-Wide Urban Forest Strategy

Program Benefits

- Increased climate change resilience
- Reduced impact of urban heat on vulnerable communities
- Improved liveability and amenity of metropolitan and regional urban centres

Trees are crucial to mitigate the impacts of climate change in urban areas, providing shade and reducing heat, while also creating liveable neighbourhoods, improving air quality, enhancing biodiversity and promoting psychological and emotional wellbeing.^{19 20}

With climate projections of higher temperatures, more very hot days and longer and more intense heatwaves this role will become even more important. The impacts will be more pronounced in urban areas as a result of the heat island effect caused by heat absorbing materials used in roads and buildings.

Overall canopy cover in Perth is 16%^{21 22}, the lowest of any major Australian city and only 22% of Perth's suburbs have canopy cover above 20%.²³ Between 2011 and 2020 one quarter of Perth's urban canopy has been lost, largely through the clearing of private land for development.

Local Governments are working hard to implement measures to reduce tree loss on private land and undertake comprehensive tree planting programs on street verges, parks and other public areas. The State Government's Urban Greening Grant Program, announced in the 2023-24 budget, is a positive step in addressing the loss of canopy, however more needs to be done to reverse this decline.

Expanding the Local Government Urban Forest Grant Program for metropolitan and regional urban centres will provide an immediate action to arrest the decline in canopy cover. Through this program, funds are provided to Local Governments, through a competitive grant program, to be spent on tree purchase, planting and associated works to support ongoing tree health in areas of low canopy cover and increased vulnerability to heat. Experience from the Water Corporation's Urban Canopy Grant program indicates that these funds would deliver around 100,000 trees.

A comprehensive Urban Forest Strategy, accompanied by a significant investment in tree planting, is required immediately to address the decline in canopy cover. This is acknowledged in the State Infrastructure Strategy, which recommends the development of an overarching urban forest strategy, including expanding the Urban Canopy Grant Program, partnering with Local Governments, community groups and land managers in the strategy rollout, and a review of the current policy settings around the treatment of trees, particularly in greenfield and infill developments.

The strategy should be developed with the objective of creating a resilient, connected, expanded and equitable urban forest, and set a minimum tree canopy target of 30% by 2040 for the Perth and Peel regions.

Strengthening local capacity to tackle climate change

Expand the Regional Climate Alliance (RCA) Program

Funding Required

- \$3 million annually from 2024-25 to fund a Climate Alliance program for all Local Governments in WA

Program Benefits

- Strengthened Local Government capacity to act on climate change, energy and sustainability through coordinated training and professional development programs.
- On-ground targeted projects to tackle climate change and build resilience across WA, particularly in vulnerable and remote communities, that support Commonwealth and State Government priorities and targets

Local Governments in WA are taking action on climate change, energy and sustainability. 53 Local Governments - representing more than 70% of the State's population - have signed WALGA's Climate Change Declaration.

Funding to facilitate collaboration between Local Governments across WA will rapidly build economic, social and environmental resilience and scale up existing action to support State priorities.

The Regional Climate Alliance (RCA) program supported two Alliances (Goldfields Voluntary Regional Organisation of Councils and South Coast Alliance) to progress collaborative and impactful climate mitigation and adaptation activities, undertaken by a dedicated Climate Coordinator.

Key achievements from the pilot program included: a regional carbon emissions baseline study; a climate risk and adaptation plan; an educational program to help small businesses assess their emissions; and a project on sustainable building design focussed on reducing emissions on Council buildings.

The evaluation of the Pilot showed that collectively, Local Governments, with State Government, industry, and community support, are well-placed to lead and build on-ground climate resilience across WA.

Additional funding to expand the Alliance model across the whole State will strengthen collaborative partnerships and realise larger scale, holistic action against climate impacts than can be achieved by individual Local Governments.

The funding should include provision for a central State Coordinator to support collaborative and targeted on-ground climate activities, governance, information sharing and capacity building across the Climate Alliances. This position has been instrumental in the success of similar Alliance models in other States.

ACCELERATING THE TRANSITION TO A CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Funding for strategic waste management initiatives

Full hypothecation of the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Levy (WARR Levy) to waste initiatives focusing on waste avoidance and maximising resource recovery

Funding Required

- \$80 million, per annum from 2024-25 from the WARR Levy be directed to waste initiatives, including waste avoidance programs, investment in regional and remote waste management and interventions for the Commercial & Industrial (C&I) waste sector
- \$68 million per year additional funding from 2024-25, from consolidated revenue for operational costs for the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) to cover the Levy reallocation

Program Benefits

- Reduce carbon emissions and assist State Government to meet the goal of net zero by 2050
- Contribute to the achievement of the WARR Strategy Targets
- Creation of new jobs in waste recovery
- Ensure sustainable long-term funding for DWER
- Assist the community to reduce cost of living through waste avoidance

When the Kwinana and Rockingham Waste to Energy Facilities are operational in late 2025, the amount of waste to landfill will drop significantly. In line with this, the total revenue raised through the WARR Levy will also decline.

