

# **South West Country Zone Minutes**

## **20 February 2026**

**Hosted by the City of Busselton  
2 Southern Drive, Busselton**

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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.

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

Prospect of negative consequences for WALGA for not undertaking the advocacy effort. E.g. diminished standing among members or other stakeholders.			
<b>Partnerships</b> 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. Department of Local Government, Industry Regulation and Safety Update Report
3. Zone Status Report
4. President's Report

## 1 OPENING, ATTENDANCE AND APOLOGIES

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### 1.1 OPENING

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*Zone Chair, President Cr Donnelle Buegge, opened the meeting at 9:07am.*

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### 1.2 ATTENDANCE

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<b>MEMBERS</b>	<b>1 Voting Delegate from each Member Local Government</b>
Shire of August Margaret River	President Cr Julia Jean-Rice
Shire of Boyup Brook	President Cr Helen O'Connell Mr Leonard Long, Chief Executive Officer, non-voting
Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes	President Cr Stephen Carstairs Mr Garry Adams, Chief Executive Officer, non-voting
City of Bunbury	Mayor Jaysen De San Miguel Mr Alan Ferris, Chief Executive Officer, non-voting
City of Busselton	Mayor Phill Cronin Dr Garry Hunt PSM, Chief Executive Officer (Temporary), non-voting
Shire of Capel	President Cr John Fergusson

	Cr Rosina Mogg (observer) Mr Gary Clark, Chief Executive Officer (Temporary), non-voting
Shire of Collie	Cr Joe Italiano Mr Phil Anastasakis, Chief Executive Officer, non-voting
Shire of Dardanup	President Cr Tyrrell Gardiner Mr André Schönfeldt, Chief Executive Officer, non- voting
Shire of Donnybrook Balingup	Mr Nick O'Connor, Chief Executive Officer, non-voting
Shire of Harvey	President Cr Michelle Campbell Ms Annie Riordan, Chief Executive Officer, non-voting
Shire of Manjimup	President Cr Donnelle Buegge ( <b>Chair</b> ) Mr Ben Rose, Chief Executive Officer, non-voting
Shire of Nannup	Cr Vicki Hansen (Deputy) Mr David Taylor, Chief Executive Officer, non-voting
WALGA Secretariat	President Cr Karen Chappel AM JP, WALGA President Cr Paul Kelly, WALGA Deputy President Ms Felicity Morris, Manager Governance and Procurement Ms Coralie Claudio, Acting Policy Manager Planning and Building Ms Fern Brookes, Grant Project Coordinator
<b>Invited Guests</b>	
RDA South West	Mr Charles Jenkinson, Director Regional Development
Australia's South West	Ms Catrin Pickworth, Chief Executive Officer Dr Lenore Lyons, Chair
<b>Presentations</b>	
Tesltra	Mr Boyd Brown
WA Police	Superintendent Paul Van Noort

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### 1.3 APOLOGIES

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Shire of Augusta Margaret River	Ms Andrea Selvey, Chief Executive Officer
Shire of Donnybrook Balingup	President Cr Vivienne McCarthy
Shire of Collie	President Cr Ian Miffing
Shire of Nannup	President Cr Tony Dean
South West Development Commission	Ms Cate Brooks, Chief Executive Officer
Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations	Mr Matt Beahan, Regional Workforce Transition Officer

### 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

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#### 4.1 CITY OF BUSSELTON

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*Mayor Phill Cronin and Mr Garry Hunt, Chief Executive Officer*

City of Busselton Mayor Phill Cronin and CEO Mr Garry Hunt provided an update to the Zone on current priorities and key projects.

**Noted**

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#### 4.2 TELSTRA UPDATE

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Mr Boyd Brown provided an update to the Zone on the South West telecommunications issues raised in 2025.

**Noted**

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### 4.3 WA POLICE – SOUTH WEST REGION

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Superintendent Paul Van Noort provided the Zone with updates on the Crime Statistics in relation to the South West region.

Noted

## 5 AGENCY REPORTS

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### 5.1 REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUSTRALIA – SOUTH WEST

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

Noted

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### 5.2 DEPARTMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT, INDUSTRY REGULATION AND SAFETY UPDATE REPORT

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The February 2026 report from the Department of Local Government, Industry Regulation and Safety (DLGIRS) was provided as an attachment within the Agenda.

Noted

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### 5.3 AUSTRALIA'S SOUTH WEST

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Chief Executive Officer at Australia's South West Chairperson, Dr Lenore Lyons, provided a brief update to the Zone.

Noted

## 6 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

The Minutes of the South West Country Zone meeting held on 21 November 2025 have previously been circulated to Member Councils and were provided as an attachment to the Agenda.

### RESOLUTION

**Moved:** President Cr Julia Jean-Rice  
**Seconded:** Mayor Phill Cronin

**That the Minutes of the meeting of the South West Country Zone held on 21 November 2025 be confirmed as a true and accurate record of the proceedings.**

**CARRIED**

## 7 BUSINESS ARISING

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### 7.1 STATUS REPORT

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*By Chantelle O'Brien, Zone Executive Officer*

A Status Report outlining the actions taken on the Zone's resolutions was enclosed as an attachment within the Agenda.

Noted

## 8 ZONE BUSINESS

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### 8.1 SOUTH WEST DAMA UPDATE

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*By Shire of Dardanup*

#### BACKGROUND

The South-West DAMA was executed in December 2021 as an agreement between the Commonwealth and the Shire of Dardanup, covering the 12 local government areas of the South-West.

