

Local Emergency Management Arrangements (LEMA) Review

Consultation with Western Australian Local
Governments: Project Summary and
Recommendations Report

February 2023



Introduction

The **Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA)** is the peak body for **Local Government (LG) in Western Australia**. The Association is an independent, membership-based organisation representing and supporting Western Australian Local Governments. WALGA provides an essential voice for its members: 139 LGs, 1,215 Elected Members and approximately 22,000 LG employees. WALGA is committed to a strategic vision of “agile and inclusive Local Governments enhancing community wellbeing and enabling economic prosperity”.

LGs play a significant role in emergency management (EM). WALGA is committed to working closely with all levels of government to ensure that all WA LGs understand and are supported to undertake their EM responsibilities. WALGA also advocates for and makes representations on EM issues that are of importance to WA LGs (refer to [WALGA's EM Advocacy Positions](#)).

The Local Emergency Management Arrangements (LEMA) Review provides an important opportunity to ensure that LGs are actively engaged in informing State EM policy and procedure reform that will impact LG EM and emergency prevention, preparedness, response and recovery at the local level.

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of WALGA's LEMA Review Consultation with WA LGs and present WALGA's key recommendations to inform the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) LEMA Improvement Plan.

Background

In 2019, the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) identified that there were an increasing number of LGs with LEMA overdue for review.

WALGA responded to this finding by submitting a paper to SEMC that outlined the key challenges that LGs were facing in fulfilling their LEMA obligations including:

- a lack of clarity around LGs' EM roles and responsibilities,
- a misalignment between EM and LG day-to-day business, and
- a lack of financial and human resources to support EM planning.

Based on WALGA's recommendation, SEMC endorsed a LEMA Review.

In 2021, DFES was granted National Disaster Resilience Program (NDRP) funding for a LEMA Review and WALGA was allocated AWARE Funding to lead a consultation with Local Governments to ensure a sector-led approach.

The overarching aim of the LEMA Review is to inform the design of an improved LEMA model that:

- streamlines LEMA development and reporting processes,
- is scalable and fit-for-purpose for LGs of different sizes with varying EM capability,
- is responsive to the changing risk landscape, and
- supports LGs who currently lack resources to fulfil their EM obligations.

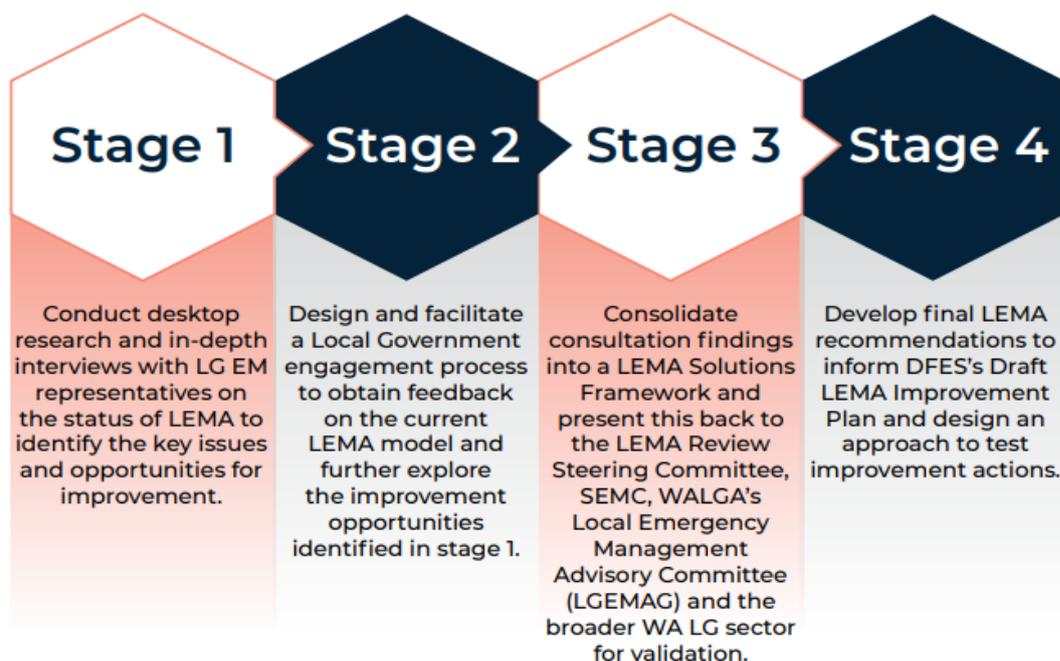
The LEMA Review officially commenced in March 2022 as a partnership initiative between the DFES’ SEMC Business Unit and WALGA. A LEMA Review Steering Committee with membership representation from WALGA, DFES and the Department of Local Government, Sport and Culture (DLGSC) has provided ongoing advice and guidance to the review.