Currently, the WARR Levy generates about \$80 million annually, of which 25% is directed to Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Account for waste related activities. The remainder funds the operating costs of DWER. Of the \$20 million that is directed to the WARR Account, approximately 40% is expended on Departmental staffing, with the remaining \$12 million directed to on ground projects and activities.

The Department is reliant on the WARR levy for a significant proportion of its operational budget (approximately \$68 million). The projected fall in revenue from the WARR levy will necessitate a review of waste management and DWER funding going forward.

The WARR Strategy is due for review, and the Directions Paper identifies the good work which has been made possible through the funding from the WARR Levy. WALGA's Submission on the Directions Paper highlights that while progress has been made there is a need for further focus on Waste Avoidance, Commercial and Industrial Waste and support for regional and remote areas.²⁴

WALGA considers that full hypothecation of the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Levy (WARR Levy) is needed to deliver strategic waste initiatives focusing on waste avoidance and maximising resource recovery. The operational costs for the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation should be funded through consolidated revenue.

Further investment in waste will assist the State Government to achieve its net zero by 2050 goal. For example, food waste makes up approximately 3.5% of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions.

With additional funding for waste activities, a comprehensive investment approach could be taken, with significant funding directed towards food waste avoidance at the household level. This could

have broader benefits for Western Australians, including potentially reducing the cost of living by up to \$2,500 per household annually.²⁵

Interventions that could be funded by redirecting the full amount of WARR levy revenue to waste activities include:

- Additional funding over two years to cover the entire cost of FOGO implementation for Local Government, including funding to Local Governments that have already introduced FOGO. A two-year implementation period is required as not all Local Governments can undertake the transition to FOGO immediately.
- Household Food Waste avoidance interventions to provide the community with hands on opportunities and tools to learn how to reduce their food waste and reduce their ongoing costs.
- Regional Waste Management Planning and Infrastructure investment to ensure all regional waste management facilities are operating to meet better practice standards by 2030 (a target in the Waste Strategy)
- Funding for Material Recovery Facility (MRF) infrastructure upgrades to ensure maximum recovery from the kerbside bin.
- Increased funding for the WasteSorted Bin Tagging Program to support Local Governments to educate and engage the community in how to maximise resource recovery and reduce contamination.
- Funding to establish and maintain a Commercial & Industrial Waste Program to engage and assist small to medium businesses to reduce their waste and improve their environmental performance.
- Funding for the continuation of existing programs, including the Household Hazardous Waste Program and waste education.

DISASTER RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

Increased support for Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades and State Emergency Service

Increase Local Government Grant Scheme (LGGS) funding to meet the current and future needs of Local Government volunteer Bush Fire Brigades (BFBs) and State Emergency Service (SES)

Funding Required

- Additional \$2.8 million in the annual LGGS operating grant budget from 2024-25 for BFB
- Additional \$45.5 million in 2024-25, to clear the backlog of unsuccessful 2023-24 Capital Grants requests for BFBs
- \$5 million in 2024-25 to fund an audit of assets for Local Government BFBs and SES to inform the preparation of a Comprehensive Asset Management Plan and a strategic redesign of the LGGS to meet the future needs of WA emergency services
- Increased funding from the Emergency Services Levy (ESL) allocated for LGGS capital grants to meet the future emergency response capability needs of BFBs:
 - The total value of funding required should be informed by the Asset Management Plan and strategic redesign of the LGGS. It is estimated that at least \$66.7 million per annum will be required from 2025-26.

Program Benefits

- Stronger local disaster and emergency response capabilities
- Safe and efficient operation of Local Government volunteer Bush Fire Brigades, in accordance with obligations of the *Work Health and Safety Act 2020*
- Improved volunteer attraction and retention

Local Government volunteer BFBs and SES are critical to the State's emergency and disaster response capability and foster community cohesion, particularly in regional areas. WA Local Governments manage 563 BFBs with approximately 20,000 volunteers and administer funding for both BFBs and SES.

BFBs and SES units are primarily funded through the LGGS which is funded from the ESL.

LGGS funding has not kept pace with rising operational and capital costs of BFBs, including:

- buildings, equipment, materials and labour,
- more stringent Work Health and Safety standards,
- the changing composition of the volunteer workforce, for example bathroom facilities for the increasing number of female volunteers,
- higher insurance premiums.

Local Governments' LGGS capital funding requests have consistently exceeded available funding, and the gap is growing. In 2017 - 18 the gap between total funding requested and funding approved was \$3.4 million. By 2022 - 23 the total gap had grown to \$23.2 million. The 2023-24 the LGGS capital budget was \$21.1 million. \$18.7 million of this was committed to the Fleet Assets Annual Build Program and previously approved projects, leaving only \$2.5 million available to meet Local

Government's additional capital requests which totalled \$48 million. Only 5% of additional requests were funded.

