

South West Country Zone Minutes

23 June 2025

**Hosted by the Shire of
Boyup Brook, 55 Abel Street,
Boyup Brook**

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PRIORITISATION FRAMEWORK

The below Prioritisation Framework was endorsed at the April 2024 South West Country Zone meeting.

Zone Delegates when drafting Agenda items and motions on policy or advocacy issues, using the below criteria as prompts for what kind of information to include. The Prioritisation Framework does not remove the need for judgements to be made and is intended to guide, not replace, decision-making.

How to use the Framework:

- If the majority of the factors are towards the left column, the issue is a high priority.
- If the majority of the factors are towards the middle, the issue requires action, but is not a high priority.
- If the majority of the factors are towards the right column, the issue is a low priority.

Impact on Local Government Sector Impact on Local Government sector without intervention	High	Medium	Low
Reach Number of member Local Governments affected	Sector-wide	Significant (multiple regions, Zones, or bands)	Few
Influence Capacity to influence decision makers	High	Medium	Low
Principles Alignment to core principles such as autonomy, funding, general competence	Strong	Partial	Peripheral
Clarity Policy change needed is clear and well-defined	Clear	Partial	Unclear
Decision-maker support Level of support among decision-makers (political and administrative)	High	Medium	Low
Public support Level of support among the public or other stakeholders	High	Medium	Low
Positive consequences for WALGA Prospect of positive consequences for WALGA. E.g. enhanced standing among members or leverage for other issues.	High	Medium	Low
Negative consequences for WALGA	High	Medium	Low

Prospect of negative consequences for WALGA for not undertaking the advocacy effort. E.g. diminished standing among members or other stakeholders.			
Partnerships Potential for partnerships with other stakeholders	Yes (3+)	Possibly (1-2)	No (0)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Zone Delegates were requested to provide sufficient written notice, wherever possible, on amendments to recommendations within the State Council or Zone agenda to the Zone Chair and Secretariat prior to the Zone meeting.

Agenda Papers were emailed 7 days prior to the meeting date.

Confirmation of Attendance An attendance sheet was circulated prior to the commencement of the meeting.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Draft Minutes of previous meeting
2. June 2025 Update – Department of Local Government, Sports and Cultural Industries
3. Zone Status Report
4. President's Report

1 OPENING, ATTENDANCE AND APOLOGIES

1.1 OPENING

Chair, President Cr Tony Dean opened the meeting at 9:01am.

1.2 ATTENDANCE

MEMBERS

1 Voting Delegates from each Member Council

Shire of August Margaret River

Cr Ian Earl (Deputy)
Ms Andrea Selvey, Chief Executive Officer, non-voting delegate

City of Busselton

Cr Mikayla Love (Deputy)
Ms Stephanie Addison-Brown, Manager Stakeholder Relations, non-voting delegate

Shire of Boyup Brook

President Cr Richard Walker
Mr Leonard Long, Chief Executive Officer, non-voting delegate

Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes

President Cr Tracy Lansdell
Mr Morgan Gillam, A/Chief Executive Officer, non-voting delegate

City of Bunbury	Ms Tresslyn Smith, Deputy Mayor (Deputy) Mr Alan Ferris, Chief Executive Officer, non-voting delegate
Shire of Capel	Cr Christine Terrantroy (Observer) Mr Kenn Donahoe, Chief Executive Officer (Temporary), non-voting delegate
Shire of Collie	President Cr Ian Miffling Mr Phil Anastasakis, Chief Executive Officer, non-voting delegate
Shire of Dardanup	President Cr Tyrrell Gardiner Mr André Schönfeldt, Chief Executive Officer, non-voting delegate
Shire of Donnybrook Balingup	President Cr Vivienne McCarthy (online) Mr Nick O'Connor, Chief Executive Officer, non-voting delegate (online)
Shire of Harvey	President Cr Michelle Campbell Ms Annie Riordan, Chief Executive Officer, non-voting delegate
Shire of Manjimup	Cr Steve Moilin (Deputy) Ms Catherine Mills, Director Infrastructure Services, non-voting delegate
Shire of Nannup	President Cr Tony Dean (Chair) Mr David Taylor, Chief Executive Officer, non-voting delegate
WA Local Government Association Secretariat	Mr Chris Hossen, Policy Manager Planning and Building Ms Rebecca Hicks, Policy Officer Community
South West Development Commission	Ms Allison Christou, A/Chief Executive Officer
RDA South West	Mr Charles Jenkinson, Director Regional Development
Australia's South West	Ms Catrin Allsop, Chief Executive Officer
Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations	Mr Matt Beahan, Regional Workforce Transition Officer

1.3 APOLOGIES

Shire of Augusta Margaret River	President Cr Julia Meldrum
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City of Busselton	Mayor Phill Cronin Mr Tony Nottle, Chief Executive Officer, non-voting delegate
Shire of Capel	President Cr Doug Kitchen
Shire of Manjimup	President Cr Donnelle Buegge Mr Ben Rose, Chief Executive Officer, non-voting delegate
Shire of Nannup	Mr David Taylor, Chief Executive Officer, non-voting delegate

2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We, the South West Country Zone of WALGA, acknowledge the Nyoongar people, the Traditional Custodians of this land, and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and future.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Nil.

4 DEPUTATIONS

4.1 SHIRE OF BOYUP BROOK

President Cr Richard Walker and Mr Leonard Long Chief Executive Officer

President Cr Richard Walker and Chief Executive Officer, Mr Leonard Walker provided an update to the Zone on current priorities and key projects.

Noted

5 AGENCY REPORTS

5.1 SOUTH WEST DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Ms Allison Christou, A/Chief Executive Officer, provided an update to the Zone.

Noted

5.2 REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUSTRALIA – SOUTH WEST

Mr Charles Jenkinson, Director Regional Development, provided a brief update to the Zone.

Noted

5.3 DEPARTMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT, SPORT AND CULTURAL INDUSTRIES

The June 2025 DLGSC update was attached with the Agenda.

Noted

5.4 AUSTRALIA'S SOUTH WEST

Chief Executive Officer at Australia's South West, Ms Catrin Allsop, provided a brief update to the Zone.

Noted

5.5 AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

Mr Matt Beahan provided a brief update to the Zone.

Noted

6 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

The Minutes of the South West Country Zone meeting held on Monday, 28 April 2025 have previously been circulated to Member Councils and are provided as an attachment to the Agenda.

RESOLUTION

Moved: President Cr Richard Walker
Seconded: President Cr Michelle Campbell

That the Minutes of the meeting of the South West Country Zone held on 28 April 2025 be confirmed as a true and accurate record of the proceedings.

CARRIED

7 BUSINESS ARISING

7.1 STATUS REPORT

By Chantelle O'Brien, Zone Executive Officer

BACKGROUND

Status Report for June 2025 which contains WALGA's responses to the resolutions of previous Zone Meetings.