The consultation findings and recommendations of WALGA’s LEMA Review Project summarised in this report will inform **a LEMA Improvement Plan developed by DFES and submitted to SEMC for endorsement in August 2023.**

Local Government Engagement Process and Methods

WALGA recognises the challenges that LGs face in fulfilling their EM responsibilities vary across the State. To ensure that WALGA’s LEMA Review recommendations are well-founded and representative, WALGA set out with the aim to consult with between 60% to 80% of the 139 LGs that comprise WA and ensure representation from a cross-section of LGs of different size, location, and risk profile.

WALGA’s LEMA Review Consultation with LG was approached as a four-stage process using a range of engagement methods and was delivered from March 2022 to February 2023.



Stage 1 (March to August 2022): Background Research and Preliminary Consultation

Stage 1 of WALGA's LEMA Review Project entailed an investigation of the current LEMA model and a scan of the local-level EM arrangements of other Australian States and Territories. Ten in-depth interviews with LG EM representatives determined the key issues with the current LEMA model and identified several improvement opportunities that could be further explored through a LEMA Review engagement process with the LG sector. A key output of Stage 1 was a [LEMA Issues Paper](#) which was distributed to the LG sector for comment and informed the design of Stage 2 of the project.

Stage 2 (September to November 2022): Local Government Engagement and Consultation

Stage 2 of WALGA's LEMA Review Project comprised the design and delivery of a series of interactive workshops and an online LEMA Review Survey for LGs.

WALGA engaged independent consultant Sue Middleton from [Agdots](#) to facilitate 6 face-to-face LEMA Review Workshops in various locations across WA, and 4 online workshops for LG representatives who could not attend a workshop in person.

In total, 149 participants, including Local Government CEOs, Emergency Management Staff, Elected Members and Community Emergency Service Managers (CESMS) attended a LEMA Review workshop, with 92 diverse Local Governments represented. The workshop findings informed the development an independent [LEMA Review Workshop Consultation with WA LGs Report](#).

In addition, a LEMA Review Survey allowed LGs to provide structured feedback and for WALGA to obtain quantitative data to validate the interview and workshop findings. 79 respondents, representing a diverse range of WA LGs completed the survey and the results are summarised in a [LEMA Review Survey Report](#).

Overall, 72% (100 LGs) have contributed to the LEMA Review Consultation.

Stage 3 (November to December 2022): Local Government Engagement Findings - Consolidation and Validation

In Stage 3 the key findings of WALGA's LEMA Review Consultation were presented to SEMC, WALGA's Local Emergency Management Advisory Group (LGEMAG) and to the wider LG Sector through a series of presentations and a free WALGA webinar to obtain further input and to capture any views that were missed or misinterpreted.

Stage 4 (February to May 2023): Collaborate with DFES to develop, test and implement a LEMA Improvement Plan.

In the current Stage 4 of the LEMA Review, WALGA is working with the DFES SEMC Business Unit to develop a Draft Improvement Plan that responds to WALGA's LEMA Review consultation findings and the recommendations presented in this report. Further, WALGA will collaborate with DFES to develop a method to test the proposed new approaches outlined in the Draft Improvement Plan with the LG sector.

