

Discussion Paper: A Multicultural Act for Western Australia

WALGA Submission

February 2026

Table of Contents

WALGA Submission	1
February 2026.....	1
About WALGA.....	3
Local Government in WA	3
Introduction	3
Role of Local Government	4
Overarching Feedback.....	4
Guiding principles and definitions.....	5
Regional Communities.....	6
Planning and Reporting.....	7
Recommendations	7
Conclusion	7

About WALGA

The Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) is an independent, member-based, not for profit organisation representing and supporting the Western Australian (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.

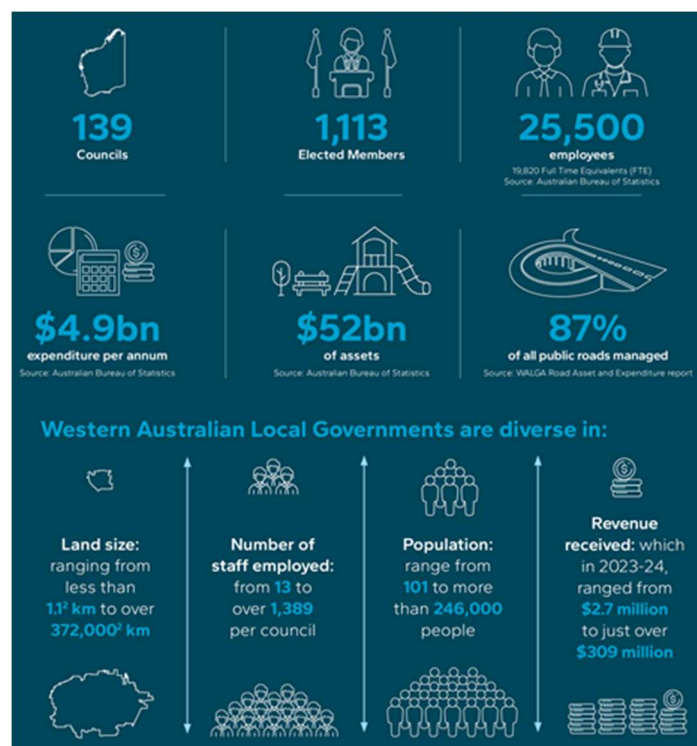
We do this through effective advocacy to all levels of Government on behalf of our Members, and by the provision of expert advice, services and support to Local Governments.

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

Local Government in WA

Local Government undertakes functions most appropriately implemented at the local level in the best interests of local communities.

The Local Government sector in WA is diverse. There are 139 Local Governments; 30 metropolitan and 109 regional, varying in geographical size and population. As a result, there is a significant diversity in the range of functions and services that are provided by Local Government.



Introduction

WALGA welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission in response to the *Discussion Paper: A Multicultural Act for Western Australia* (Discussion Paper) on behalf of the Western Australian Local Government sector.

WALGA supports a whole of government and community approach to creating and sustaining socially cohesive, culturally diverse communities and notes the significant role Local Government already plays through its varied and wide-ranging responsibilities.

This Submission provides an overview of the enabling role that WA Local Governments have without the need for legislative requirements and responds to the Discussion Paper key questions as relevant to the sector.

Role of Local Government

Local Governments respond to their community's needs as part of their existing responsibilities and do so within competing priorities for constrained budgets. This includes actively supporting cultural diversity through their core business and service offerings and promoting respectful, welcoming and culturally diverse communities. Examples include:

- Inclusive community engagement and consultation
- Facilitating multicultural advisory groups, forums and partnerships
- Delivering community events including Harmony Week activities, cultural festivals and social programs
- Supporting initiatives that strengthen belonging, community connection and civic participation.

Local Governments in WA are driving new standards in multicultural program design and delivery, working in partnership with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) community leaders and organisations. For example, several Local Governments are members of Multicultural Networks with the Cities of Mandurah, Cockburn, Swan, Wanneroo, Stirling and Joondalup hosting networks in their region.

Ten Local Governments are now members of [Welcoming Cities](#), a national network of cities, shires, towns and municipalities who are committed to an Australia where everyone can belong and participate in social, cultural and economic and civic life. WALGA supports the Local Government Welcoming Cities Network by attending meetings and sharing information with Members, and benefits from the two-way learning and capacity building that this peer network provides.