Agenda Item	Zone Resolution	WALGA Response	Update	WALGA Contact
28 April 2025 Zone Agenda Item 8.7 Lack of Biosecurity Management by Government Agencies	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. That the South West Country Zone write to the relevant Ministers seeking information on the Forest Products Commission's biosecurity management plans on title land.2. That the South West Country Zone write to the following Ministers outlining this Zones concerns with the lack of biosecurity, in particular invasive species, on freehold and State controlled plantations.<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hon Jackie Jarvis, Minister for Agriculture• Hon Don Punch, Minister for South West• Hon Matthew Swinbourn, Minister for Environment• Hon Stephen Dawson, Minister for Regional Development• Hon John Carey, Minister for Lands3. That this Zone forward the above letter to the Chair of the Upper House Standing Committee on the Environment and Public Works Affairs requesting it act on its contents, and that this be done after the new Upper House is sworn in.	WALGA is preparing responses in relation to this matter. Internal advice has been sought from WALGA's Environment Policy team ahead of finalizing a draft letter	June 2025	Chris Hossen Policy Manager Planning and Building chossen@walga.asn.au 92132056
28 April 2025 Zone Agenda Item 8.1	That the South West Country Zone:	WALGA is preparing responses in relation to this matter. Internal advice has been sought	June 2025	Chris Hossen

Divestment of Bridge Works from Main Roads WA to Local Government	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strongly objects to the transfer of bridge works management from Main Roads WA (South West Region) to Local Governments in the South West. 2. Adopts an advocacy position in relation to bridge works management which advocates for Main Roads WA (South West Region) to maintain its present service delivery to Local Governments, with increased State funding to better resource and enable Main Roads WA to continue the sustainable delivery of bridge works services. 3. Writes to the following contacts to advise of the above adopted advocacy position and that the Zone strongly objects to the transfer of bridge works management from Main Roads WA to Local Governments in the South West: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Director General, and South West Regional Manager of Main Roads WA. • The Hon. Rita Saffioti MLA (Deputy Premier, Treasurer, Minister for Transport, Sport and Recreation). • Hon. Don Punch MLA (Minister for Aboriginal Affairs; Water; Climate Resilience; South West). • The Hon. Stephen Dawson MLC (Minister for Regional Development; Ports; Science and Innovation; Medical Research; Kimberley). • Hon. Hannah Beazley MLA (Minister for Local Government; Disability Services; Volunteering; Youth; Gascoyne). • Other Members of State Parliament representing the electorates of member • Local Governments of the South West Country Zone. • WALGA State Council. 	from WALGA's Infrastructure Policy team ahead of finalizing a draft letter		Policy Manager Planning and Building chossen@walga.asn.au 92132056
22 November 2024 Zone Agenda Item 8.1 Cessation of Custom Kill Services in South West	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the South West Country Zone advocate to the Minister for Agriculture for the Western Australian Government to support local, small-scale farmers in their efforts to locate or develop an alternative custom kill service provider in the South-West Region. 2. Reaffirm the South West Country Zone's commitment to a Regional Agribusiness Precinct in the South West as a regionally significant outcome, as adopted February 2024. 	A response has been received from the Minister and is attached to the June Zone Agenda.	June 2025	Chris Hossen Policy Manager Planning and Building chossen@walga.asn.au 92132056
22 November 2024 Zone Agenda Item 8.7 Proposal to Increase Pensioners and Seniors Rebates	That the South West Country Zone advocate to the State Government and Federal Government for increased rebates to eligible Pensioners and Seniors in relation to their local government rates charges, water service charges, emergency services levy and underground electricity connection charges, as suggested in the three tables above.	A response has been received from the Minister and is attached to the June Zone Agenda.	June 2025	Chris Hossen Policy Manager Planning and Building chossen@walga.asn.au 92132056

22 November 2024 Zone Agenda Item 8.8 Breast Cancer Diagnostic Clinic in Bunbury	That the South West WALGA Zone write to Premier Hon. Roger Cook, requesting the expansion of a Breast Cancer Diagnostic Clinic in Bunbury to enhance breast cancer diagnostic services for women in the South West.	A letter was sent to the Minister in May and a response has not yet been received.	June 2025	Chris Hossen Policy Manager Planning and Building chossen@walga.asn.au 92132056
23 August 2024 Zone Agenda Item 8.4 Telco Communication Coverage in Rural Areas	That WALGA: 1. advocate through the State Government for an independent investigation into mobile phone coverage in rural Western Australia particularly the Lower South West land division and 2. advocate via both the State and Federal Government for a greater and more reliable mobile coverage network throughout the rural areas of Western Australia.	The Association met with senior representatives from Telstra and is documenting specific areas where reduced coverage has been identified. The Association will participate in a regional connectivity policy workshop on 11 June which may provide additional policy development direction.	June 2025	Ian Duncan Executive Manager Infrastructure iduncan@walga.asn.au 9213 2031
7 May State Council Agenda Item 8.3 Native Vegetation Clearing Regulations Advocacy Position	That the South West Country Zone support the WALGA recommendation for State Council Agenda item 8.3 as contained in the State Council Agenda and as provided above with the following amendment to point 1(c): <i><u>"provide a permanent exemption for clearing of previously legally cleared transport corridors including allowing Local Governments to clear for safety reasons as previously allowed for in the Regulations"</u></i>	SECRETARIAT COMMENT The 2004 amendments to the Environmental Protection Act 1986 introduced provisions for regulating the clearing of native vegetation. The Environmental Protection (Clearing of Native Vegetation) Regulations 2004 includes a number of exemptions, and specifically one relating to human safety and danger reduction: 2 Clearing resulting from accidents or to reduce danger Clearing — a) for the purposes of preventing imminent danger to human life or health or irreversible damage to a significant portion of the environment; or b) as a result of an accident caused otherwise than by the negligence of the person clearing or the person who authorised the clearing As there are provisions under the current Regulations regarding safety no change to the draft Advocacy Position has been made. STATE COUNCIL RESOLUTION That WALGA replace the following Advocacy Positions: 5.2.1 Environmental Protection Act 5.2.2 Land Clearing in Road Reserves with an updated Native Vegetation Clearing Regulations Advocacy Position as follows: <i>WALGA calls on the Western Australian Government, in consultation with Local Government, to undertake legislative and policy reform to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and transparency of the regulatory system for clearing native vegetation in Western Australia, including:</i>	June 2025	Nicole Matthews Executive Manager Policy nmatthews@walga.asn.au 9213 2039

		<p>1. Amending the Environmental Protection Act 1986 and associated regulations to remove unnecessary process, complexity and improve timeframes, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. introducing statutory timeframes for the determination of referrals, permit applications and appeals b. increasing the default duration of Area and Purpose Permits to 10 years c. providing a permanent exemption for clearing of previously legally cleared transport corridors, <u>including allowing Local Governments to clear for safety reasons.</u> d. strengthening environmental data sharing requirements to ensure proponents cannot opt-out of sharing data collected for environmental assessment and monitoring purposes. <p>2. Ensuring the regulatory system is adequately resourced to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. implement an expedited process for clearing permits for projects that prevent death and serious injury (road safety), and state and federally funded or co-funded projects b. establish a dedicated Local Government Unit within the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. case manage Local Government referrals and clearing permit applications ii. provide guidance and training for Local Governments, particularly in relation to roadside vegetation management iii. support partnerships with Local Governments in strategic environmental offsets c. enable timely investigation and enforcement action for illegal clearing d. increase investment in the collection and provision of statewide biodiversity data, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. funding and coordinating a state-wide biodiversity survey program to standardise habitat and vegetation mapping ii. making biodiversity data more discoverable, accessible and useable 		
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		<p>iii. <u>ensuring survey data relied upon for decision making is contemporary and accurate, particularly if there has been a change in environmental condition.</u></p> <p>3. Undertaking bioregional planning for native vegetation management, with a focus on highly cleared areas and implementing strategic solutions for environmental offsets that can be utilised by Local Government.</p> <p>4. <u>Ensuring that environmental offsets are relevant and proportionate, including:</u></p> <p>a. <u>proximity to the area impacted</u></p> <p>b. <u>the environmental value being impacted.</u></p> <p>5. Working with the Australian Government to reduce duplication between the Environmental Protection Act 1986 and the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.</p> <p>RESOLUTION 029.2/2025 CARRIED</p>		
7 May State Council Agenda Item 8.4 Submission on the State Recovery Arrangements	<p>That the South West Country Zone supports the WALGA recommendation for State Council Agenda item 8.4 as contained in the State Council Agenda and as provided above with the following addition:</p> <p><i>That WALGA advocates for a Community Emergency Services Manager to be placed at each Local Government in WA to provide a network of support for the preparation and implementation of the State recovery arrangements at a local level.</i></p>	<p>SECRETARIAT COMMENT</p> <p>WALGA acknowledges the South West Country Zone's comment and has updated its submission on the State Recovery Arrangements to incorporate its existing Advocacy Position 8.9 - Expansion of the Community Emergency Services Manager Program.</p> <p>STATE COUNCIL RESOLUTION</p> <p>That State Council endorse the submission to the Department of Fire and Emergency Services on proposed revisions to the State Recovery Arrangements, <u>subject to incorporating Advocacy Position 8.9 - Expansion of the Community Emergency Services Manager Program.</u></p> <p>RESOLUTION 030.2/2025 CARRIED</p>	June 2025	Nicole Matthews Executive Manager Policy nmatthews@walga.asn.au 9213 2039
7 May State Council Agenda Item 8.2 Dog and Cat Management Advocacy Position	<p>That the South West Country Zone:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. supports the WALGA recommendation for State Council Agenda item 8.2 as contained in the State Council Agenda and as provided above; and 2. Reaffirms the Cat Local Law WALGA AGM resolution and the need for State Government to amend the State Cat Act. 	<p>SECRETARIAT COMMENT</p> <p>WALGA has a separate advocacy position relating to Cat Local Laws that was endorsed at the December 2024 State Council meeting as below:</p> <p>2.2.5 <i>Review of the Cat Act 2011 and Dog Act 1976</i></p> <p><i>That WALGA advocate to the State Government:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>for the conduct of a comprehensive review of the Dog Act 1976;</i> 2. <i>to prioritise reforms to the Cat Act 2011, in accordance with the Statutory Review undertaken and</i> 	June 2025	Tony Brown Executive Director, Member Services 9213 2051 tbrown@walga.asn.au