In November 2025, we were advised by the Department of Home Affairs that the South West DAMA will not be renewed at the end of its five-year term and will instead be incorporated into the WA DAMA, to be administered by the Department of Training and Workforce Development. (Attachment A)

While we support extending the DAMA framework to regions not currently served, we are concerned that the local experience, support, and business relationships that have proven central to the success of the South-West DAMA may be diminished under a centralised model.

The Shire of Dardanup has therefore written to Minister Sanderson (Attachment B) requesting the establishment of a dedicated South-West representative within the WA DAMA structure that would be funded by charging an application fee like that of the current South West DAMA model.

We believe this solution balances the benefits of statewide coordination with the essential local expertise required to support South-West employers effectively.

#### RESOLUTION

**Moved:** Cr Tyrrell Gardiner  
**Seconded:** President Cr Julia Jean-Rice

**That the South West Country Zone requests WALGA to lobby the State Government to provide adequate resources to WA DAMA including regional DAMA Officers to support the regions within which regional DAMAs exists currently including:**

- 1. The South West,**
- 2. Kalgoorlie – Goldfields**
- 3. Pilbara; and**
- 4. Kimberley.**

**CARRIED**

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## 8.2 BUSH FIRE BRIGADE MANAGEMENT – REQUEST FOR UPDATE ON WALGA ADVOCACY POSITION 8.10

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*By City of Busselton*

### BACKGROUND

The City of Busselton has operated Bush Fire Brigades (BFBs) for over half a century, with the authority to establish and maintain brigades legislated under the *Bush Fires Act 1954*. The City currently oversees 13 BFBs (with over 400 volunteer members), governed through the *City of Busselton Bush Fire Brigade Local Law*, which came into operation on 14 November 2023. This replaced a simplistic 1968 local law and various policies, providing a more contemporary framework for brigade management.

Under this Local Law, the City adopted *Bush Fire Operating Procedures (BFOP)* at its Ordinary Council Meeting on 18 September 2024. These procedures formalise governance, operational, and strategic aspects of brigade management, including:

- Minimum training standards for brigade roles;
- Equipment maintenance and replacement programs;
- PPE guidelines for volunteers;
- Membership application processes including medical declarations.

Despite these efforts, recent medical incidents on the fireground have highlighted gaps in clarity and consistency, particularly around fitness-for-duty assessments, communication protocols, and post-incident support. A motion from the Sussex Bush Fire Brigade, supported at the BFAC meeting on 2 September 2025, called for further development of operating procedures to address:

- Fitness-for-duty checks and medical declaration assessments;
- Defined WHS roles and responsibilities;
- Clear communication protocols during and post-incident;
- Insurance and medical support pathways for volunteers.

These challenges are not unique to Busselton. Many Local Governments across Western Australia face similar issues in managing BFBs, particularly in relation to:

- Work Health and Safety obligations under the *WHS Act 2020*, which classifies volunteers as “workers” and imposes significant duty-of-care responsibilities;
- Lack of minimum standards at the state level for brigade governance, training, and equipment;
- Insurance complexities, as volunteers are not covered under the *Workers’ Compensation and Injury Management Act 2023*, requiring reliance on LGIS Personal Accident and Bush Fire Injury policies;
- Operational risk and liability exposure, especially in regional areas with limited resources and increasing bushfire activity.

WALGA Advocacy Position 8.10 recognises these sector-wide challenges and calls for:

1. A framework to enable voluntary transfer of BFBs to the State Government;
2. Co-designed management guidelines and materials;
3. A universally accessible training program;
4. Consideration of an independent Rural Fire Service and review of funding and operational models.

The City of Busselton supports this position and at its Ordinary Council Meeting on 8 October 2025, resolved to formally seek clarity on its progression, noting that reform is essential not only for Busselton but for all Local Governments managing Bush Fire Brigades under increasingly complex conditions.

## SECRETARIAT COMMENT

WALGA regularly engages with State Government in relation to Advocacy Position 8.10, through our membership to committees including the State Emergency Management Committee, State Bushfire Advisory Committee, Interagency Bushfire Operations Committee and Bushfire Operations Committee and other networks. WALGA President met with the Emergency Management Minister in February to discuss WALGA's State Budget Submission.

The WALGA [2026-27 State Budget submission](#) advocates for Reform the Local Government Grant Scheme (LGGs) to ensure a sustainable and equitable funding model that meets the future needs of bushfire response and, in the interim, to boost to Emergency Services Funding through the Local Government Grants Scheme (LGGs).

- \$42.3M is needed 2026-27 to clear the backlog of unfunded capital grant requests for VBFs and SES units.
- \$10M per year minimum allocation within LGGs for new Local Government capital grant requests (currently availability for new requests is as little as \$1.5M pa)
- \$2.8M per year additional operating grants from 2026-27 to meet rising costs and safety requirements for VBFs.

Considering the Consolidated Emergency Services Legislation, DFES has advised that:

- work on the development of an Emergency Services Exposure Draft Bill is ongoing, that the drafting process is legally technical, time-intensive and the practical considerations are complex.
- DFES is investing time and effort to produce new legislation that is fit-for-purpose for the many stakeholders involved in emergency management.
- Once finalised, the Exposure Draft Bill will be released for public comment. Until then, targeted consultation may be undertaken by DFES on discrete matters.

WALGA has not received an update on expected timing for release of a consultation draft and will continue to advocate for involvement of the sector in scoping and co-design of the legislation. WALGA participates in cabinet in confidence consultations on the CES Act through the State Bushfire Advisory Committee and Bushfire Operations Committee. Through these forums we continue to advocate for a mechanism to establish a voluntary transfer framework for Bush Fire Brigades and to ensure adequate funding and a sustainable future operational model of management of Bush Fire Brigades including consideration of an independent Rural Fire Service model.