The Office of the Auditor General Performance Audit into Funding of Volunteer Emergency and Fire Services 2022 recommended that the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) work with the Local Government sector to adopt a State-wide strategic approach to Grants Scheme funding based on a more comprehensive understanding of LG entities' longer term operating and capital costs.

WALGA is proposing an audit of buildings, facilities, appliances, vehicles and major items of equipment for Local Government BFBs and the SES to inform the preparation of a Comprehensive Asset Management Plan. This plan would guide the efficient allocation of funds and assist to inform the re-design of a strategic funding approach to better forecast the emergency response needs of communities over the next decade and support the creation of a sustainable, modern, equitable grants program that adequately funds Local Government emergency management activities across prevention, preparedness and response.

A modest annual increase in LGGs operating grants of \$2.8 million will provide the 563 volunteer BFBs across the State with an extra \$5,000 annually to meet increased operational needs.

Together these measures will enable BFBs to attract and retain volunteers and meet the pressures and demands of more intense and frequent bushfires and other natural disasters.

More Community Emergency Services Managers

Expand the Community Emergency Services Manager (CESM) to all Local Governments to bolster local emergency management capability across prevention, preparedness, response and recovery

Funding Required

- Additional \$2.7 million per annum from 2024-25 to fully fund the cost of existing Local Government employed CESMs

A staged approach to increasing the number of CESMs:

- Stage 1 – approximately \$5.4 million additional per annum from 2024-25 to fully fund an additional 27 CESMs for Local Governments that manage volunteer BFBs
- Stage 2 – A further \$2.6 million per annum from 2025-26 to fully fund an additional 13 CESMs for other interested Local Governments that do not manage volunteer BFBs.

The estimated total cost of the CESM Program once fully subscribed is approximately \$14.9 million per annum. This should be fully funded from Emergency Services Levy (ESL) revenue.

Program Benefits

- Local Governments and their communities are supported across the prevention, preparedness, response and recovery phases of emergency management
- Better access to training and administrative support for volunteer BFBs
- Enhanced emergency management capability, skills and knowledge in the Local Government sector
- More effective emergency management coordination and collaboration between State and Local Government, BFBs and the community

The CESM Program bolsters Local Government's capacity to deliver and implement all-hazard preparedness, prevention, response and recovery (PPRR) services to their communities. The Program is partially funded by the ESL.

CESMs are a particularly valuable resource for smaller regional Local Governments with responsibility for volunteer BFBs that lack the financial resources to sustain a dedicated emergency management officer. WALGA's 2021 Emergency Management Survey indicated that Local Governments value the CESM Program and that those with a CESM felt more confident in managing their volunteer BFBs.

There are currently 34 CESMs working across 57 Local Governments, with some employed by DFES and the remainder employed by Local Governments under varying cost sharing arrangements with DFES. Some Local Governments share a CESM. A further 24 Local Governments also responded that they wanted to join the CESM Program.

WALGA is proposing that increased ESL funding be provided for the CESM Program to fully fund existing and additional CESMs and to ensure pay parity for all CESMs comprising:

- Approximately \$2.7 million per annum from 2024-25 to fully fund the cost of existing Local Government employed CESMs
- A two-stage expansion:
 - 27 positions for the remaining 54 Local Governments with responsibility for managing volunteer BFBs at a cost of approximately \$5.4 million per annum from 2024-25

- 13 positions for the remaining 26 Local Governments to comprehensively address their PPRR roles and responsibilities at a cost of \$2.6million per annum from 2025-26.

The ongoing annual cost of the CESM Program from 2025-26 is estimated at approximately \$14.9 million.

Expand mitigation works in areas of high bushfire risk

Increase funding and expand the scope of the Mitigation Activity Fund Grants Program to include all bushfire risk reduction activities

Funding Required

- \$15 million per annum from 2024-25
- Expansion to include community education and resilience building in areas of high bushfire risk, bushfire risk management planning and assets to build local capacity for mitigation work

Program Benefits

- More effective bushfire risk mitigation in areas of high risk and low capacity for mitigation work
- More Local Governments supported to undertake a broader range of bushfire risk mitigation activities
- Reduced risk and enhanced community preparedness and resilience to bushfire across more of WA
- Safer fire-fighting operations and safer volunteers
- Better collaboration between key stakeholders in management of bushfire risk

Climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of bushfires in WA as well as the length of both the southern and northern bushfire season. As fire suppression becomes more challenging due to more hot, dry and windy conditions, prevention through bushfire risk mitigation is more important than ever to keep communities and firefighters safe.

Under the *State Hazard Plan – Fire*, the Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner has overall responsibility for the prevention and mitigation of bushfire risk, with responsibility for property fire prevention and mitigation belonging to the owner / occupier of the property. Local Governments have a supporting role in preventing and mitigating bushfire risk. Risk reduction is increasingly acknowledged as essential to reduce the costs of recovery, both financial and on community well-being.

The Mitigation Activity Fund (MAF) Grants Program enables Local Governments with an endorsed Bushfire Risk Mitigation Plan (BRMP) to undertake physical mitigation works on Crown land that they manage on behalf of the State. Since 2017-18, DFES has allocated approximately \$48 million in mitigation funding to 70 Local Governments to conduct over 6000 mitigation treatments.