		<p>tabled in the State Parliament on 27 November 2019;</p> <p>3. to make changes to the Cat Act 2011 to permit local laws to be made to the following effect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Cats are to be confined to the cat owner's residence premises; b) Cats within public places are to be under effective control and not to create a nuisance; c) Cats are not allowed on other private properties where the cat does not have the expressed permission of the occupier of that premises, and are not to create a nuisance; d) Cats are prohibited from ecologically sensitive areas designated as Cat Prohibited Areas by absolute majority of Council, and clearly demarcated as such on a sign displayed at the area, without the need to modify the local law. <p>4. that the reviews incorporate Local Government-specific consultation processes, coordinated in discussion with WALGA and Local Government stakeholders.</p> <p>STATE COUNCIL RESOLUTION</p> <p>That WALGA replace Advocacy Position 2.12 <i>Puppy Farming</i> with a revised <i>Dog and Cat Management</i> advocacy position, as follows:</p> <p><i>In regard to the Dog Amendment (Stop Puppy Farming) Act 2021 and the PetsWA Centralised Database, the WA Local Government sector advocates:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) <u>that all Local Governments achieve full cost recovery in ensuring compliance with the Dog Act 1976 or Cat Act 2011 through a combination of appropriate fees and State Government funding that encourages compliance and serves the interests of all Western Australians regardless of where they live.</u> b) that Fees and Charges set in Regulations are reviewed bi-annually and, at minimum, adjusted by the Local Government Cost Index. c) that the PetsWA centralised registration database is developed, operated and maintained by State Government, with no loss to Local 		
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		<p>Government registration fee revenue.</p> <p>d) that the function of PetsWA be restricted to the registration of dogs and cats, exclude ancillary functions such as animal related complaints and infringement notices, and integrate with existing Local Government corporate systems.</p> <p>e) for the continued legislative exemptions for livestock working dogs in recognition of their special breeding requirements.</p> <p>f) for a State Government-led education initiative whereby the community is encouraged to purchase puppies from approved breeders.</p>		
		RESOLUTION 027.2/2025	CARRIED	

Noted

8 ZONE BUSINESS

8.1 ADVOCACY FOR IMPROVED TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND INTERNET COVERAGE IN THE SOUTH WEST REGION

By City of Busselton and Shire of Augusta Margaret River

BACKGROUND

The South West of Western Australia is a region experiencing rapid growth. The South West Development Commission has published the following data with regard to the region ([Statistical Data - South West Development Commission \(swdc.wa.gov.au\)](https://www.swdc.wa.gov.au)):

- Population 197,000
- Largest region by population in WA
- Gross Regional Product \$19 billion
- Jobs 80,400
- Manufacturing Exports \$6.96 million

In today's digital age, reliable telecommunications and internet connectivity are not luxuries but necessities for every household, business and service. However, the South West region is experiencing significant challenges which are impacting economic development, public safety, and quality of life. A particular area of concern is inadequate telecommunications connectivity during emergencies which directly impact on the ability of local communities to respond to and manage crisis situations effectively.

Issues such as inadequate infrastructure, service unreliability, and digital inequity continue to be ongoing concerns. While government initiatives like the Regional Connectivity Program (RCP) and the WA Regional Digital Connectivity Program (WARDCP) have assisted to progress a number of regional projects, persistent gaps remain, limiting the region's ability to meet future demands and further capitalise on economic and social opportunities.

All twelve local governments in the South West Zone have consistently reported issues within their communities relating to telecommunications and internet connectivity. Network speeds are often slow and unreliable, with residents, businesses and emergency responders all sharing ongoing concerns about the lack of coverage and regular drop outs. These concerns are detailed below.

General residential use

Most residents in the region have access to internet, however, anecdotal and some survey evidence suggests these connections cannot not be considered reliable. Consistently slow services with poor connection and recurring drop outs mean that residents are not able to rely on the high quality of services that are so critical to their wellbeing and daily life.

The City of Busselton is aware of numerous concerns whereby residents are regularly unable to use mobile phones or access the internet, even in highly populated residential areas. One complaint received by the City was from a local resident in a suburban area in Vasse who was unable to call 000 to call an ambulance without walking outside and away from the medical emergency situation occurring within her own home. Another local government surveyed its community and respondents reported drop out times of 10-20 minutes at a time. Communities with poor coverage complain about children being unable to undertake homework or access their studies online, or not being able to make phone calls within their homes.

In some localities (impacting multiple local government areas), residents are limited by only being able to use the service providers available in their particular area. This means that they cannot simply change provider and must continue to struggle with poor telecommunication and internet services. There is evidence that some residents in suburban areas are paying for satellite connections to ensure reliability. It seems improved connectivity for residents in areas such as Vasse will still be some time away as it was confirmed that the telecommunications network cannot cope with the surge in population growth experienced over the last two years. The solutions offered were for the resident, at their expense, to install either a fixed landline or a mobile signal boosting device in their home.

Planning for residential areas also appears to rely on the developer selecting a telecoms provider and quantifying the forecast population and timeframes for implementation. It is understood this is often late in being communicated and contracted. It is also appreciated that Telstra may not be the preferred supplier, however other service providers rely on Telstra's network and therefore it is considered important that Telstra should be informed by the Western Australian Planning Commission at very early stages of structure planning new developments. At present, there does not appear to be a process for this to occur.

Reliable services to all regional residents are essential. Regional communities should be able to access to medical consultations, mental health support, and emergency services without the need for long-distance travel. In addition, reliable internet services will help maintain social connections, reducing feelings of isolation and improving mental wellbeing, particularly for the elderly and those living in more remote areas. The need for access to government services, emergency response systems and community information is critical to make the region safer and more efficient for all residents.

Visitor Influx

Local governments with high tourism visitation consistently receive reports of mobile network and internet connection drop outs during peak tourism seasons. The City of Busselton alone experiences significant swells in numbers from people staying (and accessing networks) during these periods, resulting in significant issues with lengthy periods where mobile and internet connectivity experience continual drop outs or there is a complete lack of coverage for some people for significant periods of time.

Peak school holiday periods can span up to 18 weeks in a year, which results in a significant level of impact on the services the local community is so reliant on. Services are clearly not designed to meet peak period demand, and this also creates impacts on local emergency service response capability which is especially critical with large numbers of people from outside the region staying locally. See **Emergency Services** section below.

Rural Areas

There are still numerous blackspot areas around the region, which impact on critical services and emergency response. Multiple areas lack adequate mobile coverage and high-speed internet, leading to a digital divide. Many residents in the South West still do not have NBN available to them in their location, forcing them to rely on their mobile phones to hotspot to other devices.