The revised [State Hazard Plan Fire](#) (2025) introduced minimum training standards for Bush Fire Brigades, supported by WALGA's submission. WALGA continues to work with DFES and through membership to committees such as the Interagency Bushfire Operations Committee, Bushfire Operations Committee and the Volunteer Bush Fire Service Training Advisory Group towards co-designed training and brigade management materials. We anticipate that DFES may release guidance on adoption of DFES doctrine by Local Government in 2026.

WALGA's submission to the Statutory Review of the Work Health and Safety Act 2020 included recommendations to:

- Provide greater legislative clarity on PCBU responsibilities during bushfire response
- Implement a contemporary legislative and policy framework for bushfire management that addresses work health and safety concerns for VBFs and provides certainty on what "reasonably practicable" means under the WHS Act, as applied to VBFs, and how it should be achieved.

## **RESOLUTION**

**Moved: Mayor Phill Cronin**

**Seconded: President Michelle Campbell**

**That the South West Country Zone requests WALGA to provide an update on the progression of Advocacy Position 8.10 – Management of Bushfire Brigades, including:**

- 1. Engagement undertaken with the State Government and DFES;**
- 2. Progress on the development of the Consolidated Emergency Services Act and/or other mechanism to establish the transfer framework for Bush Fire Brigades to the State Government;**
- 3. Status of the proposed co-designed training and management materials;**
- 4. Update on the review of funding and future operational model of management of Bush Fire Brigades including consideration of an independent Rural Fire Service model; and**
- 5. Timeline for sector consultation and legislative reform.**

**CARRIED**

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## **8.3 ADVOCACY FOR ELECTRONIC VOTING FEASIBILITY**

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*By Shire of Harvey*

### **BACKGROUND**

At the Ordinary Council Meeting held on Tuesday, 16 December 2025, The Shire of Harvey Council considered a Notice of Motion submitted by Cr Carbone proposing that the Shire of Harvey request the Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA), through the South West Zone, to advocate to the Western Australian Electoral Commission (WAEC) Expert Advisory Committee and the Department of Local Government, Industry Regulation and Safety to explore the feasibility of introducing electronic voting for Local Government elections in Western Australia.

Council identified several challenges associated with the current postal voting system, including low voter turnout, delayed results, and increasing operational costs. Additionally, concerns were raised that declining voter participation may undermine community confidence in the representativeness of Local Government elections. Council also noted that preferential voting and high-visibility campaigns may unintentionally favour candidates with greater resources, potentially impacting candidate diversity.

The Officer Comment presented to Council emphasised the complexity of transitioning to electronic voting, noting previously identified WAEC considerations including legislative barriers, cybersecurity requirements, equitable access, cost implications, and operational feasibility. Despite these challenges, Council acknowledged that advancements in secure digital technology could offer improved accessibility, transparency, and election efficiency.

Following debate, Council resolved unanimously (9–0) under Resolution 25/272 to:

1. Request WALGA, through the South West Zone, to advocate to the WAEC Expert Advisory Committee and the Department of Local Government, Industry Regulation and Safety to explore the feasibility of electronic voting for Local Government elections in Western Australia.
2. Authorise the Chief Executive Officer to liaise with the Executive Officer of the WALGA South West Zone to include this matter on the next meeting agenda for consideration by member councils.

## SECRETARIAT COMMENT

WALGA currently has the following Advocacy Position 2.5.16 Elections:

*The Local Government sector supports:*

1. *Councillors serve four-year terms with elections every two years and half of the Council positions spilled at each election.*
2. *First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) voting system for Local Government elections. If Optional Preferential Voting (OPV) remains as the primary method of voting, the sector supports the removal of the 'proportional' part of the voting method for general elections.*
3. *First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) voting system for internal Council elections.*
4. ***Councils holding elections by means of in-person, postal and/or electronic voting.***
5. *Current legislative provisions of Mayor/President of Class 1 and Class 2 Local Governments being directly elected by the community and Class 3 and Class 4 Local Governments determining whether its Mayor or President is elected by the Council or by the community.*

Currently, electronic voting is very limited at any tier of government in Australia, and is generally limited to assisted voting, which supports eligible electors who are unable to vote using traditional methods without help.

However, New South Wales (NSW) provides an example of a jurisdiction where non-paper ballot voting has previously been implemented.

Technology Assisted Voting (TAV), named iVote, was introduced by the NSW Electoral Commission for the 2011 State general election. Local Government elections in 2021 used iVote, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A review of TAV by the NSW Electoral Commissioner commenced in 2022, with a final report published in November 2023: [Technology assisted voting – Paper 3: Final review report](#). The report provides an assessment of the issues associated with non-paper ballot voting and is informative to considering future voting options.

