

Local Emergency Management Improvement Program Pilot

Final Report (April 2026)

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the Local Emergency Management Arrangements (LEMA) Pilot Project, delivered by the Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) in partnership with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES), on behalf of the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC).

Emergency management in Western Australia operates within a State Emergency Management Framework established under the *Emergency Management Act 2005* (EM Act). Within this framework, Local Governments play a defined role in planning for local impacts, supporting coordination, and contributing to prevention, preparedness, response and recovery activities.

Over time, Local Governments have raised concerns that Local Emergency Management Arrangements (LEMA) have become excessively complex, compliance focused and difficult to maintain. Requirements dispersed across legislation, policy and plans have reduced clarity about minimum expectations, increased duplication, and contributed to LEMA that do not consistently support Local Government to take a strategic approach to emergency management planning, or to effectively provide incident support during emergency operations.

The LEMA Review and subsequent LEMA Improvement Program were established to address these issues, seeking to:

- simplify and clarify LEMA requirements,
- better align them with the essential elements of the State Emergency Management Framework,
- support Local Governments through clearer guidance, improved templates and more consistent State support.

Further LEMA reform is also intended to be supported through integration of the LEMA Review and Improvement Program into the planned Comprehensive Review of the State Emergency Management Framework.

WALGA's main role in the LEMA Improvement Program, was to design and deliver a sector- led Pilot to test a revised LEMA document set under real Local Government operating conditions. DFES' role in the LEMA Improvement Program was to progress complementary initiatives including:

- A LEMA Development Model
- Community Emergency Risk Assessment Trial
- Local Government Emergency Management Knowledge Hub.

DFES and WALGA worked collaboratively on the LEMA Improvement Program, with shared inputs and WALGA supported consultation with the Local Government sector.

The LEMA document set that was piloted and refined through the LEMA Pilot is designed to meet Local Government needs and to address the essential requirements for LEMA outlined in the EM Act and State Emergency Management Framework. The LEMA document set includes the:

- Local Emergency Management Plan
- Incident Support Handbook
- Emergency Management Work Plan
- Local Recovery Plan¹.

The LEMA Pilot confirmed the importance of separating strategic and operational LEMA content with different approval and maintenance pathways. Retaining Council endorsement for the Local Emergency Management Plan, while allowing operational and administrative documents to be maintained outside formal Council cycles, streamlined governance, reduced review timeframes and improved currency.

Pilot Local Governments emphasised the importance of having clear minimum expectations for LEMA, alignment with existing Local Government planning and governance processes, and practical usability of both LEMA Guidance and the final LEMA documents, considering constrained Local Government capacity and competing operational pressures. Consolidating existing information, clarifying roles across the local emergency management system, and enabling whole of organisation contributions were key strengths of the pilot approach and documents.

The Pilot also highlighted constraints that will influence sector wide implementation, including workforce capacity, competing operational demands, process and resourcing for risk assessment.

The final LEMA document set, which incorporates insights and recommendations from Pilot Local Governments and additional sector consultation, is practical, scalable and better aligned with Local Government operating realities. Pilot Local Governments were concerned to ensure that their LEMA meet State requirements and there is a need for clear State level direction on the adoption of the revised LEMA Document set to confirm it meets the requirements for the EM Act and State Emergency Management Framework.

Successful implementation across the Local Government sector will require clear articulation of minimum requirements, explicit guidance on governance, review and assurance pathways, coordinated support to build capability and confidence, and sustained collaboration between State agencies, WALGA and Local Governments to enable adoption and long-term maintenance of fit for purpose local arrangements.

¹ The Local Emergency Management Plan, Incident Support Handbook and Emergency Management Work Plan were designed, piloted and refined through the LEMA Pilot. The Local Recovery Plan remains as the current document and was out of scope.

Implementing the outcomes of the LEMA improvement program

Implementation of the outcomes of the LEMA improvement program requires that the revised LEMA document set is integrated within the State Emergency Management Framework and that Local Governments are supported to transition to the revised approach. Complementary system level reform is also required to guide consistent, locally relevant emergency risk planning, strengthen Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC) practice and capacity, clarify governance, review and assurance pathways for LEMA and embed insights from the LEMA Review and Improvement Program through the Comprehensive Review of the State Emergency Management Framework.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are provided to support implementation of the outcomes of the LEMA improvement program aligned with Local Government operating realities

1. Adopt the revised LEMA document set within the State Emergency Management Framework

The revised LEMA document set should be adopted within the State Emergency Management Framework, which could occur through:

- Integration with a revised Local Emergency Management Arrangements Guideline, or
- Incorporation as an addendum to the current Local Emergency Management Arrangements Guideline, or
- Another approach determined by State Government.