The region's vast geography and low population density make it commercially unviable for private investment in telecommunications infrastructure, and anecdotal feedback suggests that even satellite services are not reliable or deemed worthy of the cost.

The shutdown of the 3G network has further reduced service availability in some areas, including in some of the more rural areas across the South West. Telstra began shutting down the 3G network nationally on 28 October 2024 and the service was switched off in WA on 4 November 2024. There are reports that people in more rural areas who are now accessing 4G require a booster to achieve the same signal they had when accessing 3G.

Busselton Margaret River Airport

The Busselton Margaret River Airport (BMRA) is recognised as a key strategic asset of the South West. BMRA supports 38 FIFO flights a week and 6 passenger services a week between Melbourne and Sydney with plans to develop the airport to enable other destinations including Brisbane, Adelaide and Singapore and attract freight and other aviation services to the area. Surrounding the airport is extensive industrial and commercial land in the process of being developed. Currently, there is sporadic mobile connectivity airside and outside of the terminal landside. This means passengers cannot make contact on arrival to confirm transport arrangements and there could also be a risk to safety in the event of an incident on the runway. Landside telecommunications provision urgently needs to be resolved to mitigate these risks and to support business and industry growth in the general precinct.

Businesses

Multiple reports evidence the fact that poor connectivity is having serious impacts on local businesses. Those that rely on customers being able to contact them are suffering. Many have reported they have been unable to undertake daily transactions (attending meetings

by video, sending emails/files, receiving payments in store or undertaking bookkeeping and other administrative tasks) due to the unreliability of services. Professional service companies relying fully on digital connectivity to deliver services are also reporting major concerns with their ability to connect with their clients and other offices across the region.

Improved connectivity is crucial for local businesses to thrive. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the South West region need to leverage better internet services to expand their market reach, engage in e-commerce, and compete on a global scale.

As previously stated, the South West is a popular tourist destination. Enhanced telecommunications will serve to improve the visitor experience by providing reliable information, navigation, access to bookings and support in emergency situations, thereby boosting the tourism industry.

The South West also attracts a large number of people who work from home, so professional services (home-based businesses and staff of larger organisations working from home etc) are also increasingly reliant on fast and reliable services. Improved connectivity will attract and retain professionals to the region, supporting local economies and reducing urban congestion.

Education

Reliable internet connectivity will enable regional students to have access to online learning platforms, digital libraries and virtual classrooms, ensuring that they are not disadvantaged due to their geographical location. Educators will also benefit from professional development opportunities and collaborative platforms, enhancing the quality of education provided in the region.

Improved internet services facilitate lifelong learning opportunities for residents, allowing them to acquire new skills and knowledge, which is essential in a rapidly evolving job market.

Emergency Services

Since the 3G network was switched off and the 4G network rolled out, some bushfire brigades within the South West have reported concerns with reduced connectivity and have identified risks of emergency service impacts, especially in peak tourism periods and events where the existing mobile phone services “appear overloaded”. Access to a mobile Starlink service in an emergency is possible, but relies on deployment from the Department of Fire and Emergency Services office in Manjimup. Additional resources or upgrades are necessary for these brigades and other emergency responders to be able to provide the level of response required for current and future needs.

Brigade volunteers rely on mobile connectivity to be able to be contacted for an emergency call out. Delays in being able to gather a crew to attend an emergency could result in more serious or life threatening outcomes.

In addition, if 000 calls cannot be connected, this will delay or prevent reporting about fires and other emergencies, posing an increased risk to lives and homes. All brigades are tasked to respond via the BART app. If there are internet/phone outages, critical resources cannot be dispatched, either within the local area or to support other areas around the South West.

The Emergency WA website “Warnings” and “Incident Alerts” are critical for ensuring messages are sent to people’s phones to direct them to evacuate through safe routes. Without stable and reliable services, these alerts will be missed. The same principle applies to people being able to access the new Emergency WA app, which only works where coverage is possible.

People residing in areas that are prone to bush fire need considerable warning time to evacuate safely or prepare to endure it from home as they have very limited means of escape. These people rely on being contacted by emergency services to alert them to any potential dangers to their property and lives. The unreliability of the connectivity in these areas creates significant safety issues for residents and visitors from outside the region during an emergency.

Current Solutions and Actions

- Submissions were made to the Federal Regional Telecommunications Review 2024
- NBN has been working to update NBN Fixed Wireless in a number of places which has improved internet speeds to some extent in those areas, but this does not meet the ongoing and growing needs of the whole South West region. People increasingly using mobile phone hotspots when internet via NBN is unreliable, resulting in even more bandwidth being used up for this purpose and slowing availability/speeds for other purposes.
- In 2024, Telstra has advised it would be upgrading some of its mobile phone towers in the region, but at the same time confirmed the upgrades would only service current demand and would not provide for future needs (due to budget restrictions and their capacity to undertake the work).
- On 5 February 2025, the then Minister for Regional Development, Hon Don Punch MLA, announced the delivery of a suite of 12 new or improved fixed wireless masts and towers to boost digital connectivity for regional and farming communities in the South West. He advised that this new telecommunications infrastructure was intended to enhance fixed wireless broadband services to businesses and residents around Busselton and Harvey. Telecommunications provider Swoop has been contracted to deliver the project, with \$1 million in State funding invested to access the Federal Government's Regional Connectivity Program. In the Busselton area, four 40-metre-high towers will deliver enterprise grade fixed wireless broadband services spanning approximately 1,100 square kilometres. In the Harvey-Brunswick area, new or upgraded towers have been installed at eight sites including Bunbury and Australind, which will deliver services across 1,200 square kilometres. Both projects cover more than 25,000 premises across 19 postcodes in the Busselton and Harvey regions. Please see correspondence to the City of Busselton from the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (including a map) attached.

Further Solutions Required

Current infrastructure planning is only based on population data and does not take into account other factors such as tourism visitation (driven and promoted by the State Government), increasing use by residents to transact their daily lives and the increasing

reliance business and industry have on these services as they evolve to meet current and future requirements to remain competitive.

One of the issues to consider is that Satellite Direct to Device is estimated to be only five years away from becoming commercial, which will mean people with a line of site to the sky (like a Starlink device) will be able to achieve signal. This will be a significant game changer to the industry, but until then it appears the region will remain in a holding pattern with continually increasing demands on existing capacity.

On a local level, some local governments have been investigating or supporting trialling a public Wi-Fi setup, but this will not reach those most effected and is not a solution to mitigate ongoing issues across the region.

A further challenge has emerged regarding the representation of Telstra, the primary telecommunications provider, on Local Emergency Management Committees (LEMCs). Telstra was approached to provide a representative for each of the 12 LEMCs across the region. In response, Telstra advised that:

1. It is unable to provide a dedicated representative per LEMC.
2. Instead, a generic WA Team email will be made available for meeting requests.
3. Attendance will be predominantly online, with limited capacity for in-person representation.

Summary

The problems faced by the region are not going to be solved through existing infrastructure plans, noting that to date upgrades have only been designed to try to keep up with current demand rather than to meet or enable a transformational future.

Investing in telecommunications and internet infrastructure in the South West region of Western Australia is both an economic and social imperative. Such investment is essential for bridging the digital divide, fostering inclusive growth, ensuring community safety and resilience, and providing all residents with the ability to thrive in the digital age.

The South West Zone requires State Council support to advocate for:

- Funding for the development of telecommunications infrastructure in the South West region (ie additional mobile towers and small-cell technology to improve coverage in underservices areas).
- Funding for upgrades to existing broadband infrastructure to provide higher speeds and greater reliability.
- Government partnerships with private sector companies to ensure the deployment of high-speed internet services.
- Implementation of policies that better support digital literacy and inclusion for all residents.
- Engagement with relevant State and Federal Governments to identify the appropriate governing or regulatory body responsible for overseeing

telecommunications providers in emergency management contexts and supporting, through LEMC membership where the local government deems necessary, their regular and meaningful participation in LEMCs.