In a brief summary the report concluded the following:

- *“that there is no sound basis on which to contemplate a large-scale program of TAV in New South Wales in the short term. The systems to control risks to electoral integrity from the broad use of TAV – particularly internet voting – are not sufficiently mature or proven to an acceptable standard. The existing paper ballot voting system is more secure and better understood and trusted by electors. It should continue to be offered as the primary voting channel”.*
- *“There is a compelling case for Australian federal, state and territory jurisdictions to jointly consider whether any forms of TAV can and should be offered at scale on a*

*common national election platform, in place of individual jurisdictions developing their own separate systems”*

## **RESOLUTION**

**Moved: President Cr Michelle Campbell**

**Seconded: Cr Vicki Hansen**

**That the South West Country Zone support the Shire of Harvey’s request that WALGA advocate to the Western Australian Electoral Commission Expert Advisory Committee and the Department of Local Government, Industry Regulation and Safety to explore the feasibility of introducing electronic voting for Local Government elections in Western Australia.**

**CARRIED**

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### **8.4 2026 LOCAL GOVERNMENT HONOURS AWARDS**

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*By Kathy Robertson, WALGA Manager Association and Corporate Governance*

The Honours Program recognises and celebrates the outstanding achievements and lasting contributions made by Elected Members and officers to their respective Local Government, the Local Government sector, WALGA and the wider community.

There are five awards in the 2026 Program:

1. Local Government Medal
2. Life Membership
3. Eminent Service Award
4. Merit Award
5. Young Achievers Award

All Local Government Elected Members and officers are eligible for nomination for each award.

Nominations are open now and will close at **5:00pm on Thursday, 2 April 2026.**

Further information about the 2026 Honours Program, including the nomination form and guidelines for preparing nominations, are available on the [WALGA website](#).

All awards will be presented later this year at the WALGA Local Government Awards event. More details about the event will be announced shortly.

For more information contact Habiba Farrag, State Council Governance Officer, on 9213 2050 or via email [honours@walga.asn.au](mailto:honours@walga.asn.au).

**Noted**

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## 8.5 WATER MANAGEMENT DISCUSSION PAPER UPDATE

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*By Rebecca Brown, WALGA Policy Manager Environment and Waste*

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- WALGA has developed a Water Management in Western Australia Discussion Paper exploring issues for Local Governments in managing water resources.
- To inform the Discussion Paper, WALGA undertook research and direct engagement with the sector and reviewed existing Water Advocacy Positions and feedback from WALGA Zones.
- Based on this consultation, the Discussion Paper identifies water security and water efficiency as key themes.
- Feedback on the Discussion Paper will inform the development of a new water management advocacy position.
- Zones and Local Governments are encouraged to provide comments to WALGA by 12 March 2026.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This item relates to [WALGA Advocacy Positions](#) 3.1.1 Service Delivery to Aboriginal Communities, 4.3 Clearing Permits and Water Licenses and Permits, 6.10 Public Open Space (POS) and 6.14 Planning for Water.

### ATTACHMENT

- [Water Management in Western Australia Discussion Paper](#)

### BACKGROUND

Local Governments contribute to the management of water through strategic planning, land management, development approvals, community behaviour change and, in some cases, direct water service provision. Local Governments' role in water service provision includes drainage, water use and re-use and aspects of wastewater and sewerage services. The challenges for future water management are escalating across Western Australia due to population growth, climate change and increased competition for limited water resources.

To inform the Discussion Paper WALGA reviewed its existing Water Advocacy Positions and motions, feedback from WALGA Zones and undertook research and direct consultation with the sector. Consultation included workshops with both metropolitan and non-metropolitan Local Governments, an online session with 40 officers focused on water security and efficiency and a regionally focused session with 30 Local Government representatives exploring the barriers to being waterwise in a regional setting. In addition, WALGA conducted 14 one-on-one interviews with officers from 22 metropolitan, regional and remote Local Governments to better understand key issues. Further insights were gained through meetings with officers from the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation and the Water Corporation, as well as internal discussions with WALGA.

### COMMENT

From consultation and research WALGA has undertaken with Local Government, two key themes consistently emerged - water security and water efficiency.

Water security relates to the reliable availability, adequate quantity and acceptable quality of water needed to support human health, economic development and environmental amenity. Issues identified include:

- Infrastructure: Funding to repair and upgrade aging Local Government water infrastructure including irrigation, drainage and stormwater systems and to improve reliability of State-managed assets.
- Alternative Sources: Diversifying water supply through non-traditional sources such as recycled water, stormwater harvesting, or desalination to support community assets.
- Licensing: Reforming the current water licensing system, including equity, access and regulatory enforcement.
- Access: Addressing barriers to equitable water access, particularly for regional and remote communities.
- Use: Planning for water allocation and consumption across sectors.

Water efficiency is focused on reducing unnecessary water loss through better practices, technologies and infrastructure. Issues identified include:

- Technology: Adopting waterwise technologies to enhance water efficiency.
- Water Literacy and behaviour change: Increasing water literacy within Local Government and the community to support change management and adaptation within communities.
- Water Sensitive Urban Design: Improving understanding to encourage the adoption of efficient technologies and design standards to reduce water consumption across public and private infrastructure.

Local Governments across Western Australia are addressing water security and efficiency through various actions across strategic infrastructure planning, innovative water management practices and community awareness. A new Water Management Advocacy Position will ensure WALGA can effectively advocate on behalf of the sector in relation to this issue. The Discussion Paper includes options to address these issues and questions for the sector relating to each of the key areas.

Feedback on the Discussion Paper will inform the development of a new water management advocacy position. All Zones and Local Governments are encouraged to provide comments to WALGA by 12 March 2026.

**Noted**

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## **8.6 CONSULTATION ON DRAFT CLIMATE CHANGE ADVOCACY POSITION**

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*By Rebecca Brown, WALGA Policy Manager Environment and Waste*

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- WALGA is undertaking consultation on a revised Climate Change Advocacy Position.
- This Draft was developed following initial consultation, consideration by State Council in March 2025 and feedback from the Environment Policy Team of State Council.
- Since WALGA's current Advocacy Position and Policy Statement were endorsed in 2018, there have been significant legislative, policy, technological and scientific changes.
- An updated climate change advocacy position, which complements other WALGA advocacy positions, will provide a sound basis for WALGA's advocacy.
- WALGA is seeking Council endorsed feedback by 1 May 2026.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

This item is intended to replace WALGA's 2018 Climate Change [Advocacy Position](#) and [Policy Statement](#).