Key Findings of WALGA's LEMA Review Consultation with LGs

1.1 Strengths of the current LEMA model

WALGA approached the LEMA Review model from a strengths-based perspective to ensure that the consultation did not just focus on the issues with the current LEMA model but also identified elements that are working well that should be retained. The consultation found that LEMA has important strengths and has supported LGs to build maturity and understanding in the EM space since the enactment of the *Emergency Management Act 2005*.

In summary:

- The LEMA model had assisted some LGs embed a culture of EM across their LG departments and gain support for EM from their executive team and Elected Members.
- Some LG representatives considered the LEMA documents to be a useful educational and induction tool for their staff, particularly for those new to the area, or who have limited EM knowledge and training.
- Many LG representatives noted that the collaborative process required to develop LEMA had helped build relationships, awareness and learning across the different agencies involved in EM.
- Some LGs noted how their LEMA documents recorded important local knowledge about the local risk profile and vulnerable groups in their community.
- For a few LGs who had experienced a significant emergency event, the LEMA had provided a starting point to help them navigate the process of response and early recovery.
- All LGs consulted agreed that the greatest contribution of LEMA was in identifying EM roles and responsibilities, key EM contacts, critical infrastructure and local resources.

1.2 Issues with the current LEMA Model

Despite these strengths, the LEMA Review consultation identified significant issues with the current LEMA model including:

The purpose of LEMA is not well understood

The consultation revealed that there are diverging opinions within the LG sector regarding whether the purpose of LEMA is to support emergency preparedness through a multi-agency planning process or to create a practical operational response tool. Ultimately, the consultation findings confirm LEMA should be a strategic planning process that results in a practical tool or handbook specific to the needs of LGs. However, currently LEMA processes and supporting resources are not fulfilling either of these functions effectively.

There is also confusion within the LG sector with regards to what LEMA constitutes. It is evident that some LGs consider the main overarching LEMA document as the LEMA and other LGs understand LEMA as the full suite of EM plans, processes and systems, that includes but is broader than the main LEMA document.

LEMA documents are not practical

LGs agreed that the LEMA documentation contains some useful information, such as the contact lists, critical infrastructure information and resource register. However, the sector expressed frustration with the excessive length, duplication and generic guidance information that is included in the current LEMA Model Templates that render the final documentation too long and not useful when an emergency event occurs.

The LEMA model does not account for the different EM capacities and capabilities of WAs LGs

Notably, regional and remote LGs reported that the lack of ongoing funding and human resources for EM is a significant barrier to developing and maintaining effective LEMA. There was criticism that the current model is a one-size-fits-all that does not acknowledge that the EM capability of LGs generally declines with decreasing LG band size and increasing remoteness. It was also noted that the Community Emergency Service Manager (CESM) program that provides some LGs with an enhanced capability through a human resource that can support LEMA development, exercising and review, a CESM position is not currently available for all LGs.

Local Governments find the State Emergency Management Framework complex and the role and responsibilities for Local Government are not clearly defined in a single document

The consultation confirmed that LGs find the State EM Framework difficult to navigate and the roles and trigger points for the transfer of responsibilities to the State for response and recovery unclear. The findings highlighted that the different organisational boundaries and diverging expectations of the various agencies involved in EM at the local level is a challenge for LGs.

LGs report that their Local Emergency Management Committees (LEMCs) are not actively engaging in LEMA

Despite it being a core function of LEMCs to advise and assist LGs to ensure LEMA are established for their district, many LGs reported a lack of involvement and interest in LEMA from their respective LEMCs. Many LGs noted that they struggle to get HMA attendance and that LEMC meetings were not as constructive as they could be given the expertise around the table. Overall, LGs agreed (73% of survey respondents) that LEMCs should be more engaged in the LEMA and believed (81% of respondents) that the most effective mechanism for improving LEMC engagement in LEMA was through the provision of more training, better resources and procedural guidance.