SECRETARIAT COMMENT

WALGA has an existing advocacy position in relation to the Regional Telecommunications Project to address mobile black spots passed by the WALGA AGM and State Council in 2021. WALGA has continued to advocate on regional telecommunications, including in its submission to the 2024 Regional Telecommunications Review and advocacy during the 2025 Federal Election. WALGA has also been liaising with State agencies in relation to the Telstra pilot projects for Automatic Transfer Units to support regional network resilience.

With both State and Federal Governments having recently made specific commitments on different initiatives to improve coverage, it is expected that regional telecommunications will continue to be a priority of every level of government into the future.

While the draft resolution is quite specific to the South West, similar issues are relevant to many Zones across WA. Potential sector advocacy should consider by the elements of the prioritisation framework included at page 3 of the meeting agenda.

RESOLUTION

Moved: Cr Mikayla Love

Seconded: Cr Ian Earl

That the South West Country Zone requests the State Council to advocate for tangible actions to improve telecommunication and internet coverage throughout the South West to meet current and future demands, taking into account:

- **forecast population increases**
- **planning for future development**
- **increasing community reliance on digital capabilities for everyday life (residents and businesses)**
- **seasonal tourism swells**
- **increasing emergency service response and management requirements**
- **the need to enable transformational business and industry to evolve and thrive in the regions.**
- **engagement with relevant State and Federal Governments to identify the appropriate governing or regulatory body responsible for overseeing telecommunications providers in emergency management contexts and supporting, through Local Emergency Management Committees (LEMC) membership where the local government deems necessary, their regular and meaningful participation in LEMCs.**

CARRIED

8.2 JACQUI DODD SCHOLARSHIP

By WALGA Training Team

BACKGROUND

The LGA50220 Diploma of Local Government – Elected Member Scholarship, named in honour of the late Jacqui Dodd, former long-serving WALGA Training Services Manager, has been awarded since 2021. This program is the highest qualification an Elected Member can achieve through WALGA Training and enables participants to increase their skills and knowledge in order to confidently provide leadership to their community.

The scholarship covers 50% of training and assessment fees and provides additional travel expense compensation for regional applicants upon completion of the program. WALGA Training awards this scholarship to two Metropolitan and two Regional Elected Members.

To qualify, applicants must be current Elected Members, have completed all Council Member Essentials training, and must not have previously received the scholarship.

This year's nominations will open on Tuesday, 1 July and close on Friday, 15 August 2025 at 12 noon. The scholarship winners will be announced at the Local Government Convention in September.

For more information and details on how to apply please visit the WALGA Training [website](#), contact the team via email training@walga.asn.au, or call us on (08) 9213 2088.

Noted

8.3 INVITATIONS TO MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT TO ATTEND ZONE MEETINGS

By Kathy Robertson, Manager Association and Corporate Governance

BACKGROUND

The recent State election has brought with it two significant changes which may impact how Zones invite members of Parliament to attend Zone meetings:

1. The electoral regions for the Legislative Council were abolished under the *Constitutional and Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Equality) Act 2021* and replaced with a single "whole of state" electorate. As a result, the members of the Legislative Council are drawn from across the whole of the State and no longer represent a particular region or area.
2. Premier Roger Cook has appointed nine cabinet members with region-specific portfolios. These Regional Ministers cover the areas of the Kimberley, Pilbara, South West, Mid West, Goldfields-Esperance, Gascoyne, Peel, Great Southern and Wheatbelt.

A full list of MLCs can be found here: [Legislative Council of Western Australia, Forty Second Parliament, List Of Members](#)

A full list of WA Ministers, including Regional Ministers can be found here: [Western Australian Government Cabinet Ministers](#)

COMMENT

Zones can choose to invite members of Parliament (State or Federal) to meetings at their discretion. Some Zones have standing invitations for all MPs relevant to that region (including MLAs, MLCs and Federal members) whilst others choose to invite MPs on a meeting-by-meeting basis to speak on a particular topic or issue.

Those Zones that have a standing invite for MPs generally allow time on the Agenda for each politician in attendance to address the meeting (as a standing item).

The South West Country Zone does not currently invite MPs to meetings on a regular basis.

That the South West Country Zone AGREED to deal with the Regional Minister Hon Don Punch for region specific matters.

9 STATE COUNCIL AGENDA – MATTERS FOR DECISION AND NOTING

Zone Delegates are invited to read and consider the WALGA State Council Agenda, which has been provided as an attachment with this Agenda and can be found via the link [here](#).

The Zone can provide comment or submit an alternative recommendation on any of the items, including the items for noting. The Zone comment will then be presented to the State Council for consideration at their meeting.

The State Council Agenda items requiring a decision of State Council are extracted for Zone consideration below.

9.1 SUSPENSION AND DISQUALIFICATION FOR OFFENCES ADVOCACY POSITION (STATE COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM 8.1)

By Jason Russell, Senior Governance Specialist

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The South East Metropolitan Zone (SEMZ) passed a motion requesting that WALGA advocate for additional powers for the Minister to suspend Council Members charged with criminal offences likely to damage the reputation of the Local Government, and disqualify if convicted.
- Suspension, dismissal and disqualification must balance the public interest in elected representatives of good character, with protections for the individual and respect for democratic processes.
- While the *Local Government Act 1995* (the Act) includes a range of suspension, dismissal and disqualification mechanisms, their operation also depends on how the relevant decision-makers choose to use their powers.
- This report recommends that the dismissal mechanisms under the Act are sufficient to address the Zone's concern, but that WALGA's advocacy position be amended to include an additional suspension power for the Minister of Local Government.
- The Governance Policy Team endorsed the advocacy position at its meeting on 19 May.

STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLICATIONS

Influence:

- Lead advocacy on issues important to Local Government.

Support:

- Provide practical sector-wide solutions based on research and evidence.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The current Advocacy Position 2.5.5 Disqualification Due to Conviction position provides as follows:

Position Statement: A new disqualification criterion should be added to the *Local Government Act 1995* that disqualifies a person from serving as an Elected Member if they have been convicted of an offence against the *Planning and Development Act*, or the *Building Act* in the preceding five years.

Background: A planning or building system conviction is potentially more serious than a *Local Government Act* conviction because of Local Government's prominent role in planning and building control and the significant personal benefits which can be illegally gained through these systems.

This report recommends that this position is renamed and amended to include an additional point 2, as follows:

Suspension and Disqualification for Offences

The WA Local Government sector advocates that:

1. *A new disqualification criterion should be added to the Local Government Act 1995 that disqualifies a person from serving as an Elected Member if they have been convicted of an offence against the Planning and Development Act, or the Building Act in the preceding five years.*
2. *A new suspension criterion should be added to the Local Government Act 1995 allowing the Minister of Local Government to suspend a Council Member charged with an offence, where the Minister is satisfied this would be in the best interests of the Local Government, based on advice of the Director General.*

BACKGROUND

At its November 2024 meeting, the SEMZ asked WALGA to advocate:

That the Local Government Act 1995 be amended to give the Minister for Local Government the power to:

1. *Disqualify a person from membership of a council if the person has been convicted of a criminal offence that, in the opinion of the Minister for Local Government, under the advice of the State Solicitor's Office, has the potential to damage the reputation of the local government or the local government sector more broadly.*
2. *Suspend the council member who is charged with a criminal offence that has the potential to damage the reputation of the local government or the local government sector more broadly, until the charges are dealt with; and*
3. *Require a person to be paid fees and allowances until they are disqualified.*

COMMENT

The *Local Government Act 1995* (the Act) automatically disqualifies someone from membership of a Council if convicted of certain types of offences. The Act also includes mechanisms for suspending and dismissing Council Members. Each mechanism differs in terms of the parties, processes, powers, and preconditions involved.

