



2025 Local Government Emergency Management Survey Snapshot

Message from the CEO

Local Governments play a vital role in emergency management in line with their statutory responsibilities. Their deep local knowledge and connections are essential to community safety and disaster resilience.

To support our Members as they work to keep their communities safe, WALGA conducts the biennial Local Government Emergency Management Survey to gather information on the experiences, priorities and challenges faced by the sector in undertaking its Emergency Management roles and responsibilities.

Thank you to all the Local Governments who contributed to the 2025 survey and shared valuable input.

The results of this survey are invaluable for identifying sector priorities, pressure points, and emerging issues to inform policy development and advocacy.

Through proactive representation, and policy engagement, WALGA will continue to work alongside



our Members to ensure local communities are heard, local needs are addressed, and our communities are safeguarded.

Nick Sloan
Chief Executive Officer

2025 Local Government Emergency Management Survey Snapshot

Local Governments play an essential role in keeping WA communities safe – planning for emergencies, maintaining essential community services when they are needed most, and leading community recovery after an event. They hold responsibilities under the *Emergency Management Act 2005*, *Bush Fires Act 1954* and *State Emergency Management Framework*.

As climate-driven hazards grow more frequent and complex, these responsibilities – and the pressure on Local Government capability – are intensifying. WALGA is advocating to ensure that Local Governments are properly supported, recognising that strong Local Government capacity and capability underpin WA's resilience.

A Unique Responsibility: Bushfire Response at Unmatched Scale

Western Australia is the only Australian jurisdiction where Local Government has statutory responsibility

for bushfire response. This is a frontline operational role of extraordinary scale:

111 Local Governments manage 563 Volunteer Bushfire Brigades (VBFBs) and WHS obligations for 18,000–20,000 volunteers.

A Robust Evidence Base

WALGA partnered with the ECU Survey Research Centre to deliver the 2025 biennial Emergency Management Survey, with 100 of WA's 137 Local Governments taking part (>70%).

The result is a strong, representative snapshot across metropolitan and regional councils, Local Government Bands, and Local Governments with and without VBFB responsibilities.

Sector Insights at a Glance



Expectations are outpacing Local Government capacity

~90% of Local Governments have maintained or increased their emergency management investment, but emergency demands are growing faster.

Local Governments are not under-investing, they are absorbing increasing system demand without a proportional increase in capacity.



Local Government capacity is under systemic strain

Local Governments are facing critical system-driven workforce, funding, and capability pressures. 80% are now topping up VBFB funding to maintain essential capability.

48% consider the current range of emergency management grant programs, including Disaster Ready Fund, AWARE, Mitigation Activity Fund Grants program as well as Local Government Grants Scheme (LGGS), to be inadequate.



Proven models should be scaled

Scaling proven models, like the Community Emergency Services Manager (CESM) program, is a clear and practical way to strengthen system capability. Targeted capability support delivers results.



Bushfire is shaping system pressures

Bushfire is dominating the system and forcing structural questions. 91% of Local Governments rank bushfire in their top 5 hazards; 66% say bushfire crowds out all-hazards work; 41% support transfer of VBFB responsibility to the State, and 55% support reconsideration of an independent Rural Fire Service.



One State, many realities

Local Governments operate in fundamentally different risk and capacity environments. A single emergency management model cannot meet these diverse needs, reinforcing the importance of a differentiated, risk-based approach, as recognised through the LEMA Improvement Program.