## **ATTACHMENT**

The Consultation Paper is available [online](#).

## **BACKGROUND**

Climate change, and related legislation, policy and action, have implications for many aspects of Local Governments' operations and services. More frequent and severe droughts, heatwaves, bushfires, extreme rainfall events and warming, rising sea levels are increasing the costs and complexity of delivering critical services, infrastructure and ensuring community wellbeing.

In 2018, State Council endorsed a [Climate Change Policy Statement](#) and advocacy position, following extensive sector consultation. Since this Advocacy Position was adopted there have been significant legislative, policy, technological and scientific changes, including:

- The national *Climate Change Act 2022* and the Western Australian Climate Change Bill 2023.
- The *Local Government Amendment Act 2023*, which expanded Western Australian Local Governments' general function to include planning for, and mitigating, the risks associated with climate change.
- The release of the Australian Government's [National Climate Risk Assessment](#) and [National Adaptation Plan](#) in 2025.
- Escalation of the transition to renewable energy, uptake of electric vehicles and energy efficiency standards under the National Construction Code.
- Climate science and projections ([international](#), [national](#) and [WA specific](#)) have also become clearer regarding the risks posed by climate change and the need for action to address the consequential impacts.

## **COMMENT**

It is important that the WALGA climate change advocacy position is updated to reflect these changes and the consequent needs and priorities of Local Governments. An updated climate change advocacy position, which complements other WALGA advocacy positions, will provide a sound basis for WALGA's advocacy.

Following initial consultation, consideration by State Council in March 2025 and feedback from the Environment Policy Team, WALGA has developed a revised, draft Climate Change Advocacy Position for Local Government feedback.

WALGA Environment and Waste Team members will be attending Zone meetings in April 2026 to support zone discussions on the draft Advocacy Position.

WALGA is seeking Council endorsed feedback on the draft Climate Change Advocacy Position by **COB Friday, 1 May 2026**. Feedback can be provided to [environment@walga.asn.au](mailto:environment@walga.asn.au).

Following consideration of this feedback a final draft advocacy position will be developed and provided to Zones and State Council for consideration, expected to be in July 2026.

## **Noted**

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## 8.7 DISASTER READY FUND: ROUND 4 ANTICIPATED TO OPEN IN MARCH 2026

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*By Rachel Armstrong, WALGA Policy Manager Emergency Management*

The Disaster Ready Fund (DRF) is the Australian Government's key funding program to support projects that reduce disaster risk and strengthen community resilience.

Round Four of the DRF is expected to open in March 2026 with approximately \$200 million available nationally. A strong focus on *construction-ready*, infrastructure-based mitigation projects with clear risk reduction benefits is expected. This is similar to Round 3 which prioritised infrastructure-based projects such as flood levees, cyclone shelters, warning systems. A list of Round 3 projects funded is available at [Disaster Ready Fund | NEMA](#)).

WALGA is providing early notice to Zones and member Local Governments to consideration of both individual and collaborative project opportunities, and pre-planning ahead of the formal announcement.

The DRF is administered by DFES, in Western Australia. Further information is available at [Disaster Resilience Grants - Department of Fire and Emergency Services](#) and by emailing [DisasterResilienceGrants@dfes.wa.gov.au](mailto:DisasterResilienceGrants@dfes.wa.gov.au).

DRF Round 4 is likely to be released in March 2026, and encourage Local Governments to consider shared or individual disaster risk reduction projects

WALGA will advise the Sector when the DRF is formally announced.

### **Noted**

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## 8.8 REQUEST TO PRESENT

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*By Chantelle O'Brien, Zones Governance Officer*

WALGA was approached by HC Construction Services Pty Ltd requesting an opportunity to attend various Country Zone meetings to provide a deputation on how to navigate through the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangement (DRFA). HC Construction Services is a WA based company specialising in project management, consultancy and construction delivery. HC is a WALGA Preferred Supplier and has worked with several Local Governments to manage disaster relief funding claims. This includes by way of road condition video using their internally developed RF Vid Assist system.

The proposed presentation would include some tips, dos and don'ts, advice on pre disaster evidence requirements, and lessons learnt on three or four case studies where applicants have encountered problems. The presentation would also include information on how Local Governments can prepare a funding application, so they receive the maximum funding available in the event of a natural disaster.

### **RESOLUTION**

**Moved:** President Cr Julia Jean-Rice  
**Seconded:** President Cr John Fergusson

**That the South West Country Zone does not support a deputation from HC Construction Services Pty Ltd at a future Zone meeting in 2026.**

**CARRIED**

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## 8.9 DRAFT RENEWABLE ENERGY PLANNING CODE

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*By Kieran McGovern, WALGA Senior Policy Advisor, Planning*

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- WALGA Advocacy Position 6.17 Renewable Energy Facilities calls for changes to the renewable energy State planning framework to ensure it is fit for purpose to guide the ongoing development of the sector.
- The State Government has released a draft Renewable Energy Planning Code and Guidelines with the aim of establishing a consistent assessment framework, clear development standards, and improved certainty around impacts such as noise, landscape, environmental considerations, and safety.
- The Code initially focuses on wind farms but is designed to expand to other renewable technologies, requiring detailed technical reporting and encouraging (but not regulating) community benefit-sharing agreements.
- Proposed regulatory amendments would align local planning schemes with the Code and classify renewable energy projects valued at \$20 million or more as mandatory significant development, shifting decision-making authority to the WAPC.
- WALGA strongly encourages consideration of the draft Code by Zones. Local Governments should make their own submissions on the draft Code by 10 April 2026 and provide feedback to WALGA to inform our submission on behalf of the sector by 27 February 2026. Council endorsed submissions are preferred.