LEMA requirements are not well integrated with usual Local Government business activities and planning processes.

The consultation highlighted that EM or disaster preparedness is rarely mentioned in LG Strategic Community Plans despite community safety being a stated aspiration of most LGs. It is evident that there is a disconnect between LG business continuity and risk management

planning and LEMA planning despite there being some relevant links. Interestingly however, while the LEMA Review Workshop consultation indicated that LG Business Continuity Plans should be better aligned and informed by LEMA, the survey results indicated low support (only 35% of LG respondents) to include Business Continuity Plans as a sub plan within LEMA.

1.3 LEMA Improvement Options

In both the LEMA Review consultation workshops and the survey, WALGA further explored several options for improving the current LEMA model that had been identified as an opportunity in Stage 1. There was overwhelming agreement about several of the improvement options.

- Most LGs agree (86% of survey respondents) that a scalable model that accounts for differences in EM capability and maturity and guides continuous improvement is needed.
- Most LGs agree (85% of survey respondents) that it would be useful to have a single policy statement that outlines the specific EM responsibilities and legislative obligations of LGs rather than having to search for this information throughout the State EM Framework policies and procedures.
- Most LGs agree that the LEMA documentation should be restructured to be more practical (90% of survey respondents) and simplified by removing guidance information, duplication and technical jargon, and restructuring the documentation into “before, during and after”.
- Most LGs agree that improved LEMA training for staff and Elected Members would support them to maintain and develop practical LEMA and the survey showed that this need was greater for regional LGs (82%) when compared to Perth and Peel LGs (72%).
- There was strong agreement from the LG sector that improved training for Elected Members and LG staff on the LEMA would help foster the integration of LEMA into their LG’s BAU (86% of LG survey respondents).
- Many LG’s (73% of survey respondents) agree that human resources in the form of an extra staff member or shared staff member such as a CESM or EM officer would help them to maintain and better exercise their LEMA, again with the need higher in regional LGs (79%) than for Perth and Peel LGs (64%).
- Almost all LGs agree (95% survey respondents) that the LEMA model needs to modernise and move towards a centralised online system where LGs have access to a range of LEMA resources, templates and LEMA examples.
- Many LGs agree that LEMCs should be more involved in developing and maintaining LEMA (74% of survey respondents), particularly in regional areas.
- Most LGs (81% survey respondents) agree that providing LEMC with additional training and resources would enable LEMCs to be better engaged in LEMA activities.

Consultation findings regarding the other improvement options explored were insightful but inconclusive. Notably, there were very mixed responses regarding whether the LEMA model should be transitioned from a local to a sub-district/district level structure and there was low support for legislative change to discharge some EM responsibility for LEMA from LGs to a multi-agency committee. Overall, only 45% of LG survey respondents supported a sub-district/district LEMA model. While there were suggestions in the workshops to transfer responsibility for some specific elements of EM planning up to the district level (particularly for

response and recovery), most LGs agree that there is still a need for a local government level EM or Council Ready plan that captures local context, resources, contacts and roles. All LGs support improving LEMA processes to enable more collaboration, joint LEMAs and LEMCs and resource sharing between LGs to address LG staff fatigue and maintain LG business continuity during and after an emergency event.

1.4 LEMA Model Improvement Recommendations

Recommendation 1: To ensure that the LEMA Review leads to improved LEMA processes and outputs that are responsive to the needs and capacity of the WA LG sector, **WALGA recommends that the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and SEMC approve and secure funding for a three-year LEMA Improvement Project to implement the LEMA Review improvement actions (August 2023 – August 2026).**

Recommendation 2: **WALGA recommends that as part of the LEMA Improvement Project a position be established within WALGA to work closely with the DFES SEMC business Unit to pilot new LEMA approaches with LG to ensure:**

- LGs are supported in the transition to a new LEMA model;
- all LEMA improvement actions are monitored for effectiveness and continual improvement;
- the development of fit-for-purpose LEMA resources and training to support LGs and their respective LEMCs;
- LGs who currently lack resources are provided targeted support to develop and deliver grant-funded EM projects; and
- LEMA resource-sharing arrangements and collaborative approaches are strengthened.