The MAF Program is strongly supported by Local Governments, due to its benefits in improving community safety and the outcomes of bushfire response. Supported activities include building fire breaks, reducing fuel loads and carrying out hazard reduction burns. Without the MAF Program, Local Governments would be unable to effectively mitigate bushfire risk on Crown Land under their management. The MAF Program also helps to facilitate an integrated approach to bushfire risk management across all land tenures, complementing the work that is done by State Government and private property owners to mitigate bushfire risk.

There is growing pressure on the MAF Program, as the number of Local Governments with an endorsed BRMP increases. Local Governments with an endorsed BRMP have more than doubled from 35 in 2019 to 74 in 2023 and this is set to grow further, with a total of 94 Local Governments currently participating in the BRMP program.

Additionally, it is becoming increasingly difficult to implement critical mitigation treatments in some regional and remote areas due to limited access to contractors and machinery, smaller weather windows for mitigation work to occur and multiple demands on BFB volunteers' time.

The MAF Program should also be expanded beyond physical mitigation works to include additional activities that support physical mitigation, including educating private property owners on risk and responsibility, building community resilience, developing and implementing BRMPs, and supporting purchase of assets required to undertake mitigation works. This expanded scope will support a comprehensive, long-term approach to risk reduction and reduce the costs of recovery.

More Effective Local Emergency Management Arrangements

Implement the Local Emergency Management Arrangements (LEMA) Improvement Plan and provide funding to Local Governments for emergency management planning to build community disaster resilience

Funding Required

- \$1 million per annum for five years from 2024-25 to fund the implementation of the State Emergency Management Committee endorsed Local Emergency Management Arrangements (LEMA) Improvement Plan
- \$9 million per annum from 2024-25 to replace the AWARE Competitive Grants Program with an enhanced program to support Local Government emergency management, including an expanded scope of eligible activities, increased funding caps and flexibility for Local Governments to allocate resources according to their capacity, risk profile and need

Program Benefits

- Reduced disaster risks and vulnerabilities across the State through enhanced preparedness and planning
- Local Governments are well placed to fulfil the emergency management obligations delegated to them by the State Government
- More resilient Western Australian communities

Under the *Emergency Management Act 2005*, WA Local Governments must develop and maintain Local Emergency Management Arrangements (LEMA). Results from WALGA's 2021 Local Government Emergency Management Survey²⁶ and the 2022 LEMA Review Consultation²⁷ indicate that many Local Governments lack the capacity for effective LEMA maintenance. The 2021 State Capability Survey confirms that emergency management capability declines with smaller Local Governments and increased remoteness.²⁸

A review of LEMA, with input from 100 Local Governments and State Hazard Management Agencies, confirms the need for LEMA system reform and ongoing support for Local Governments in preparing for and responding to emergencies.

The State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) has endorsed a five-year implementation plan for LEMA reform, however this is currently unfunded. Implementing LEMA improvement actions aligns with SEMC's 2022-2025 objective to enhance community resilience through local emergency management. \$1 million per annum over five years is needed to implement the LEMA Improvement Plan.

Recommendation 11.1 from the Royal Commission into National Natural Disasters provides 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.

The only State Government funding available to Local Governments to assist emergency planning and preparedness is through the *All West Australians Reducing Emergencies (AWARE)* competitive grant program. Funding for this program (\$238,000 per year) has not increased since its

establishment in 2014. The program has restrictive application criteria and low project funding limits and the cash or in-kind contributions required excludes many Local Governments.

Other jurisdictions recognise the importance of assisting Local Governments in fulfilling their emergency management obligations. Victoria, which has a comparable Local Government emergency management planning system, allocates \$4.89 million annually, with eligible Councils able to access funding at four levels (\$40,000, \$60,000, \$80,000, or \$120,000 per year) based on their capacity and emergency risk profile.²⁹

Replacing the AWARE Competitive Grant Program with an enhanced program that sustainably supports Local Government emergency management would provide the additional capacity needed to keep communities safe.

Build back better essential public assets

Create a reserve fund for disaster resilient reconstruction of essential public assets following a natural disaster

Funding Required

- \$10 million per annum from 2024-25 as a reserve fund for disaster resilient reconstruction of impacted essential public assets

Program Benefits

- More disaster resilient essential public assets
- Reduced long term infrastructure recovery costs
- Reduced impact on communities and faster recovery from natural disasters

Increased frequency and severity of disasters are a key impact of climate change. Natural disasters are currently estimated to cost the Australian economy \$38 billion per year and are expected to rise to \$73 billion annually by 2060.