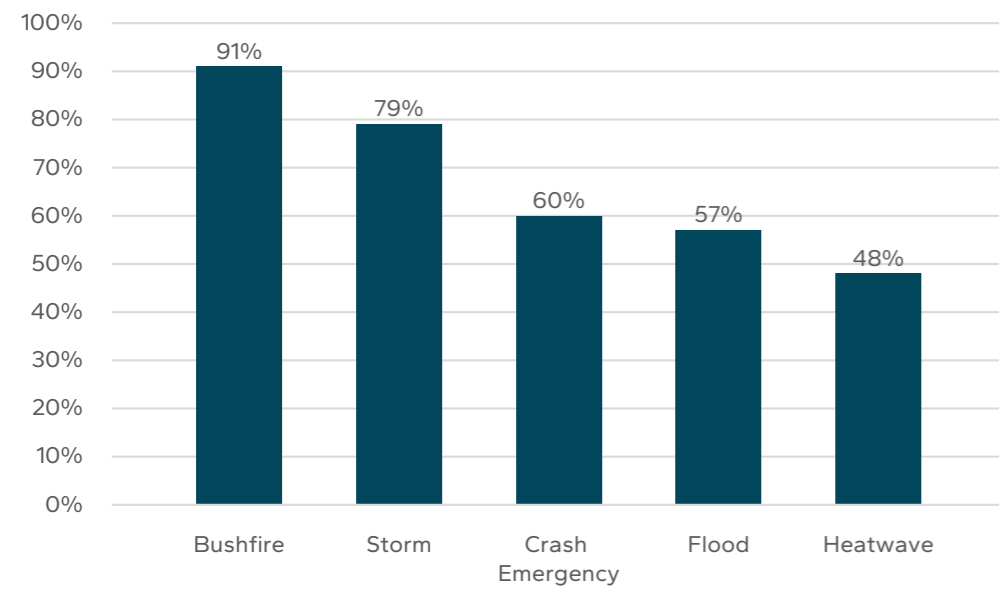
[Learn more walga.asn.au/emergency-management](https://walga.asn.au/emergency-management)

Hazard Risk versus Readiness

Ready for the familiar, more exposed to the emerging

WA's hazard profile is not uniform, and neither is Local Government readiness. The 2025 Survey shows Local Governments are generally well prepared for more familiar hazards such as bushfire, storm and flood, where roles and arrangements are clearer. For emerging and complex risks – including heatwave, animal and plant biosecurity, human epidemic, cybersecurity and energy supply disruption, preparedness is uneven, and exposure is higher.

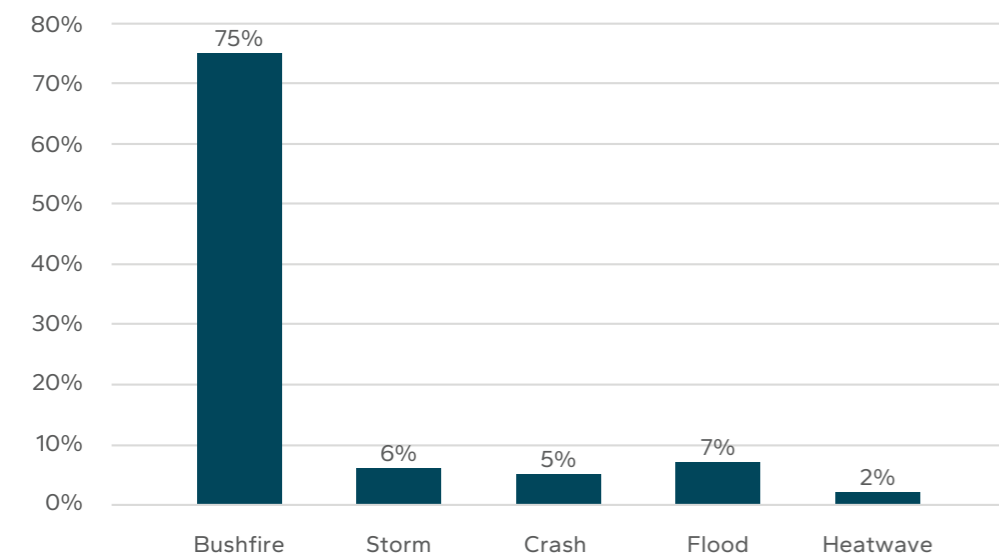
Closing these gaps relies on shared responsibility across the emergency management sector – with Hazard Management Agencies ultimately responsible for Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery; Local Governments providing local knowledge and incident support and the Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC) bringing agencies together to assess local risks, set shared priorities, and coordinate risk-reduction and preparedness actions.



Top 5 Ranked Hazards

Survey question:

Top 5 hazards that are most likely to occur and cause a large-scale emergency?



Top Hazard Most Likely to Occur and Cause Large Scale Emergency

Survey question:

Top 5 hazards that are most likely to occur and cause a large-scale emergency?



When readiness is considered alongside impact, the pressure points sharpen: bushfire and energy disruption remain high-impact hazards sitting only in the moderate-readiness range, leaving communities

exposed where consequences are greatest. In the five years since July 2020, 63% of Local Governments had activated their Local Recovery Plans in response to at least one hazard.