Complementary State level policy work should continue in parallel to support confident and consistent adoption across the sector. This should include:

- clear articulation of minimum LEMA requirements, including acceptable document structures and formats
- a clear LEMA development and review model that separates strategic and operational components and maps pathways for continuous improvement
- guidance on assurance and State level review processes, including clarity on major and minor review requirements, pathways and timeframes
- clarity on the process for LEMA to be formally noted by SEMC.

These measures respond directly to Pilot evidence that Local Governments were cautious about departing from existing templates due to uncertainty about compliance and assurance expectations.

2. Support Local Governments to transition to the revised approach

A clearly defined implementation period is required to communicate the changes, support uptake and promote continuous improvement across the Local Government sector. The implementation approach should include:

- Communication of the revised LEMA document set through multiple channels, with messaging tailored for Councils, Local Government executives and emergency managers and LEMCs, to support shared understanding and uptake of the revised LEMA document set.
- Delivery of LEMA masterclasses, paired with peer support and targeted coaching, to support Local Governments to review or develop LEMA using the revised document set.
- Updating emergency management training and professional development to align with the revised LEMA document set, and to embed emergency management understanding beyond specialist roles and individual officers.
- Strengthening LEMC practice through development of practical facilitation, agenda and oversight tools to support effective contribution to LEMA development, preparedness activities and ongoing monitoring.
- Collaboration with hazard management and support agencies to develop shared tools, templates and resources in areas where LEMA knowledge or capacity gaps are common, such as evacuation centre set-up, animal welfare, heatwave planning and emergency communication.
- Continued development of the Local Government Emergency Management Knowledge Hub to promote consistent use of templates, share better practice examples, and support both new and experienced Local Government emergency management staff.
- Collation of Local Government feedback during the transition period to support refinement of the LEMA document set and supporting guidance
- Alignment with relevant reforms arising from the Comprehensive Review of the State Emergency Management Framework.

3. Support consistent, locally relevant emergency risk planning

Local Governments require clear, practical guidance on how emergency risk assessment should be integrated into LEMA in a way that informs emergency management priorities and supports local risk reduction efforts.

The March 2026 SEMC decision to exempt Local Governments from undertaking the ERM process as outlined in Emergency Management Procedure 2.1 and the attached Emergency Management Risk Guideline provides greater flexibility to implement locally appropriate approaches to risk assessment. However, there is still a gap in risk assessment guidance and support. Implementation of the outcomes of the LEMA improvement program should include:

- development of clear, locally appropriate guidance on emergency risk assessment to support LEMA development and review, including how risk information should inform priorities, actions and resourcing decisions
- in the interim, clear guidance on the appropriate use of available district level risk information while longer term policy settings are refined through the comprehensive review of the State Emergency Management Framework.

4. Integrate insights from the LEMA Review and Improvement Program through the Comprehensive Review of the State Emergency Management Framework

Ensure that the findings of the LEMA Review and Improvement Program are embedded within the Comprehensive Review of the State Emergency Management Framework. This should include:

- revision of Local Government roles and responsibilities across prevention, preparedness, response and recovery, with a scalable approach that has regard to Local Government operating realities, capacity and constraints
- clear and practical definition of the role, expectations and capacity of Local Emergency Management Committees in supporting LEMA development, preparedness planning, coordination and ongoing monitoring, beyond compliance-focused reporting
- clearer articulation of the role and responsibilities of Hazard Management Agencies at the local level, including expectations for engagement with Local Governments and Local Emergency Management Committees in risk-based planning, preparedness activities and information sharing
- confirmation of minimum LEMA requirements and scalable, proportionate review and assurance pathways that reflect Local Government operating realities
- alignment of State level expectations with Local Government, LEMC and HMA capacity, recognising operational pressures, workforce turnover and the specific challenges of remote and high risk contexts
- fit for purpose risk assessment and planning expectations that support local decision making, coordination and community resilience.

This recommendation aligns directly with one of the four focus areas of the Comprehensive Review of the State Emergency Management Framework,

Local capacity and community resilience, including embedding the findings and recommendations of the LEMA Improvement Program and Community Disaster Resilience Strategy to support shared responsibility, local leadership and First Nations voice.

Embedding these insights will help reduce cumulative complexity within the Framework, clarify practical responsibilities across the local emergency management system, and support a more coherent, proportionate and effective approach to emergency management across the State.

Background

Emergency management in Western Australia

Emergency management in Western Australia operates within a State Emergency Management Framework established by the *Emergency Management Act 2005* (EM Act). The EM Act establishes the State Emergency Management Committee, which is responsible for overseeing emergency management policy, plans and procedures across the State.

The State Emergency Management Framework provides guidance on how emergency management responsibilities are shared across State agencies, Local Governments, and state, district and local emergency management committees. Local Governments have a defined role within this system, including supporting coordination, planning for local impacts, and contributing to prevention, preparedness, response and recovery (PPRR) activities within their district.