Some Local Governments actively support settlement initiatives in partnership with Health Service Providers, the Australian Department of Social Services, migrant resource centres and diaspora community leaders and organisations. WALGA's participation in the WA Inter-Agency Settlement Group has provided an avenue to advocate for and promote Local Government's role in this area and inform the sector of updates regarding policy, programs and funding opportunities.

WALGA worked in partnership with the State Government to create a campaign to encourage people to stand in the 2025 Local Elections. The 'You are the Right Material' campaign emphasised that Local Governments work best when they reflect the fabric of their community. The campaign encouraged diversity in nominations including people from different cultural backgrounds, ages, professions, ability levels and genders to consider standing for Council.

The 2021 census shows that one in three Western Australians were born overseas and 17.5% of the total population have Non-Main English-Speaking (NMES) birthplaces. This sits alongside the 3.3% of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander West Australians. The pattern of diversity changes across the State, due in part to migration and economic opportunities or remote Aboriginal communities. The unique community composition of each Local Government necessitates tailored local level responses.

Overarching Feedback

WALGA is supportive of the proposed Multicultural Act (proposed Act) aim to "support everyone in WA to take part in social, cultural, economic and political life – enabling full participation and recognising the value of our cultural, linguistic and religious diversity." The proposed Act provides a clear indication of the State Government's commitment to equity and cohesion. The proposed Act would bring WA in line with states and territories with legislation already in place, including the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria.

Within the three jurisdictions that currently include Local Government as responsible entities (New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria), reporting and monitoring mechanisms either do not exist or are minimal. This provides precedent in avoiding additional burden through monitoring and reporting.

The absence of legislative requirements has not inhibited strong and proactive leadership and engagement with multiculturalism across the Western Australian Local Government sector, as demonstrated by the examples outlined above. This clearly indicates that Local Governments are already committed to advancing multicultural outcomes without the need for statutory requirements.

WALGA therefore recommends that the proposed Act's application be confined to State Government agencies. This model is already established through the existing State Government multicultural policy framework, specifically the Charter of Multiculturalism and the Western Australian Multicultural Policy Framework, providing a coherent strategic direction that effectively guides Local Government activity while avoiding the imposition of prescriptive, duplicative, or administratively burdensome compliance obligations.

The Discussion Paper does not offer compelling evidence to demonstrate the benefits of applying the implementation of the Act to Local Government. Expanding the Act's reach risks diverting investment and leadership currently expanding across the sector without delivering proportional public value.

In addition, extending implementation requirements to Local Government introduces risks that could diminish the intent of the proposed Act. This includes constraining Local Governments to deliver generic, compliance-driven responses replacing the substantive, place-based approaches that currently deliver the greatest impact and the creation of additional unfunded obligations that would divert resources from existing community priorities.

WALGA also notes the diverse range of resources and capacity WA Local Governments have available to absorb additional legislative requirements. This is particularly relevant when considering the mandated requirements on Local Government under the *Public Health Act 2016*. The legislation requires all WA Local Governments to publish a local public health plan by June 2026, aligned to the [State Public Health Plan 2025-30](#), which includes the overarching objective of equity and inclusion. WALGA notes that the requirements of local public health plans is not funded by State Government.

Appropriate funding and support to align to the proposed Act intent would be a more effective mechanism to drive meaningful outcomes for Western Australians, to fulfil the intent of the proposed Act.

Guiding principles and definitions

WALGA agrees that the key focus areas from existing legislation in other jurisdictions, provides a good basis for principles to include in the proposed WA Act. These include:

- Respect for cultural identity
- Fairness and equality
- Democratic participation
- Diversity as a strength

These principles would provide a strong signal of the State Government's intent and provide useful alignment to legalisation in other jurisdictions. WALGA suggests that focusing principles to high

level value statements as set out in the Discussion Paper provides clear linkages to other priorities on key issues such as Closing the Gap. High level principles also enable flexibility as concepts and emerging social, cultural and economic issues continue to evolve. More detailed principles relating to antisemitism, cultural contributions and language are better suited in the supporting suite of documents on an as-needed basis.

WALGA suggests considering including a reference to civic participation alongside democratic participation within the principles. This would recognise the wider role all Western Australians can play within their community.

Providing clear and consistent definitions of multiculturalism terms will be critical to ensure the proposed legislation is understood and aligns to existing documents both within WA and across jurisdictions.