Risk vs Readiness – Top 5 Hazards likely to cause a significant impact

Cyclone		Bushfire	
Energy Supply Disruption		Human Epidemic	
Animal and Plant Biosecurity			

Top 5 Hazards identified from a combined impact score of the sum of Local Governments identifying a 'strong' or 'extreme' impact across People, Economy, Public Administration, Social Setting, Infrastructure & Environment dimensions.

Local Governments Have Stepped Up but the Load Keeps Growing

Rising local investment and stronger planning, with a workforce under significant pressure

Critical EM Pressure Points

Workforce capacity

Emergency management funding

Bushfire responsibilities vs all-hazards

Risk assessment capability

EM planning complexity

In the past two years, 90% of Local Governments have maintained or increased their investment in bushfire response, emergency prevention, preparedness, incident support, and disaster recovery.

Local Governments across WA continue to step up their investment in emergency management, particularly in bushfire response. Investment growth is strongest in frontline and preparedness activities. Of Local Governments with VBFs, 63% increased investment in bushfire response. Investment also rose in emergency prevention and preparedness (62%) and incident support (54%).

Despite this uplift, pressure is intensifying. The most commonly reported challenge facing Local Governments is emergency management funding, resourcing and capacity (39%), followed by VBF management, including training, recruitment and funding (30%). Planning and governance responsibilities, including Local Emergency Management Arrangements and LEMC administration, were also identified as ongoing pressure points (13%).

“The majority of LG EM Coordinators and Managers are ‘drowning’.”

– Metropolitan Band 1 Respondent

Workforce Pressures

- 54% of Local Governments report staffing is insufficient to meet their current emergency management responsibilities.
- Emergency management staffing is considered adequate by 64% of metropolitan Local Governments, compared to 42% of regional Local Governments.

Collaboration remains a key strength: 93% of Local Governments actively support one another through resource sharing arrangements; with 91% of sharing occurring between adjacent Local Governments. Growing engagement with the private sector (16%) and State agencies offers further opportunities to expand capability and ease the pressure on busy local teams.

In bushfire response, regional Local Governments continue to rely heavily on informal local support: 60% of metro Local Governments do not accept spontaneous volunteers; while regional Local Governments report greater integration into low risk roles (42%) and bushfire response (39%).

Emergency Management Planning

Local Governments have made strong progress in establishing core emergency management planning frameworks, and key plans required under the *Emergency Management Act 2005* are firmly in place:

- LEMC procedures (88%), Emergency Management Plans (85%), and Recovery Plans (84%) are widely in place, and 85–90% are up to date, reflecting a high standard of compliance, among responding Local Governments.

Local Governments in Bands 1 and 2 and those in the metropolitan zones were more likely to have specialised plans in place, such as those for animal welfare, donation management, and planning for at-risk people. This variance likely reflects capacity with smaller Local Governments more constrained by workforce and resources.

Funding Gap, Grant Squeeze

A widening funding gap is one of the most critical risks facing Local Governments



Funding and Responsibility Misalignment

Local Governments report a growing imbalance between responsibilities and available funding, with financial pressures continuing to intensify across the sector. Eighty-three percent of Local Governments report that cost shifting is occurring from State to Local Government to a notable extent.

This reflects a structural issue rather than a short-term shift. Insufficient State funding, unfunded recovery and asset costs, increasing WHS obligations, and the full burden of VBF management are placing significant and ongoing financial demands on Local Governments.



Bush Fire Brigade Funding – Local Government Grant Scheme

Local Governments are increasingly filling gaps in the VBF funding that the Emergency Services Levy and LGGs were designed to fully cover: 80% are “topping up” funding to meet essential operational needs. These costs are not discretionary, including training, equipment, insurance, maintenance, WHS compliance and operational readiness.

Confidence in the LGGs is critically low: <10% believe capital funding is sufficient; and <20% believe operational funding is sufficient.

Local Governments strongly support a shift to a minimum viable capability model and a regional, risk-based funding approach aligned to hazard and geography.

“The current model is financially unsustainable, operationally unsafe, and exposes Local Governments to unacceptable WHS and audit risk.”

– Regional, Band 4 Respondent



Access to external funding

Accessing grant funding remains difficult, driven by system design:

- >70% identify co-contribution requirements as a barrier
- >70% say administrative requirements significantly constrain access
- >60% cite insufficient funding in grant programs.

These settings result in funding outcomes that are misaligned to risk and community need.

“...results in applications that are not aligned to risk areas or greatest threats to the community.”

– Regional Band 4 Respondent



Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA-WA)

Confidence in Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements is low:

- 75% lack confidence to apply
- Among those activated, 59% experienced significant delays.