### ATTACHMENT

- [Draft Renewable Energy Planning Code and Guidelines](#)
- [Information Sheet - Proposed Amendments to Local Planning Scheme Regulations](#)
- [Information Sheet - Proposed Amendments to Significant Development Regulations](#)
- [WALGA summary of the draft Renewable Energy Planning Code](#)

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

WALGA's proposed advocacy approach is consistent with WALGA [Advocacy Positions](#):

- 6.1 Planning Principles and Reform
- 6.4 State Development Applications and Decision Making
- 6.16 Energy Transition Engagement and Community Benefit Framework
- 6.17 Renewable Energy Facilities
- 6.18 Priority Agriculture.

### BACKGROUND

The growth in the number, size, and complexity of renewable energy facilities across Western Australia is expected to continue as energy generation and other traditional industries de-carbonise their facilities and operations. As a result, the placement and management of renewable energy facilities have become contentious issues in local communities across Western Australia.

In September 2024, WALGA's State Council endorsed three advocacy positions to address concerns related to renewable energy. Advocacy Position 6.17 Renewable Energy Facilities noted that the existing Western Australian Planning Commission's (WAPC) Position Statement: Renewable energy facilities was inadequate to address these concerns, leading to inconsistent application and approvals of renewable energy facilities across the State.

The advocacy position calls for the existing Position Statement: Renewable Energy Facilities to be elevated to a State planning policy, to provide the highest level of planning policy

control and ensure the state planning framework is fit for purpose to guide the ongoing development of the sector.

On 12 December 2025, the State Government released a draft Renewable Energy Planning Code (the Code) and associated Guidelines for public consultation. The Code has been prepared to provide guidance to industry, Local Government and communities by:

- introducing a consistent development assessment framework for renewable energy infrastructure across Western Australia.
- establishing clear development standards and application requirements.
- addresses potential land use and environmental impacts, such as noise and landscape considerations.

The initial focus of the Code is on wind farms, with flexibility to expand to other renewable energy developments, including solar farms and battery energy storage systems.

The draft Code covers key planning issues such as safety, noise, shadow flicker, landscape and visual impact, natural environment, natural hazards, aviation safety, electromagnetic interference, transport, construction, and decommissioning.

Under the proposed Code, development applications must include detailed technical reports, whilst community benefit-sharing agreements are encouraged, these agreements sit outside of the planning system.

To enable implementation of the Code, regulatory amendments are proposed to the *Planning and Development (Local Planning Schemes) Regulations 2015* to support incorporation of the Code into local planning schemes through Model Provisions, introduce standard land-use definitions that will apply to all local planning schemes and guide assessment of new noise-sensitive development near existing or approved wind farms.

There are also proposed reforms to the *Planning and Development (Significant Development) Regulations 2024*, which will classify renewable energy development applications valued at \$20 million or more as mandatory significant development. These projects will be assessed and determined by the WAPC under the State Significant Development Pathway (under Part 11B of the *Planning and Development Act 2005*), and Local Governments role will be to provide commentary to the development application, but final decision-making authority will rest with the WAPC.

Consultation on the draft Code and Guidelines closes 10 April 2026.

## **COMMENT**

WALGA's has advocated for changes to the renewable energy State planning framework to ensure orderly and proper planning of renewable energy facilities and therefore welcomes the release of the draft Renewable Energy Planning Code and Guidelines by the State Government for public comment. This draft Code represents a significant step toward establishing a consistent planning framework to guide the ongoing development of renewable energy facilities across WA - providing important clarity and guidance to WA Local Governments.

The proposed amendments to classify renewable energy projects over \$20 million as 'mandatory significant development' that must be determined by WAPC does not align with WALGA's Advocacy Position 6.4 State Development Applications and Decision Making, as it has the potential to erode Local Government decision making powers and community

input. WALGA's position is that Part 11B should be abolished, or, if it is retained, the cost threshold should be raised to \$50 million.

WALGA considers it is essential that the requirement for community benefits be mandated. There are several options that should be examined as potential mechanisms to mandate community benefit-sharing agreements, including (but not limited to) amendments to existing planning or energy legislation or new, standalone legislation.

There is also a lack of guidance regarding appropriate land uses in particular zones, specifically protecting rural land for agricultural purposes, instead stating that wind farms are generally compatible with agricultural land uses. WALGA's position is that regulatory amendments are required to create a model zone through the *Planning and Development (Local Planning Schemes) Regulations 2015* for land identified as high quality agricultural land (noting most of this land is located in the South West region) known as the 'Priority Agriculture'.

WALGA held two online information sessions on the Code alongside the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage on 5 and 9 February 2026 for Local Government officers and Elected Members respectively.

WALGA will prepare a submission to the State on behalf of the sector to ensure the draft Code delivers positive outcomes for Member Local Governments, communities and industry.

WALGA strongly encourages consideration of the draft Code by Zones. Local Governments should make their own submissions on the draft Code by 10 April 2026 and provide feedback to WALGA to inform our submission on behalf of the sector by 27 February 2026. Council endorsed submissions are preferred.