Investing in resilience is an effective mechanism to reduce these costs.³⁰ Evidence from Queensland, where 531 betterment projects have been completed since 2013, unequivocally demonstrates the cost savings and community benefits of betterment funding. From an investment of \$174 million in betterment over 10 years, there has been \$397.5 million in avoided reconstruction costs, with 81% of betterment projects subsequently re-impacted by a disaster suffering no damage, or only minor damage.³¹

The importance of betterment funding was recognised in the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, with Recommendation 22.6 providing that *Australian, State and Territory governments should incorporate the principle of 'build back better' more broadly into the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.*³²

When a disaster is declared under the DRFAWA, Local Governments become eligible for funding for emergency works and reconstruction of impacted public assets. However current funding is provided on a like-for-like basis only with no additional funding available to reconstruct essential assets in a way that improves their resilience to future disasters, for example to upgrade road floodways to a cement stabilised standard in line with the Main Roads Specification. This means that vulnerable infrastructure can be repeatedly impacted by subsequent disasters.

Since 2020 there have been 32 declared disasters impacting 77 of 139 WA Local Governments. More than \$39 million was invested in reconstruction of essential public assets through Category B of the DRFAWA in 2022-23 alone.

The WA State Government has recognised the need to invest in disaster recovery in its 2023-24 budget, with \$24.4 million announced to permanently appoint 29 dedicated disaster recovery officers to form WA's largest ever recovery team.³³ A reserve fund for resilient reconstruction would enable the State to value add to the DRFA investment by supporting Local Governments to rebuild essential public assets to a more resilient standard. It would also create opportunities to leverage further investment in betterment from the Commonwealth Government through the DRFAWA.

Investment in resilient reconstruction will have significant benefits across WA, helping communities to better withstand and recover from disasters and reducing the long-term costs to Local, State and

Commonwealth Governments and represent a step-change in the State's approach to investing in disaster risk reduction.

This could be further reinforced in future budgets through the establishment of an efficiencies framework such as that adopted in Queensland which would enable the variance between the actual cost of a reconstruction project and its estimated cost, when the actual cost is lower, to be reinvested in future betterment projects.

Improving road access in bushfire prone areas

Address existing high-risk road access in bush fire prone areas to improve community safety in line with the requirements of the State Bush Fire Planning Framework

Funding Required

- \$10 million between 2024-25 and 2027-28 to establish an open funding pool to enable Local Governments to improve road access arrangements in bush fire prone areas

Program Benefits

- Improved community safety in high-risk areas
- Improved emergency services access
- Support risk-based prioritisation of projects

93% of the State is identified as bush fire prone. New development proposals in these areas are required to address the bush fire planning framework. Significant portions of the peri-urban areas of Perth and regional centres were constructed prior to *State Planning Policy 3.7 Planning in Bushfire Prone Areas* (SPP3.7) being implemented in 2015. Many of these areas are typified by long cul-de-sacs adjoining high risk vegetation and are unable to meet the requirements for road access in the bushfire planning framework.

SPP 3.7 and the Planning in Bushfire Prone Areas Guidelines (the Guidelines) require planning decision makers to be satisfied that a proposal adequately identifies that the local vehicle network allows for the community to evacuate to a suitable destination before a bushfire impacts the site, while allowing emergency services personnel access to attend the site/hazard.

The Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage (DPLH) has undertaken a desktop assessment of one-way access routes in developed bushfire prone areas across the Perth, Peel and Greater Bunbury region scheme areas which focused on identifying no-through roads in that could limit evacuation or fire suppression practices in a bushfire event.

The mapping of areas with one-way access routes and the development of a strategy for assessment by Local Government will help quantify the location and number of lots at risk, and options for prioritising and addressing the risk.

While some risk treatment options will be possible through minor action, such as changing access arrangements through unmade road reserves, there will be situations where considerable works, or land acquisition may be required to address the risk. Where access through public land, land acquisition or expensive works are required, support from the State in delivering these solutions is necessary and appropriate.

Additional funding assistance will support Local Governments that have identified that complex solutions are the preferred or only option to address one-way access arrangements in high-risk locations.

ADDRESSING GAPS IN SERVICES TO COMMUNITIES

Renewing our Libraries

Ensure the sustainable funding of public libraries to deliver service levels that meet community need, and to support the implementation of the *WA Public Library Strategy 2022-2026*

Funding Required

- Additional \$42 million over four years from 2024-25:
 - \$30 million to restore library funding to 2012-13 levels, including annual increases for CPI and population growth
 - \$4 million to implement the *WA Public Library Strategy 2022-26*

Program Benefits

- Modern public library services that meet our growing and diverse community needs
- Support for learning, education, social cohesion and economic participation through digital inclusion
- Assist communities with the high cost of living through the provision of free services
- Equitable access to public libraries for all communities across our vast State

Public libraries have benefits extending well beyond the provision of books. The modern public library is an important community hub, promoting social cohesion, wellbeing and knowledge. As a vital part of the social infrastructure landscape, public libraries support literacy in young children, continue to bridge the digital divide and provide a safe space for many vulnerable members of the community to meet and find assistance.³⁴ Libraries provide free services to the community at a time when the cost of living presents a major challenge for many Western Australians.