Key pressure points include:

- Evidence collection (73%)
- Damage assessment (65%)

This points to a system that is complex, resource-intensive, and hardest to navigate when capacity is most constrained.

“Arrangements are overly complex, bureaucratic and take a huge amount of time and resources.”

– Regional Band 4 Respondent

Bushfire Dominates and Raises Structural Questions

Escalating Operational Pressures

Bushfire remains one of WA's most significant hazards, with Local Governments holding frontline statutory responsibility under the *Bush Fires Act 1954*. The scale of this responsibility is increasingly consuming available capacity:

- 66% of Local Governments report that bushfire demands are reducing the time and resources available for 'all hazards' emergency management.

As frequency and complexity grow, bushfire is crowding out other priorities, raising questions about the sustainability of the current model.

"Everything revolves around bushfire. Everything is deprioritised in favour of bushfire preparations and planning."

– Regional Band 3 Respondent

Transfer of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades to State Responsibility

As pressure intensifies, Local Governments are questioning current arrangements:

- 41% of Local Governments would prefer the State to assume responsibility for VBFs. This result is similar to WALGA's 2023 survey findings.
- A further 35% are unsure, reflecting growing uncertainty about the sustainability of managing Bush Fire Brigades for Local Government.

Local Governments consistently emphasise this is not about the value of brigades – which they deeply respect as an "integral aspect of the community and culture"¹ – but about the structural settings that place increasing pressure on Local Governments.

¹ Regional Band 2 Respondent.

² Regional Band 4 Respondent.

An Independent Rural Fire Service for WA

There is also strong sector appetite to revisit the bushfire governance model more broadly.

- 55% support reconsidering an independent Rural Fire Service for WA "as a better option"².

Support for an independent Rural Fire Service is driven by the same pressures affecting day-to-day brigade management: escalating operational demands, WHS obligations, increasing liability, and growing difficulty maintaining capability over time.

Legislative responsibilities under the *Emergency Management Act 2005* and *Bush Fires Act 1954*.

111 Local Governments manage 563 Volunteer Bushfire Brigades and WHS obligations for 18,000–20,000 volunteers.

Prescribed Combat Agency for fire suppression on >90% of WA's landmass.



One State, Many Realities

Metropolitan and regional Local Governments operate in fundamentally different risk environments

WA does not face a single emergency management reality. Hazard profiles vary significantly.

- 97% of regional Local Governments rank bushfire in their top five hazards compared with 70% of metropolitan.
- HAZMAT is a top five risk for 44% of metropolitan Local Governments, compared to 21% of regional.
- 27% of regional Local Governments rate biosecurity as a top five risk compared with 4% of metropolitan.

These differences shape preparedness, training and resourcing. Metropolitan Local Governments are more likely to exercise recovery (40% metro vs 13% regional), heatwave (35% vs 13%), and hostile act (20% vs 5%); regional Local Governments were more likely to exercise bushfire (84% regional vs 50% metro).

"Because we are also very remote, depending on agencies such as DFES and DBCA to assist in response is difficult and takes time to access (i.e. a minimum of 3hrs for resource assistance)."

– Regional Band 3 Respondent

Workforce and Administrative Capacity Divide

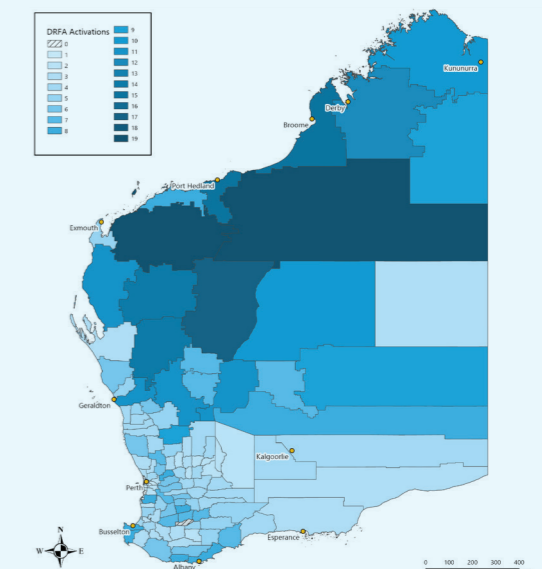
Capabilities and capacity also differ sharply. Reported staffing sufficiency sits at 64% in metropolitan Local Governments, but drops to 42% in regional, and this gap shows up across core functions: 88% of regional Local Governments cite limited staff availability as a barrier to exercises, compared with 62% of metro.