While suspended, a Council Member cannot perform any of the powers and duties of their role. Suspension does not affect the duration of a Council Member's term or their eligibility to be a candidate for election to Council. If a Council Member is dismissed, the office of the member becomes vacant from the time when the order dismissing the member takes effect. A Council Member that is dismissed is not prevented from standing in future elections. In contrast, persons disqualified are ineligible to hold or be elected to office as a Council Member.

It is necessary for these mechanisms to balance the public interest in ensuring that elected representatives are of good character, with protections for due process, the presumption of innocence and resumption of rights following completion of a sentence. There must also be an appropriate level of respect for the democratic process and the rights of communities to choose their representatives.

Whether the suspension, dismissal and disqualification framework is fit-for-purpose depends on the legislative framework (e.g. legislative settings for disqualification, powers and constraints on powers to suspend and dismiss) and its implementation (e.g. how decision-makers exercise their discretion to intervene).

Existing Disqualification Provisions

A person may be disqualified from membership of a Council based on the following provisions of the Act:

Provision	A person is disqualified –
2.20	If they are a member of a parliament
2.21	If they are a bankrupt or their affairs are under insolvency laws
2.22	Because of conviction
2.23	If they are a member of another Council
2.24	Because of misapplication of local government funds or property
5.117	If SAT orders disqualification (for not more than 5 years) for serious or recurrent breach, or failure to comply with order

Section 2.22 of the Act provides that a person is disqualified if:

- they have been convicted of a crime and are in prison serving a sentence for that crime,
- have been convicted of a serious local government offence in the previous 5 years, or
- have been convicted of an offence carrying an indictable penalty of imprisonment for more than 5 years.

Clearly, the threshold for disqualification is high, excluding all lower-level offences and even indictable offences with a penalty of 5 years or less. As an example, high-level indecent assault will be dealt with as an indictable offense, with the offender liable for up to 5 years imprisonment. Serious local government offences are offences against the Act for which a person may be sentenced to imprisonment or a fine of over \$10,000. A court sentencing a

person for a serious local government offence may make an order waiving the disqualification, or reducing the period for which it applies.

There is currently no ability for the Minister to disqualify a person from Council membership. SAT has discretion to order disqualification in some circumstances, while a court has the authority to order that disqualification not apply. In the context of these judicial or quasi-judicial processes, there are strong protections for the rights of the affected person. This reflects the seriousness of this penalty. While the SEMZ motion calls for disqualification, dismissal may be a more appropriate penalty if the exercise of Ministerial discretion is required.

Current Dismissal Provisions

Under sections 8.15K and 8.15L of the Act, the Minister may recommend that the Governor dismiss a Council Member, if the Minister is satisfied that it is appropriate to intervene. The Minister must be satisfied based on the Director General's written advice that:

- the member is impeding the Local Government's ability to perform its functions and duties under the Act, and/or
- it is in the best interest of the Local Government that the member be dismissed.

The Minister must also be satisfied that the seriousness of the situation for the Local Government requires intervention.

The Minister must give the member:

- a report that includes their proposed recommendation and grounds for the recommendation;
- a show cause notice;
- 21 days to respond.

The Minister must consider the member's response prior to making a recommendation to the Governor that the member be dismissed.

Best interest is not defined and allows for a broad range of factors to form the grounds for dismissal. This could include where a Council Member has been charged with or convicted of an offence, and the charges or conviction are adversely affecting the Local Government.

It appears that the existing framework for dismissal has the capacity to respond to circumstances referenced in the SEMZ's motion and rationale. WALGA considers it is reasonable to expect that the Local Government Inspector may have greater capacity to provide targeted and timely investigation and advice to support this mechanism.

Current Suspension Provisions

Section 8.15E of the Act enables the Minister to suspend a Council Member or order them to undertake remedial action.

The Minister can only act where they are satisfied that it is appropriate to intervene, based on one or more of the following:

- The member has been charged with a disqualification offence.
- The Director General has made an allegation to SAT against the member, of a serious or recurrent breach.
- The Director General has written to the Minister advising that they suspect on reasonable grounds that one or more of the following applies:
 - The member has failed to perform their role, functions or duties;

- The member's conduct has adversely affected the ability of another person to perform their role, functions or duties;
- The member's conduct has adversely affected the ability of the Local Government to comply with the principles that apply under section 5.40 of the Act (principles affecting employment by Local Government, including the responsibility to provide safe and healthy working conditions in accordance with WHS legislation).

The Minister must give:

- The member a written notice of the proposed order that provides the allegations and particulars supporting the proposed order is based on.
- The member a show cause notice, allowing 21 days for the member's response
- Any submissions made by the member consideration prior to making the order.

While suspended, a Council Member is not entitled to be paid any fee or allowance to which they would otherwise be entitled. A Council Member is liable to repay annual allowances and fees paid in advance, as if the member had, for the period of their suspension, ceased to hold the office.

Options for reform of suspension

The current system shares some common elements with the Zone's proposal, however, some changes could be made to bring them into closer alignment. Under the current framework, the Director General and Minister would need to be satisfied that any reputational damage resulting from charges was impeding the workings of the Local Government before they could move to suspend a Council Member.

Charges resulting in reputational damage could be included in the legislation as an explicit ground for which the Director General can recommend suspension to the Minister. However, reputational damage may be somewhat narrow or subjective.

A 'best interests' test, consistent with that provided in the dismissal mechanism (discussed above), could allow the consideration of a broad range of factors, including reputational damage. A mechanism could be introduced allowing the Minister to suspend a Council Member who is charged with an offence that, despite not being a disqualification offence, satisfies the Minister that it is in the best interests of the Local Government to suspend the member. Consistent with the other grounds for suspension, this could be on the advice of the Director General, as the State Solicitor's Office will be primarily concerned with avoiding prejudice to any matter currently before the courts.

Local Government Reform Amendments

The *Local Government (Amendment) Act 2024* will transfer the powers of the Director General under these provisions to the soon-to-be-established Local Government Inspector. The Inspector/Inspectorate model has been introduced to provide improved oversight and early interventions capability into the Local Government sector.

The Inspector will be able initiate inquiries into the affairs of a local government and recommend suspension and dismissal of Council Members. It is expected that this newly created office may have greater independence, timeliness, focus and flexibility in addressing conduct issues.

The Governance Policy Team considered and endorsed the proposed advocacy position at its meeting on 19 May.

WALGA RECOMMENDATION

1. That WALGA amend and rename advocacy position 2.5.5 *Disqualification Due to Conviction* to read as follows:

Suspension and Disqualification for Offences

The WA Local Government sector advocates that:

1. *A new disqualification criterion should be added to the Local Government Act 1995 that disqualifies a person from serving as an Elected Member if they have been convicted of an offence against the Planning and Development Act, or the Building Act in the preceding five years.*
 2. *A new suspension criterion should be added to the Local Government Act 1995 allowing the Minister of Local Government to suspend a Council Member charged with an offence, where the Minister is satisfied this would be in the best interests of the Local Government, based on advice of the Director General.*
2. That WALGA incorporate advocacy on this issue into its ongoing legislative reform engagement.

RESOLUTION

Moved: President Cr Tony Dean
Seconded: Cr Tresslyn Smith

That the South West Country Zone support the WALGA recommendation for State Council Agenda item 8.1 as contained in the State Council Agenda and as provided above.

CARRIED

9.2 STATE DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS AND DECISION MAKING ADVOCACY POSITION (STATE COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM 8.2)

By Coralie Claudio, Senior Policy Advisor Planning

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- It is proposed that Advocacy Position 6.4 Development Assessment Panels be replaced with a new, expanded position that includes all forms of State Government development assessment and decision making.
- The updated position incorporates principles for state decision making, a refined list of recommended reforms to the Development Assessment Panels (DAPs) system and recommends that the significant development pathway be abolished but includes a list of recommended reforms if the pathway is retained.
- The draft position was informed by WALGA's review of the operation of the DAPs and the state significant development pathways, input from Local Government officers, and previous WALGA submissions.
- The draft position and accompanying review reports were provided to Local Governments for Council endorsed or CEO approved preferred feedback by 23 May.
- The Environment Policy team endorsed the position at their meeting on 29 May.

