

National WA [Local government](#)

Perth councils fire back on premier's 'unbecoming and baseless' attack



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Comments from Premier Roger Cook alleging Perth councils were under the thumbs of “noisy” community groups has drawn the ire of the state’s peak local government body.

Roger Cook was on radio discussing an ongoing lease saga between the Town of East Fremantle and the Sharks Football Club when he responded to a presenter’s comment that councils were “a law unto their own”.



Roger Cook labelled councils “unaccountable”, WALGA president Karen Chappel hit back.
WATODAY/WALGA/GETTY (COMPOSITE)

Cook agreed with the NOVA presenter on Thursday, saying councils were “not very accountable”.

“They tend not to pay much attention to their ratepayers,” he said.

“There’s usually one or two noisy stakeholders in the community action groups or progress associations, which tend to seize the agenda.”

He touted the state’s newest tranche of local government reforms – designed to increase transparency and accountability while reducing red tape – including appointment of an inspector with “greater powers” to oversee the sector.

The West Australian Local Government Association fired back, telling *WAtoday* the premier’s comments were baseless and disappointing.

She said out of all three levels of government, local government was the level held most accountable.

“The comments from the premier are disappointing and not based in fact,” president Karen Chappel said.

“Generalised comments that are not reflective of the extraordinary work of local government across the state are unhelpful and unbecoming of the premier.”

Earlier reforms introduced in March also stripped councils of influence over smaller proposed developments by allowing planning applications valued \$2 million or more to opt out of a council approval process in favour of review by an independent panel.

The three inner, outer and regional Development Assessment Panels are each chaired by three independent members and two local government councillors, meaning the balance of power lies with the independent members.

Chappel said these changes “eroded” the role of local governments.

“On the reforms to DAPs and the introduction of the State Development Assessment Unit, WALGA has consistently articulated that the changes further erode the role of local government in providing a valuable community perspective on planning proposals,” he said. She said highly skilled local government officers made good and timely decisions under delegation with elected councillors playing an important role representing the interests of their constituents and the broader community.

“Local governments continue to excel in performing their planning functions, determining over 15,000 planning approvals annually, worth over \$5.7 billion with over 85 per cent determined within statutory timeframes,” she said.

“The contribution local government makes to the planning system is clear, it is up to the state to demonstrate the new processes provide a more efficient and effective outcome.”

WALGA is appealing some of those changes in its *The West at its Best 2025* election priority statement.

Some of the appeals include raising the DAP project value threshold from \$2 million to \$5 million, balancing the DAP representation of independent members of councillors to three and three, and allowing third-party appeal rights to allow local governments to appeal DAP decisions.

One local government has vocalised its support for WALGA’s stance.

Shire of Mundaring president Paige McNeil told a resident and ratepayers’ association meeting this month that the reforms were diminishing local governments’ influence on planning decisions.

The residents had gathered in opposition to a proposed childcare facility in Darlington, open for public comment until December 10.

Resident feedback will form part of a Shire Responsible Authority Report which will include a recommendation to approve or refuse the application with the final approval laying in the hands of the DAP.

“Local governments are required to engage with their community and then councillors take their community’s concerns into consideration along with many other factors, including financial and sustainability risks, to make the best decision,” she said.

“One of the values of the Shire of Mundaring is accountability, and we take that seriously.”

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Claire Ottaviano is a breaking news journalist with WAtoday, and has extensive experience in local government reporting.