Administrative capacity is also felt strongly in regional Local Governments: 76% cite lack of capacity to prepare grant applications as a barrier, compared with 48% of metro, and are less confident navigating DRFA-WA (18% vs 48%). Regional Local Governments expressed a stronger desire to develop/expand resource sharing arrangements (84% regional vs 41% metro).

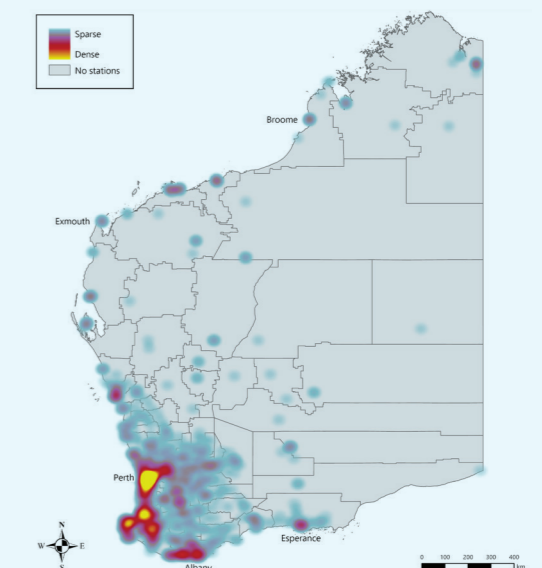
A System That Reflects Reality

These differences translate into distinct operational, governance and funding pressures. A single emergency management model cannot meet the needs of both metropolitan and regional Local Governments.

WA requires a differentiated, risk-based and scalable framework to ensure equity, sustainability and system resilience.



DRFA Activations by Local Government, 2007–2024



Fire Station Density (Career and Volunteer), WA



Community Readiness and Capability

Community readiness, CESH support and fit-for-purpose exercising are critical to a sustainable Emergency Management system

Community Preparedness

Local Governments play a central role in building community preparedness, but significant gaps remain. The most significant gap is reaching and supporting higher-risk community members (65%). Other gaps include: Limited awareness of support services (45%); Understanding of local risks and hazards (44%); Personal emergency planning (35%); Insurance literacy (33%); and Accessing reliable emergency information (29%).

These findings highlight the need for targeted, culturally appropriate engagement, supported by practical tools, shared resources and accessible communication.

The 2025 Survey identified an impressive range of community resilience projects underway by Local Governments, including disability-inclusive emergency management planning and person-centred approaches.

Demand for CESHs

Demand for CESHs remains strong and unmet.

- Among Local Governments without a CESH, 53% (27 Local Governments) would like to have one.

Where CESHs are in place, the impact is substantial, particularly in bushfire-related capability: Local Governments report significantly higher capability in brigade management (92%), volunteer training (90%), operational coordination (82%), communication with DFES (80%), and volunteer attraction and retention (65%).

“A CESH provides essential support in areas that small regional Shires cannot resource internally.”

– Regional Band 4 Respondent

Exercising and Lessons

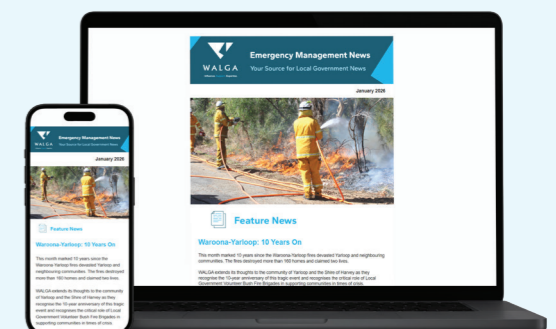
Local Governments are committed to exercising capability in line with State Emergency Management Framework, which require regular testing of plans and arrangements through an exercise program. 90% rely on tabletop exercises, compared with more resource-intensive formats: seminars/workshops (39%), functional (38%), multi-agency (26%), and drills (16%). There is strong support for a shift in approach with 90% supporting district level exercising.

Hazard Risk Assessment

A coordinated, State-led approach to risk information and tools is critical to enable consistent, effective local planning. There is strong support for centralised risk information (92%), State-developed risk registers (88%), structured capability support (86%), and district level assessments (77%), and for hazard data to be provided directly by relevant State agencies (87%).

To learn more

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