ATTACHMENT

- [Rationale for draft advocacy position](#)

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

It is proposed State Council replace the **current** Advocacy Position **6.4 Development Assessment Panels**:

The Association does not support Development Assessment Panels (DAPs), in their current structure.

Necessary changes to the structure of the DAPs system include:

1. *The abolishment of the current 'mandatory' mechanism where a proposal has a value of \$10 million or greater, and its replacement with an 'opt in' mechanism for all proposals.*
2. *Raising the DAP threshold from the current \$2 million to \$5 million,*
3. *The composition of DAPs should be modified to provide equal representation of Specialist Members and Local Government Members.*
4. *The creation of a distinct Special Matters DAP (SMDAP) is not supported, given there are already multiple avenues for determination on the basis of zoning and monetary value of applications. Should the State Government progress with the implementation of a SMDAP, the following changes are proposed to the model released in March 2022:*
 - *allow proponents with proposals that meet the threshold or criteria being able to opt-out of the SMDAP pathway and allow assessment and determination by Local Government*
 - *mandate consultation with the relevant Local Governments prior to the issuing of a Ministerial Order in relation to SMDAP Precinct Criteria, and ensure SMDAP Precincts be identified through regulations, rather than by the Minister,*
 - *include greater professional planning expertise, and knowledge of local context through the Local Government members of the District DAP, by including majority professional town planner panel members, with two Local Government*
 - *representatives*

- *expand the role of Local Governments in SMDAP processes and appropriate remuneration for involvement of Local Governments be included to support the SMDAP decision-making process.*
5. *In principle, the further reduction in the number of panels from five to three is supported, to the extent that this reduces the administrative burden on local governments and enhances consistency of decision making.*
 6. *In principle, the permanent appointment of panel members where this results in consistent decision-making is supported as this reduces the potential for conflicts of interest and ensures sound knowledge of DAP processes and procedures.*
 7. *WALGA supports greater transparency around DAP processes and decisions, as community distrust of DAP decision-making is a key area of concern for many local governments.*

with a **new** advocacy position **6.4 State Development Applications and Decision Making Advocacy Position:**

WALGA calls on the State Government to:

1. *Ensure that decision making on development applications (DAs) is:*
 - a. *consistent and accountable*
 - b. *accessible to local communities*
 - c. *respectful of, and appropriately applies, local planning frameworks in line with their statutory weight.*
2. *Reform the Development Assessment Panel (DAP) system to:*
 - a. *raise the DAP threshold from the current \$2 million to \$5 million and mandate periodic reviews of the threshold*
 - b. *modify the composition of DAPs to provide equal representation of Specialist Members and Local Government Members*
 - c. *review DAP processes to ensure proponents provide necessary information in a timely manner*
 - d. *provide clear procedural guidance on the roles and functions of Local Government officers and Council*
 - e. *allow access to the State Referral Coordination Unit for DAP applications to ensure timely and adequate referral responses from State Government agencies are provided to Local Governments.*
3. *Abolish the state significant development assessment pathway (Part 11B of the Planning and Development Act 2005).*
4. *If the significant development assessment pathway is retained, implement the following reforms:*
 - a. *raise the cost threshold to \$50 million and mandate periodic reviews of the threshold*
 - b. *align statutory timeframes with DAP and Local Government determined DAs*
 - c. *ensure all developments are consistent with applicable local planning instruments and provide comprehensive guidelines for discretionary decision making, including applying extraordinary discretion*
 - d. *delete references to 'mandatory significant development' to ensure the pathway remains entirely opt-in*
 - e. *undertake periodic reviews of its operation and effectiveness.*

BACKGROUND

There are a range of development application (DAs) decision makers in the Western Australian Planning system. While Local Governments process and determine the vast majority of DAs, other State Government boards or agencies are also decision makers, particularly for complex proposals and public works. This includes DAPs, the Western Australian Planning Commission (WAPC) and other State Government agencies (i.e. DevelopmentWA) that determine DAs such as DAPs, significant development applications (Part 17 and Part 11B of the *Planning Development Act 2005*) and developments under region schemes, redevelopment schemes and improvement schemes and public works.

WALGA has historically opposed DAPs and the significant development pathway as they erode the role of Local Government in providing a valuable community perspective on planning proposals.

WALGA has undertaken two reviews of the performance of the DAP system in [2016](#) and [2020](#). Those reviews informed WALGA's current advocacy position, endorsed in May 2022, that recommends changes to the DAP system to ensure it operates in an efficient, effective, and transparent way, and appropriately considers matters of local planning context in decision-making.

The current position is being reviewed as part of WALGA's regular position review process and in recognition of significant planning reforms in 2024, specifically the replacement of the proposed special matters DAP with the permanent significant development pathway (Part 11B).

To inform the review of the DAP position and its ongoing advocacy, WALGA collated and reviewed data on the operation of the DAPs and the significant development pathway.

The [DAP Report](#) examines DAP data from its inception in 2011 to the end of the 2023-24 financial year, with a focus on observable trends since the previous report in 2020. The report indicates minor improvements in the DAP system, particularly in reliability and consistent decision making. Despite this, the DAP system continues to determine many low-value applications that lack strategic importance and should be redirected to the Local Government pathway.

The [Significant Development Pathway Report](#) examines data from the pathway's commencement in 2020 until 1 April 2025. The report finds that this pathway is used infrequently and does not process applications efficiently, contrary to its intended purpose and that the pathway's other goals, driving economic recovery (Part 17) and aiding housing supply (Part 11B), have also not been met.

The collated data will be uploaded to the [DAP Dashboard](#) on WALGA's website.

WALGA has drafted a revised advocacy position that will sit within the context of the Planning Principles and Reform advocacy position and will expand on the DAP position to:

1. Be applicable to all State Government DAs and approvals (e.g. significant development pathway, DAPs, Public Works, region scheme approvals, Development WA).
2. Establish principles to guide transparent and accountable decision-making on development applications, ensuring that local planning frameworks are appropriately considered, and communities, particularly in regional areas, are granted equitable access to the decision-making process.

3. Include a refined list of reforms to the DAP system, while retaining the position to increase the DAP threshold and for equal representation of Specialist Members and Local Government Members.
4. Include a recommendation that the significant development pathway be abolished based on the findings of the significant development pathway report, and includes a list of reforms if the pathway is to be retained to ensure it operates more efficiently and only processes genuine state significant projects.

The draft position and accompanying review reports were provided to Local Governments for Council endorsed or CEO preferred feedback by 23 May.

COMMENT

The current DAP advocacy position is outdated and does not reflect the current planning framework, specifically the introduction of the permanent significant development pathway (Part 11B of the *Planning and Development Act 2005*).

The proposed new advocacy position will complement WALGA's planning advocacy position, 6.1 Planning Principles and Reform, that notes decisions should be made by the level of government closest to and most impacted by a planning proposal and should appropriately reflect local environment, context, communities and character.

The proposed advocacy position has been informed by feedback from CEO approved and Council endorsed submissions, Local Government officer input and WALGA's previous submissions, specifically on DAP reforms and amendments to the *Planning and Development Act 2005* that introduced the significant development pathway.

Some minor amendments were made to the draft position in response to members' feedback, particularly regarding the recommendations for the state significant development pathway.

Local Government feedback was that the pathway was not functioning effectively in its current form. While some Local Governments advocated for its abolition, others considered that there may be benefits if the pathway was limited to genuine state-significant projects only and operated more efficiently. The draft position calls for the reforms to the pathway and for it to be subject to periodic review if retained.

Further information on the rationale for the position and feedback provided is attached.

The Environment Policy agreed to recommend that State Council endorse the new expanded position at their meeting on 29 May.