WALGA's submission will be provided to State Council by flying agenda to meet the submission deadline.

## **Noted**

## 9 WALGA STATE COUNCIL AGENDA

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.

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### 9.1 AVIATION ADVOCACY POSITIONS

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*By Negar Nili, Policy Officer Transport and Roads*

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Two new Advocacy Positions are proposed to strengthen WALGA's aviation advocacy framework and to inform WALGA's response to future inquiries and/or consultation relating to aviation.
- The aim of the new positions is to provide clearer and more contemporary guidance on:
  - the sustainability and ongoing viability of Local Government-owned regional airports; and
  - the affordability, reliability and accessibility of regional and remote air services for Western Australian communities.
- The proposed positions will assist WALGA to advocate more effectively on behalf of its Members by:
  - clearly articulating the essential service role of aviation in regional, rural and remote Western Australia;
  - strengthening WALGA's capacity to engage with State and Commonwealth governments on aviation policy and funding; and
  - supporting Local Governments facing regulatory, financial and service-delivery challenges associated with regional aviation.
- The development of the proposed Advocacy Positions has been informed by engagement with a sample of Local Governments, which highlighted shared concerns regarding high regional airfares, service reliability, capacity constraints and the role of aviation in supporting health access, emergency response and regional economic development.
- WALGA currently has two existing aviation Advocacy Positions; however, feedback from Local Governments clarified that the inclusion of additional, targeted policy positions is essential to better reflect contemporary challenges and to strengthen support for Councils.
- The proposed positions build on existing WALGA policy and provide a stronger basis for:
  - sector advocacy;
  - engagement with State Council and Zones to seek feedback; and
  - informing WALGA's potential submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Regional Airfares.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The current [WALGA Advocacy Positions](#) relating to Aviation are positions 5.9 Aviation and 5.9.1 Airfare Pricing in Regional Western Australia. The proposed new positions would be in addition to these existing positions.

### 5.9 Aviation

**Position Statement** *The Local Government sector supports the Department of Transport's State Aviation Strategy 2020, with more focus required on non-RPT airports to ensure it is representative of all of WA, more focus on general aviation development across WA and noting that the preferred ownership and governance of Local Governments is Council Controlled Organisations. The Local Government sector advocates for a clear position on the economic benefit of airports in regional areas to be included in the future state wide Airports State Planning Policy.*

#### 5.9.1. Airfare Pricing in Regional Western Australia

**Position Statement** *The Local Government sector supports:*

- 1. An evidence-based assessment commissioned by the State Government to determine the degree to which market structure and other factors influence the cost of providing air services on each route, the pricing structure offered and the actual prices paid.*
- 2. The State Government providing oversight of airfares ensuring transparency, encouraging partnerships between Local Governments and airline carriers to grow the market and the provision of subsidies in some situations.*

## BACKGROUND

Aviation plays a critical role in Western Australia, particularly for regional, rural, and remote communities, by providing essential connectivity for access to healthcare, education, employment, and social engagement. Reliable and affordable air services are also vital to regional economic development, workforce mobility, and community resilience, especially where alternative transport options are limited.

WALGA's advocacy on aviation is underpinned by its existing policy framework, which emphasises the need for safe, reliable, and cost-effective air services across regional and remote Western Australia. These policies highlight the critical role of aviation in enabling regional connectivity, supporting service delivery, and contributing to economic development, while recognising the operational and regulatory responsibilities faced by Local Government-managed airports.

WALGA has also contributed to State-level policy development including the State Aviation Strategy 2020. This strategy supports key initiatives including regulating certain routes to support a sustainable service, the Regional Airfare Zone Cap, Regional Airports Development Scheme and regulation of closed charters in some situations. It is anticipated that the Department of Transport and Major Infrastructure will review and refresh the State Aviation Strategy in 2026-27.

At the national level, WALGA engaged in consultation processes leading to the Green and White Papers on Regional Transport and Aviation, representing Local Government perspectives and regional needs.

Two recently initiated inquiries — the Productivity Commission Inquiry into the determinants of regional airfares and the Senate (Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee) Inquiry into the State of Australia's Aviation Sector and its ability to deliver reliable and affordable services to rural, regional and remote communities — provide important opportunities to review and improve policies supporting regional aviation. Both inquiries have overlapping focus areas, including affordability, government intervention, and impacts on regional communities.

To inform its responses to both inquiries, WALGA has engaged with a sample of Local Governments to understand their experiences, challenges, and priorities for regional air services. This engagement has clarified the needs of Local Governments and communities, forming the basis for developing two proposed new Advocacy Positions to support Members and advocate for improved connectivity, affordability, and service sustainability across regional Western Australia.

## **NEW ADVOCACY POSITIONS**

### **Regional Airports**

**Position Statement**     *WALGA supports the sustainable operation of Local Government owned regional airports and advocates for proportionate regulatory frameworks, targeted funding, and operational guidance to ensure safe, efficient, and resilient airport infrastructure and services.*

**Background**             Regional airports are vital for connectivity, economic development, tourism, health access, and emergency response in Western Australia. Local Governments operating regional airports face increasing regulatory and operational pressures, including aviation security requirements, compliance obligations, ageing infrastructure, and limited staffing capacity. Many Council-owned airports cover day-to-day operating costs but lack sufficient capital to fund major infrastructure renewal or security upgrades. Airports that support both community access and FIFO activity can face additional funding constraints despite their ongoing role in servicing regional communities. These challenges highlight the need for regulatory settings and funding arrangements that reflect airport scale, risk profile, and regional operating conditions.