WALGA’s LEMA Review findings confirm that many LGs require additional human resources to develop and maintain effective LEMA plans and sub plans and to build their EM capability.

Recommendation 3: **WALGA recommends that the State Government increase the EM resourcing for LGs who currently lack EM capacity and capability.** This includes:

- Expanding the CESM Program to all LGs to provide LGs additional support to fulfil their LEMA requirements.
- Developing a more sustainable grant funding model for LGs that is responsive to the variations in LG resourcing and context.
- Continuation of the DFES DEMA and Community Preparedness Advisors programs and supporting these positions to be more responsive to needs of LGs and LEMA requirements.

Recommendation 4: **WALGA recommends the State Government develop a simpler and streamlined State Emergency Management Framework with improved communications, guidance and digital tools for LGs to assist them to meet their LEMA obligations** This includes:

- The development of a single policy statement that outlines the roles and responsibilities of LG in EM and more clearly articulates the function of LEMA and the minimum requirements for LEMA compliance.

- Improvement of the SEMC website to make it easier and more intuitive for LGs to navigate.
- Development of a digital LEMA knowledge hub/digital application that enables LG resource sharing and fosters a community of practice.
- Provision of a secure online portal system that supports LEMA reporting and interoperability between LGs and HMAs and between the local, district and state EM arrangements.

Recommendation 5: WALGA recommends that the SEMC abolish the current one-size-fits all LEMA model template and develop a suite of LEMA guidance material and practical tools. New LEMA guidance and resources should:

- reduce the LEMA administration burden for LGs
- provide clear instructions and step-by-step procedures for LGs
- be separated into strategic and operational documents/templates
- be simplified and made more user-friendly for a LG audience
- be scalable and flexible to accommodate different LG capacities and capabilities
- focus more on the legislative obligations and remit of LG
- remove generic state-level information, and
- enable more collaboration and resource sharing between LGs.

Recommendation 6: WALGA recommends that the State Government develop new LEMA approaches that focus more on building the EM capacity and capability of the LG sector through the provision of training, exercising support and targeted investment rather than compliance. This includes:

- The development of LEMA resources and exercise guidance for LG staff, LEMCs and Elected Members.
- The provision of targeted support for LGs who lack capability to develop and deliver grant-funded EM projects.
- The development of a LEMA maturity model that guides continuous improvement and investment in EM.
- The development of scalable tools that facilitate locally relevant and integrated EM risk and capability assessments to direct investment for risk treatment and resilience building activities.
- DFES and DLGSC to work collaboratively to strengthen the integration of LEMA with LG business as usual, the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework requirements and other risk management and climate change adaptation planning processes.

1.5 Conclusion

In summary, WALGA's consultation with WA LGs suggests that the overarching purpose of LEMA should be to empower LGs to prepare for and recover from hazards that are likely to impact their communities and business operations now and into the future. To enable this outcome, an improved the LEMA model should:

- clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities of LGs in EM and disaster risk reduction;

- simplify the reporting processes and reduce the administrative burden of maintaining LG compliance;
- provide a suite of scalable LEMA tools and guidance that are co-designed with the LG sector and easily accessed through an online system;
- build the EM capacity and capability of the LG sector through the provision of targeted EM training, exercising support, human resources and funding, based on measures of risk, capability and vulnerability;
- assist LGs to continue to deliver their core business activities and provide public information during an emergency event;
- improve the connectivity of LG's various risk management and hazard planning processes through an integrated approach;
- enable resource sharing and collaboration across the LG sector; and
- transfer specific elements of LEMA planning to the district or sub-district level where appropriate so LGs can focus on relevant and contextual EM planning at the local level.