Regional Communities

WALGA supports the Discussion Paper's premise that the proposed Act should include everyone in WA regardless of where they live. WALGA acknowledges the focus on regional WA and encourages consideration of how the composition of multiculturalism varies across regional areas. For example, The City of Kalgoorlie has one of the highest culturally diverse populations outside of the Perth metropolitan area, in part reflective of its resource industry. In comparison, the Shire of Derby–West Kimberly has an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait population of 70%, speaking at least four different languages. WALGA also urges consideration of the cultural diversity of metropolitan Perth Local Government Areas, with 91% of people from CaLD backgrounds residing within Perth Metropolitan areas.

The Discussion Paper does not acknowledge the intersectionality of multiculturalism with wider matters that can impact equity and community engagement such as disability, age, gender and digital inclusion. A holistic approach to enabling wellbeing outcomes will be critical to achieving the intent of the proposed Act. WALGA notes that there are numerous existing statutory frameworks that the proposed legislation would interact with and suggests these are investigated further to ensure alignment and avoid duplication.

Ensuring the proposed Act has impact across all WA communities would not require Local Governments to be included in the proposed Act's implementation but rather could complement the work Local Governments already undertake. WALGA notes that the Victorian model includes regional advisory councils that inform the Victoria Multiculturalism Commission directly.

Introducing additional legislative requirements and reporting can be disproportionate and unsustainable, especially for smaller Local Governments. Any introduction of additional data requirements should have a clear purpose, safeguards, and resourcing. Consideration should be given to any data requirements introduced with the legislation including data ownership, protection and cultural safety. WALGA recommends the Office of Multicultural Interests consult with the Department of Local Government, Industry Regulation and Safety and the Department of Health's Epidemiology Directorate to understand the practical implications and complexity of collecting and reporting data for small rural communities, in particular.

Planning and Reporting

The Discussion Paper identifies the *Local Government Act 1995* as a potential mechanism to hold Local Government accountable to their communities and encourage participation. The Discussion Paper notes that the legislation does not include specific requirements to address multicultural needs. While this is true, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people are explicitly mentioned in the legislation. The *Local Government Amendment Act 2023* also introduces a revised framework of Council Planning, which will include a Community Perception Survey and Community Engagement Charter, further enshrining the intent of community engagement.

Similarly, the *Local Government Amendment Act 2024* updated the role of Councillors and references facilitating communication with their communities. Local Governments are also required to consider the unique needs and interests of people from CaLD backgrounds in their mandated local public health plans in line with the State Public Health Plan, which includes Equity and Inclusion as an overarching objective.

Fostering regional and metropolitan Local Government engagement consistent with the intent of the proposed Act could be more effectively achieved outside of legislation, through interagency collaboration, guidance, training and funding for community-led programs. For example, WALGA Members have noted a lack of access and funding for language services such as interpreters and translated resources in regional and remote areas, hindering their efforts to ensure access for diverse community members.

WALGA welcomes an opportunity to continue working collaboratively with the Office of Multicultural Interests to improve information sharing about resources available for Local Governments, including shared service arrangements, policy and program advice.

Recommendations

WALGA recommends that a future WA Multiculturalism Act directs implementation through State Government Agencies and does not extend the scope to include Local Government.

Clearly defined and principles-based legislation, implemented by State Government agencies, would provide strategic direction for Local Government while avoiding disproportionate and potentially duplicative mandatory reporting or compliance obligations. This approach would recognise that existing planning, engagement and governance frameworks exist under *the Local Government Act 1995*.

Adequate, sustainable and capacity-based funding will be required to enable flexible, place-based approaches by Local Governments and collaborative cross-sector partnerships to achieve meaningful and impactful outcomes, consistent with the intent of the proposed Act.

Conclusion

WALGA thanks the Office of Multicultural Interests for the opportunity to engage in the Development of the proposed Multiculturalism Act. WALGA supports the intent of the proposed Multicultural Act to be implemented through State agencies. Local Governments make a significant contribution to embedding social cohesion and supporting cultural diversity across WA given their deep understanding of and reach into local communities.



WALGA

Collaboration, partnerships and appropriate levels of funding are critical to implementing the intent of the proposed Act. WALGA looks forward to continuing to work with the Office of Multicultural Affairs and other relevant State Government agencies on the proposed Act's development and implementation.

For enquiries on this Submission please contact Hannah Godsave, Manager Community Policy, at hgodsave@walga.asn.au or (08) 9213 2074.