WA's 233 public libraries have more than 637,000 active members. In 2021-22, members borrowed just under 11 million physical items and over 3.4 million digital items³⁵ and there were 7.6 million individual library visits³⁶, the equivalent of three visits for every Western Australian.

Public library services in WA are delivered through a partnership between the State Government and Local Governments. Local Governments provide library infrastructure, including buildings and technology, staff, and operating costs, while the Library Board, through the State Library of Western Australia, allocates funds for public library stock including books and e-resources.

The *State Library of Western Australia Strategic Plan 2023-2027*³⁷ Priority area 3 is to champion the essential role of local public libraries in our communities in supporting innovation and providing a sense of belonging, through partnering with Local Government to deliver free, equitable and contemporary public library services that are responsive to community needs, support public libraries to deliver literacy and digital inclusion programs, and advocate for public libraries as an essential public asset.

Ageing public library infrastructure throughout the State has also reduced many libraries' capacity to deliver the necessary digital improvements to meet the State Government's *Digital Strategy for the Western Australian Government 2021-2025*, which calls for every public library in WA to have appropriate digital infrastructure and connectivity to provide universal access for all communities. There is currently no dedicated funding to implement this Strategy.

The State's *Digital Inclusion in WA Blueprint (2022)* acknowledges that many public libraries already deliver digital inclusion programs but require more resources to sustain this delivery.³⁸

The State and Local Government sectors recognise that there is a need for significant change to deliver more efficient and flexible public library services to continue to meet our growing and diverse community needs.³⁹ The [Public Libraries Working Group](#) leads this work on behalf of State and Local Government to “*deliver more agile and innovative public library services and programs that respond to the diverse needs of Western Australian communities and are sustainable into the future*”.

The *WA Public Library Strategy 2022-26* is the result of extensive research and consultation through the [Public Libraries Working Group](#) and with stakeholders including Local Government and the community. This strategy focuses on three pillars: strengthening communities, promoting digital inclusion, and valuing libraries as essential community assets.⁴⁰

However, there is currently no dedicated funding to support Strategy implementation. The Strategy sets out a clear vision for innovative and responsive library services and programs, which cannot be achieved without dedicated funding for both State and Local Governments. WALGA advocates for \$4 million per annum over four years from 2024-25 to enable the State Library to implement the Strategy in alignment with the actions already identified by the Public Library Working Group.

In the ten years to 2022-23, State Government public library funding has increased by a mere 4% from \$16.3 million to \$16.9 million. At the same time, the population of Western Australia has increased by 15% and the Consumer Price Index has increased by 28%. To provide the same per capita level of support to public libraries as a decade ago, funding through the State budget in 2023-4 would have needed to be \$6.6 million higher than the amount allocated. It is estimated that annual increases for CPI and population growth would require approximately \$30 million over four years to restore funding to previous levels and maintain service levels through the forward estimates.

Although the partnership arrangements between the State and Local Government provide for the State to provide library collections, Local Governments are increasingly funding collections to provide the level of service expected by the community. 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.

Funding for public libraries’ print resources and e-resources in WA 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).⁴¹

One area which has driven higher costs for Local Governments has been the use of e-resources, which has more than doubled since 2016-17. 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. The majority of these e-resource licences expire after one year, requiring re-purchasing by public libraries.

Expenditure on e-resources in WA in 2021-22 was lower than comparable States, at only \$1.2 per capita compared to \$1.7 per capita in Victoria and \$1.8 in Queensland.⁴² This includes a contribution of \$1.4 million in 2021-22 from WA Local Governments to try and keep up with rapidly increasing demand.

Enhanced State funding will ensure the equitable delivery of agile, innovative and sustainable public library services that respond to local community need all across WA, and enable Local Governments to shift their focus from funding the gap in library stock provision to focus on their core responsibility of funding library operating costs. WALGA also advocates in this submission for increased State Government funding for cultural infrastructure, including libraries.

Accessing primary health services in regional, rural and remote areas

Establish a Local Government Primary Healthcare funding program to assist with the costs incurred by rural and regional Local Governments to secure and support the delivery of essential primary health services for their local communities.

Funding Required

- \$5 million per annum from 2024-25

Program Benefits

- Sustainable and equitable access to primary healthcare services for local communities
- Reduced hospital pressures and costs
- Collaborative and joined up policy responses to primary healthcare provision across all tiers of Government

The Commonwealth and State Government are failing in their responsibility to ensure the adequate provision of primary health services in many regional and remote parts of WA.

Poor access to health services means that those living in outer-metropolitan, regional and rural locations face increased costs, reduced quality of care and worse health outcomes compared to metropolitan areas.

Local Governments are reluctantly stepping in to subsidise the provision of healthcare services for their communities, including funding accommodation, vehicles and medical centre operations. WALGA's recent Local Government Primary Health Services survey found that 53% of non-metropolitan respondents were supporting one or more primary healthcare services for their communities in 2021-22, at a cost of \$7.8 million.⁴³

This is placing pressure on Local Government resources and diverting funding away from the provision of other essential community services and infrastructure. Local Governments cannot continue to bear this cost.