### **Regional and Remote Air Services**

**Position Statement**     *WALGA advocates for reliable, affordable, and equitable regional air services, calling for greater oversight of airline pricing practices, including transparent fare structures and equitable access to discounted and lower-cost fares, to mitigate the impacts of limited competition and dynamic pricing on regional residents, businesses, and essential travel. WALGA also promotes the continued viability of essential routes and recognises regional aviation as an essential service supporting community access, workforce mobility, and regional economic development.*

## Background

Regional communities rely on air services for essential travel, including access to health care, employment, education, and family connections, particularly where alternative transport options are limited. High airfares, limited availability of lower-cost seats, and opaque pricing structures reduce affordability for residents and businesses, even in markets with more than one airline. Regional air services are also vulnerable to sudden service reductions or route withdrawals, which can isolate communities and disrupt economic and social activity. These challenges underscore the importance of policy settings that support affordability, service continuity, and equitable access.

## COMMENT

Engagement with a sample of Local Governments operating airports with Regular Passenger Transport (RPT) services highlighted operational, financial, and service delivery issues affecting both Council-owned airports and regional air services.

Key matters raised by Councils include:

- Airline pricing and equitable access: Complex, opaque, and highly variable fare structures; limited availability of lower-cost seats; competition does not always deliver affordable or equitable outcomes.
- Aviation security requirements: Standards designed for larger airports impose significant operational and financial burdens, with outdated equipment, regulatory ambiguities, and high upgrade costs creating compliance challenges.
- Funding and resource constraints: Many Councils operate airports with limited staff and capital; while day-to-day operating costs may be covered, major infrastructure renewal or expansion and security upgrades are often unfunded.
- Service continuity and reliability: Regional air services are fragile, with sudden route reductions or withdrawals impacting essential travel, community connectivity, and local economies.
- Coordination across governments and industry: Fragmented policy, regulatory, and funding arrangements limit Local Governments' ability to respond quickly to changes, highlighting the need for improved collaboration.
- Regional aviation as an essential service: Airports and air services underpin health access, emergency response, tourism, economic development, and social cohesion, demonstrating their broader value beyond transport alone.

Based on these issues and priorities identified through Local Government engagement, WALGA has developed the two proposed Advocacy Positions above on aviation – one focusing on regional airports and the other on regional and remote air services – to address the challenges of affordability, accessibility, operational sustainability, and service continuity for regional communities.

### WALGA RECOMMENDATION

That State Council endorse two new Advocacy Positions on Aviation as follows:

1. Regional Airports  
*WALGA supports the sustainable operation of Local Government owned regional airports and advocates for proportionate regulatory frameworks, targeted funding,*

*and operational guidance to ensure safe, efficient, and resilient airport infrastructure and services.*

2. Regional and Remote Air Services

*WALGA advocates for reliable, affordable, and equitable regional air services, calling for greater oversight of airline pricing practices, including transparent fare structures and equitable access to discounted and lower-cost fares, to mitigate the impacts of limited competition and dynamic pricing on regional residents, businesses, and essential travel. WALGA also promotes the continued viability of essential routes and recognises regional aviation as an essential service supporting community access, workforce mobility, and regional economic development.*

## RESOLUTION

**Moved: President Cr John Fergusson**

**Seconded: Mayor Phill Cronin**

**That the South West Country Zone supports the WALGA recommendation for State Council Agenda item 9.1 as contained in the State Council Agenda and as provided above.**

**CARRIED**

## 9.2 OTHER STATE COUNCIL AGENDA ITEMS

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Zone Delegates are 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

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President Cr Karen Chappel provided a brief update to the Zone. The report was provided as an attachment within the Agenda.

**Noted**

*Cr John Fergusson departed the meeting at 11:29am.*

*Cr Rosina Mogg joined the meeting as Deputy Delegate for Shire of Capel.*

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## 11.2 WALGA STATE COUNCILLOR REPORT

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President Cr Donelle Buegge, State Councillor presented on the previous State Council meeting.

Noted

## 12 FINANCIAL REPORT

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### 12.1 SOUTH WEST COUNTRY ZONE FINANCIAL REPORT

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Period Ending Dec 25 Report	Actual	Note
	\$	
Opening Cash Balance	23,636.43	
<b>Income</b>		
Subscription Income	<u>7,200</u>	1
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>7,200</b>	
<b>Expenses</b>		
Bank Charges	33	
Sponsorship	-	
Plaques	383	
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<u>416</u>	
<b>Closing Cash Balance</b>	<b>30,421</b>	

Note

1: Subscription invoices have been issued, and all payments have been received.

## RESOLUTION

**Moved:** President Cr Julia Jean-Rice

**Seconded:** Cr Joe Italiano

- 1. That the South West Country Zone financial report for February 20 2026 be received.**
- 2. Request advice from the WALGA Secretariat as to whether the South West Country Zone has a Constitution.**

**CARRIED**

## 13 EMERGING ISSUES

Nil.

## 14 2026 MEETING DATES AND LOCATIONS

Meeting dates for 2026 are listed below. Please note if any changes need to be made.

MEETING DATE	HOST LOCAL GOVERNMENT
Friday, 24 April 2026	Capel
Friday, 19 June 2026	Collie
Friday, 21 August 2026	Dardanup
Friday, 20 November 2026	Donnybrook-Balingup

## 15 NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the South West Country Zone will be held on Friday, 24 April 2026 at the Shire of Capel commencing at 9:00am.

## 16 CLOSURE

*There being no further business the Chair declared the meeting closed at 11:38am.*