This report has summarised the key findings emerging from WALGA's LEMA Review engagement with LGs that was undertaken from March to December 2022 and are detailed in [WALGA's LEMA Review Issues Paper](#), [agdots' LEMA Review Workshop Report](#) and the [LEMA Review Survey Report](#). Based on these findings, WALGA presents six key recommendations to inform a DFES Draft LEMA Improvement Plan. This includes an overarching recommendation that the State Government secure funding for a three-year LEMA Improvement Project. A LEMA Improvement Project is critical to ensure the staged delivery and monitoring of LEMA improvement actions and that LGs are provided with the necessary support to transition to a new LEMA model.

The Draft LEMA Improvement Plan is scheduled to be completed by DFES in March 2023. During April and May 2023, DFES and WALGA will test the LEMA proposed improvement actions with the LG sector and other EM stakeholders. Based on the feedback obtained through this testing process, WALGA will propose any further changes required to finalise a LEMA Improvement Plan. A final LEMA Improvement Plan will be submitted to SEMC for endorsement in August 2023.

WALGA acknowledges all the time and valuable input that LGs have contributed to the LEMA Review over the past 12 months and will continue to advocate on behalf of the sector for a more streamlined and effective State EM Framework that clarifies local-level EM roles and responsibilities and results in a more effective and better resourced LEMA model for LGs.

Appendix 1: Local Governments represented in the LEMA Review consultation

City of Albany	Shire of Kent
City of Armadale	Shire of Kojonup
Shire of Ashburton	Shire of Koorda
Shire of Augusta Margaret River	City of Kwinana
Town of Bassendean	Shire of Lake Grace
City of Bayswater	Shire of Leonora
City of Belmont	City of Mandurah
Shire of Beverley	Shire of Manjimup
Shire of Boyup Brook	Shire of Meekatharra
Shire of Brookton	City of Melville
Shire of Broome	Shire of Menzies
Shire of Broomehill-Tambellup	Shire of Mingenew
City of Bunbury	Shire of Morawa
City of Busselton	Town of Mosman Park
Town of Cambridge	Shire of Mt Marshall
City of Canning	Shire of Mundaring
Shire of Capel	Shire of Murray
Shire of Carnamah	Shire of Narembeen
Shire of Chapman Valley	Shire of Narrogin
Shire of Chittering	City of Nedlands
Town of Claremont	Shire of Northam
City of Cockburn	Shire of Northampton
Shire of Collie	Shire of Nungarin
Shire of Coolgardie	Shire of Peppermint Grove
Shire of Coorow	City of Perth
Shire of Corrigin	Shire of Pingelley
Town of Cottosloe	Shire of Plantagenet
Shire of Cranbrook	Town of Port Hedland
Shire of Cuballing	City of Rockingham
Shire of Dandaragan	Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale
Shire of Dardanup	Shire of Shark Bay
Shire of Denmark	City of South Perth
Shire of Derby-West Kimberley	City of Stirling
Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup	City of Subiaco
Shire of Dowerin	City of Swan
Shire of Dumbleyung	Shire of Toodyay
Shire of Dundas	Shire of Upper Gascoyne
Town of East Fremantle	Town of Victoria Park
Shire of Esperance	City of Vincent
Shire of Exmouth	Shire of Wandering
Shire of Gingin	City of Wanneroo

Shire of Gnowangerup	Shire of Waroona
City of Gosnells	Shire of West Arthur
City of Greater Geraldton	Shire of Wickepin
Shire of Harvey	Shire of Wongan-Ballidu
Shire of Irwin	Shire of Woodanilling
Shire of Jerramungup	Shire of Wyalkatchem
City of Joondalup	Shire of Yalgoo
City of Kalamunda	Shire of Yilgarn
Shire of Katanning	Shire of York