The Commonwealth and State Government need to do more to address systemic issues in the provision regional health services in the regions, and develop and fund innovative solutions. As a first step WALGA proposes the Commonwealth and State Government convene a consultative committee of key stakeholders, including Local Government, focussed to focus on:

- Addressing critical healthcare workforce shortages
- Managing the health challenges posed by aging populations and chronic illnesses
- Innovation in service provision
- Developing appropriate funding mechanisms and levels for healthcare service provision.

Until these systemic issues are addressed, regional Local Governments need to be compensated for the funding support they are providing for primary health services in their communities. A primary healthcare funding program would assist to offset the costs incurred by Local Government in securing essential primary healthcare services for their communities.

Address workforce shortages in Local Government

Creation of a dedicated Local Government training program for 110 town planning, building surveyor and environmental health officers (EHOs)

Funding Required

- \$12.3 million from 2024-25 to 2027-28 to support education, training and professional development for key areas of skills shortage in Local Governments

Program Benefits

- Ensure Local Governments have the skilled workforce necessary to provide timely services to support community and economic development
- Support activity in the construction sector as a key part of the State's response to the housing crisis
- Support the delivery of the State's building regulation and planning reform agendas

Like other sectors of the WA economy, skills shortages are a key issue facing Local Governments. Overcoming these shortages will be essential to ensure that Local Governments can efficiently perform important planning and regulatory functions to protect the wellbeing of the WA community.

Planners, building surveyors and Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) were identified in the 2022 Local Government Workforce Skills and Capability Survey to be critical Local Government occupations and amongst the hardest to fill in WA. The *Jobs and Skills Australia 2023 Skills Priority List* also identifies town planners and EHOs as experiencing regional shortages and building surveyors experiencing a general shortage in WA.

The Department of Training and Workforce and Development's State Priority Occupation List 2022 identifies both town planners and building surveyors as a State Priority 1, and notes that there is high level of demand, ongoing difficulty in filling positions, and challenges in attracting people to the professions. These trends are expected to continue for at least the next few years.

A WALGA survey of Local Government building surveyors showed that 55% planned to leave the industry in the next five years. Most of the remaining building surveyors are either unregistered cadets or registered at a level requiring supervision so the lack of experienced practitioners available will impact future training efforts.

EHOs have been identified as a Priority 2 on the State Priority Occupation List.

The shortage of these professions has significant implications for Local Governments' capacity to deliver important services to their local communities, as well as meet statutory obligations. It will also compromise the implementation of the State's building, planning and public health reform agendas in the years ahead including potentially inhibiting activity in the housing sector during the ongoing housing crisis. Environmental Health Australia has stated that the current shortage of EHOs is at a critical level and this shortage limits the ability of the health system to adequately respond to public health emergencies.⁴⁴

The shortages of these key skills are not limited to WA but are being experienced across Australia. As a result, other States have begun to act in response to these trends. For example:

- In 2021, the Victorian Government established the Women Building Surveyors Program to help meet skills shortage in Building Surveying and drive construction stimulus projects. This program

funded 40 women to enrol in an accredited training course, gain work experience with their Local Government and attend other development opportunities. This program prioritised existing Local Government officers in regional areas, to encourage upskilling of existing regional based employees, who are more likely to remain in these areas. According to the State Government of Victoria, this program is fully subscribed, and all participants remained employed at the end of the program.⁴⁵

- The New South Wales Government announced in May 2023 the Strong Start Cadetship Program to directly address NSW councils' planning workforce shortages and support them to employ new locally based planning cadets. The program includes \$1.85 million in grant funding and ongoing end-to-end support to encourage councils to onboard additional cadet planners and develop them into more senior roles, with a strong focus on regional areas where known shortages exist. The Program received high interest and was oversubscribed.⁴⁶
- The South Australian Government in partnership with Local Government Association SA announced in September 2023 the *Grow Your Own* program focused on training local talent and providing pathways to grow regional Councils' planning workforce. The pilot program will enable participating Local Governments to support four employees – either from existing staff members or external hires – to become qualified planners.⁴⁷

Funding of \$12.3 million over four years will support education, training and professional development for key areas of skills shortage in Local Governments in WA:

- \$6.5 million to provide \$75,000 a year for two years for 40 Local Government building surveyor positions to undertake an Advanced Diploma of Building Surveying or Bachelor of Building Surveying, paid work experience with Local Governments and other professional development.
- \$4.4 million to provide up to \$78,000 for at least 50 cadet Local Government planning officers to contribute up to \$18,000 towards university tuition or the cost of a Graduate Certificate in Development Planning (~\$5,000) and \$15,000 a year for up to four years for Local Governments towards the establishment of additional cadet planning officer positions.
- \$1.4 million to provide up to \$70,000 for at least 20 cadet Local Government EHOs to contribute up to \$10,000 towards university tuition or the cost of a Graduate Diploma in Environmental Health (~\$9,200) and \$15,000 a year for up to four years for Local Governments towards the establishment of additional cadet EHO positions.