WALGA RECOMMENDATION

That WALGA:

1. Replace Advocacy Position 6.4 Development Assessment Panels with the following:

6.4 State Development Applications and Decision Making

WALGA calls on the State Government to:

1. *Ensure that decision making on development applications (DAs) is:*
 - a. *consistent and accountable*
 - b. *accessible to local communities*
 - c. *respectful of, and appropriately applies, local planning frameworks in line with their statutory weight.*
 2. *Reform the Development Assessment Panel (DAP) system to:*
 - a. *raise the DAP threshold from the current \$2 million to \$5 million and mandate periodic reviews of the threshold*
 - b. *modify the composition of DAPs to provide equal representation of Specialist Members and Local Government Members*
 - c. *review DAP processes to ensure proponents provide necessary information in a timely manner*
 - d. *provide clear procedural guidance on the roles and functions of Local Government officers and Council*
 - e. *allow access to the State Referral Coordination Unit for DAP applications to ensure timely and adequate referral responses from State Government agencies are provided to Local Governments.*
 3. *Abolish the state significant development assessment pathway (Part 11B of the Planning and Development Act 2005).*
 4. *If the significant development assessment pathway is retained, implement the following reforms:*
 - a. *raise the cost threshold to \$50 million and mandate periodic reviews of the threshold*
 - b. *align statutory timeframes with DAP and Local Government determined DAs*
 - c. *ensure all developments are consistent with applicable local planning instruments and provide comprehensive guidelines for discretionary decision making, including applying extraordinary discretion*
 - d. *delete references to 'mandatory significant development' to ensure the pathway remains entirely opt-in*
 - e. *undertake periodic reviews of its operation and effectiveness.*
2. Notes the Development Assessment Panel 2011 – 2024 Review and State Development Pathway 2020 – 2025 Review reports.

RESOLUTION

Moved: Cr Ian Earl

Seconded: President Cr Richard Walker

That the South West Country Zone support the WALGA recommendation for State Council Agenda item 8.2 as contained in the State Council Agenda and as provided above.

CARRIED

9.3 PUBLIC LIBRARY AGREEMENT (STATE COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM 8.3)

By Rebecca Hicks, Policy Officer Community

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- WALGA is a signatory to the *State and Local Government Agreement for the Provision of Public Library Services in Western Australia* (the Agreement).
- The five-year Agreement defines roles and responsibilities in the delivery of public libraries and provides the structure and framework for the delivery of the WA Public Libraries Strategy and future vision for public library services.
- The current Agreement, endorsed by State Council in July 2020, is due for renewal in September 2025.
- WALGA has participated in the review of the Agreement, which has recommended minor amendments.
- Following the signing of a new Agreement, a sector consultation process will be undertaken for the associated Local Level Agreements between the State Library and Local Governments.
- The Agreement does not include funding arrangements for public libraries. WALGA continues to advocate for increased public library funding.

ATTACHMENT

- [State and Local Level Agreement for the Provision of Public Library Services in Western Australia 2025 – 2030](#)

STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLICATIONS

Endorsing the Agreement aligns with WALGA's 2025-2029 Strategic Plan, particularly:

- Influence – Lead advocacy on issues important to Local Government and empower the Local Government sector to build communities equipped for the future.
- Support – Grow opportunities for Local Governments' sharing of services and resources.
- Expertise – Optimise organisational capability to service members' needs and foster relationships between our subject matter experts and stakeholders.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Endorsement of the new Agreement aligns with WALGA's current [Advocacy Position 3.8 Public Libraries](#), which states:

1. *Western Australian Local Government public libraries provide valuable local cultural infrastructure, creating social and community hubs for community capacity building, recreation, education and literacy, digital inclusion, and social connection, cohesion and inclusion.*

2. *WALGA supports the provision of Public Library services in Western Australia through a formal partnership between Local Government and the State Government of Western Australia, governed by the Library Board Act 1951, namely the State and Local Government Agreement for the Provision of Public Library Services in Western Australia (2020).*
3. *The WA Public Libraries Strategy 2022-2026 provides a framework for a shared vision, strategic direction and collaborative action in the provision of a vibrant and sustainable 21st century public library network.*
4. *It is essential that a sustainable funding model enables Local Governments to continue to deliver library services to support continued growth and adaptation to changing community needs.*

BACKGROUND

WALGA is a signatory to the *State and Local Government Agreement for the Provision of Public Library Services in Western Australia* (the Agreement), which is due for renewal in September 2025. The Agreement defines the roles and responsibilities for each tier of government in the delivery of public libraries and provides the structure and framework for the delivery of the [WA Public Libraries Strategy 2022-2026](#) and the future vision for public library services.

Following internal endorsement from signatories, the current Agreement received final endorsement in September 2020 by the Public Library Working Group (PLWG), which includes: WALGA, the State Library of Western Australia (SLWA), the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSC), Public Libraries WA Inc. and Local Government Professionals Australia WA. The same process will be undertaken for this renewal.

Connected to the Agreement are Local Level Agreements between the SLWA and individual Local Governments that provide public library services. Local Level Agreements set out more detailed public library service delivery requirements and will be reviewed in early 2026, including sector consultation.

COMMENT

WALGA has worked with SLWA to review the Agreement to meet the September 2025 renewal date. Amendments are minor and do not raise any issues for WALGA Members.

The scope of the Agreement does not extend to public library funding. SLWA is currently reviewing the Public Library Material Funding Allocation Model. WALGA and Local Governments will be consulted as part of the review.

State Government funding has failed to keep pace with the needs of public libraries, population growth or inflation. WALGA continues to [advocate](#) for increased overall funding for public libraries to maintain and enhance service levels that meet the diverse needs of communities across WA and support the implementation of the WA Public Library Strategy.

Following the renewal of the Agreement, WALGA will work with SLWA to develop a sector-wide consultation plan for the review of Local Level Agreements.

WALGA RECOMMENDATION

That State Council endorse the *State and Local Level Agreement for the Provision of Public Library Services in Western Australia*.

RESOLUTION

Moved: Cr Steve Miolin

Seconded: President Cr Michelle Campbell

That the South West Country Zone support the WALGA recommendation for State Council Agenda item 8.3 as contained in the State Council Agenda and as provided above.

CARRIED

9.4 OTHER STATE COUNCIL AGENDA ITEMS

Zone Delegates were invited to raise for discussion, questions or decision any of the items in the State Council Agenda, including the items for noting, Policy Team and Committee Reports or the Key Activity Reports.

10 OTHER BUSINESS

Nil.

11 EXECUTIVE REPORTS

11.1 WALGA PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Mr Chris Hossen, Zone Executive Officer provided a brief update to the Zone on behalf of the WALGA President. The report was provided as an attachment to the Agenda.

Noted

11.2 WALGA STATE COUNCILLOR REPORT

President Cr Tony Dean, State Councillor presented on the previous State Council meeting.

Noted

12 FINANCIAL REPORT

12.1 SOUTH WEST COUNTRY ZONE FINANCIAL REPORT

Period Ending May 2025 Report		
	Actual \$	Comments
Opening Cash Balance	26,501	
Income		
Subscription Income	6,770	
Total Income	6,770	
Expenses		
Bank Charges	230	
Meeting expenses		
Sponsorship	10,000	IFF Sponsorship
Plaques	-	
Total Expenses	10,230	
Closing Cash Balance	23,041	

RESOLUTION

Moved: President Cr Richard Walker
Seconded: President Cr Michelle Campbell

That the South West Country Zone financial report for June 2025 be received.

CARRIED

13 EMERGING ISSUES

Nil.

14 2025 MEETING DATES AND LOCATIONS

Meeting dates for 2025 are listed below. Please note if any changes need to be made.

MEETING DATE	HOST LOCAL GOVERNMENT
Friday, 21 February 2025	August-Margaret River
Thursday, 24 April 2025	Nannup
Friday, 23 June 2025	Boyup Brook
Friday, 22 August 2025	Bridgetown-Greenbushes
Friday, 21 November 2025	Bunbury

15 NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the South West Country Zone will be held on Friday, 22 August 2025 at the Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes commencing at 9:00am.

16 CLOSURE

There being no further business the Chair declared the meeting closed at 10:51am.