BETTER GOVERNANCE AND OVERSIGHT

Establishment of the Office of the Local Government Inspector

Fund the establishment of a Chief Inspector of Local Government and Office of the Local Government Inspector

Funding Required

- \$3.5 million per year to create an office of approximately 14 FTE staff, including accommodation and travel costs.

Program Benefits

- Smooth implementation of the Local Government legislative reform initiative on Early Intervention and Effective Regulation
- Early intervention and capacity building assistance to the Local Government sector
- Save time and money on the current lengthy Local Government inquiries and assist in raising the capacity and reputation of the Local Government sector

The State Government has announced that a key platform of the Local Government legislative reform program is “Early Intervention, Effective Regulation and Stronger Penalties”.

In this category of reforms, the State Government is planning to establish a Chief Inspector of Local Government (the Inspector), supported by an Office of the Local Government Inspector (the Inspectorate).

In implementing the reforms, the primary area requiring additional funding is the establishment of the Office of the Local Government Inspector. This includes setting up a panel of Monitors to enter a Local Government and try to proactively resolve problems (as opposed to allocating blame or collecting evidence). The Inspectorate would be an independent office and ideally report direct to the Minister for Local Government.

The Office of the Inspector would also oversee the behavioural complaint system relating to Elected Members and be able to appoint arbiters to Local Governments to investigate any behaviour issues. The cost of the arbiters is funded by the Local Government that is the source of the complaint. This is similar system to the Victorian model.

Funding for the Office could be in part provided by reallocating existing resources that are provided for Local Government inquiries.

Establishment of the Child Safeguarding Independent Oversight Body

Prioritise the establishment of a Child Safeguarding Independent Oversight Body to oversee and support the implementation of the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

Funding Required

- \$2 million per annum from 2024-25

Program Benefits

- Oversight of progress on the WA response to the Royal Commission recommendations across the whole of government
- Support capacity building for a consistent whole of community response to child safeguarding
- Enhanced child safety resulting from independent oversight of organisations engaged in child-related work

Local Governments undertake many activities that intersect with children including through service provision and the management of infrastructure and facilities used by children including libraries, playgrounds and sporting infrastructure, recreational facilities.

Local Governments are uniquely placed to demonstrate leadership in the community with respect to supporting others to be Child Safe Organisations and to protect children and young people from harm. To play this vital role however, Local Governments require capacity building support, guidance and funding.

The responsibility for implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (the Royal Commission) is shared across all levels of Government and all organisations working with children. The State Government has committed to addressing the findings of the Royal Commission⁴⁸ and has established the Child Safeguarding Implementation Unit (Implementation Unit) within the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSC) to support and build capability in Local Government, arts, cultural, sport and recreation organisations to embed child safe practices.

While the establishment of the Implementation Unit within DLGSC is encouraging, further work is required to provide a whole of government approach to supporting the development of child safe organisations across WA.

The State Government has taken the approach of developing initiatives to progress the Royal Commission recommendations on a sector-by-sector basis. Examples include the funding of the SportsWest True Sport Child Safeguarding Initiative training⁴⁹, and the \$300,000 funding to the Western Australian Council of Social Services (WACOSS) WA Child Safe Project targeted at community organisations.⁵⁰

For Local Government, the Child Safe Awareness Policy Template for Local Government has been developed.⁵¹ The policy aims to assist implementation of Recommendation 6.12 of the Royal Commission regarding Child Safety Officers in Local Government. The policy template provides a framework to guide Local Governments developing child safe policies, however further support is required to translate the policy into practice.

In December 2022 WALGA surveyed Local Governments with respect to their progress with child safeguarding, and 59% of respondents identified a need to access training resources or funding

support in order to implement child safeguarding initiatives. An additional 15% of respondents sought clarity on Local Governments' roles and responsibilities with respect to child safeguarding.

Local Governments are committed to implementing the National Principles and supporting local organisations to do so. Limited resources and knowledge impact the sector's ability to achieve this outcome, particularly smaller, less well-resourced Local Governments.

The Royal Commission recommended that organisations engaged in child-related work be overseen by an independent body to improve their child safe systems and practices and handling of child abuse complaints. WALGA considers this should be progressed as a priority in the 2024-25 Budget.

The establishment of an Independent Oversight Body would oversee and support improvements in child safe cultures and practices across organisations in WA. As seen in New South Wales, an Independent Oversight Body also has the potential to provide not only compliance processes, but consistent capacity building support for organisations across all sectors to become Child Safe. The Queensland Government is also proposing to establish an integrated child safe organisations system, integrated into the role of a single, independent oversight body.

The Department of Premier and Cabinet has consulted on the development of a system independent oversight in 2021 and again in 2022. No output or action from the consultation has been provided to date.

With financial, resourcing and capacity building support from the Independent Oversight Body, Local Governments would be supported to build capacity and capability to implement and embed child safeguarding across their functions and further support community organisations to become Child Safe.

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