Local Emergency Management Arrangements

Local Emergency Management Arrangements (LEMA) are the collective arrangements required under the EM Act to support emergency management within a Local Government district. They document how emergency management is governed, coordinated, and delivered at the local level, including the roles and responsibilities of Local Government, emergency services, public authorities, partner agencies, and the community.

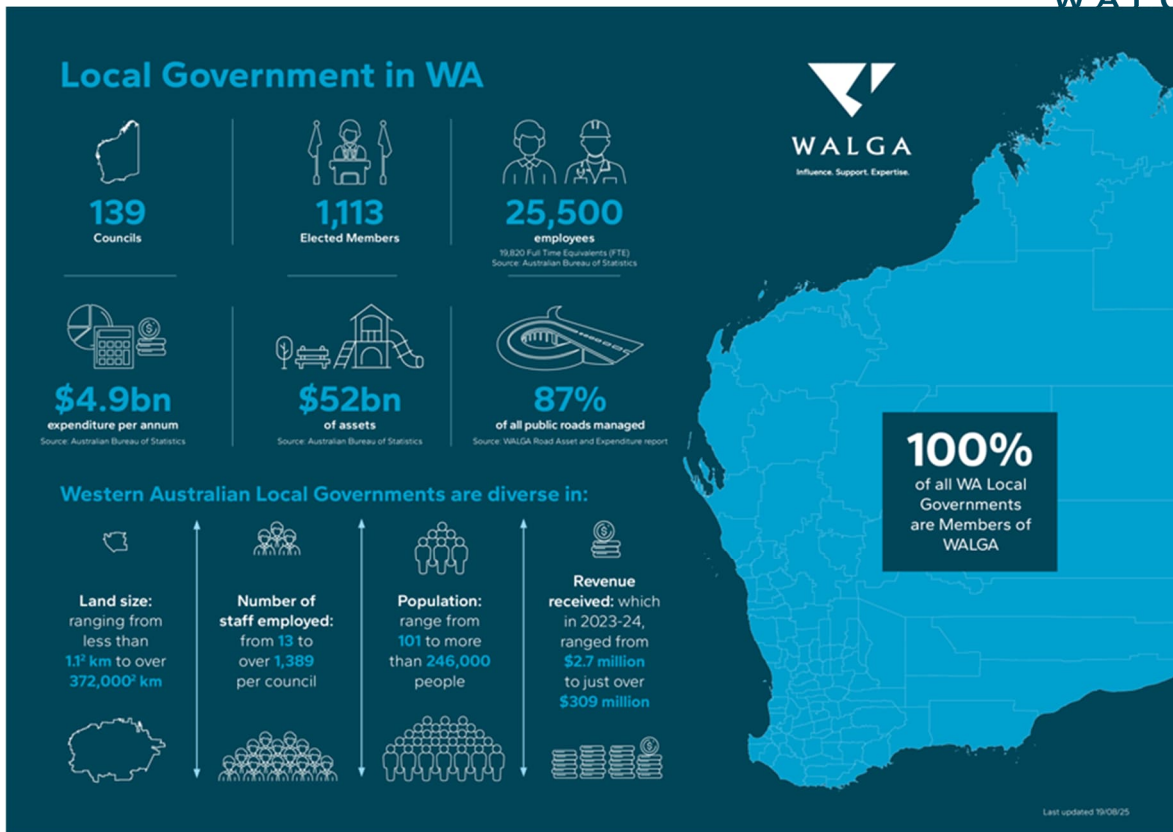
In accordance with section 41 of the EM Act, LEMA set out local policies, roles, responsibilities, coordination arrangements, identified local risks, and strategies and priorities for emergency management, and must be consistent with State emergency management policy and plans.

In accordance with section 39 of the EM Act, the Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC), advises and assists the Local Government in ensuring that LEMA are established, and liaises with public authorities and other relevant persons in the development, review and testing of those arrangements.

As part of the State Emergency Management Framework, LEMA support a comprehensive, coordinated approach across PPRR to achieve effective outcomes for the community.

Local Government Emergency Management Operating Context

There are 137 mainland Local Governments operating under Western Australian emergency management legislation and policy. The sector is highly diverse, with significant variation in geographic size, population, risk profile, workforce capacity and capability, as outlined in the figure below.



In addition to their responsibilities under the EM Act, including for LEMA and managing community recovery, Local Governments have statutory responsibilities for bushfire mitigation, prevention and response under the *Bush Fires Act 1954*. 111 Local Governments manage 563 Bush Fire Brigades and approximately 18,000 volunteers and are a prescribed combat agencies for fire on land vested in the Local Government. Collectively, Local Governments are responsible for initial fire response across 91.8 per cent of Western Australia, encompassing large, remote and high-risk areas. The breadth and significant of these emergency management responsibilities place significant and ongoing demands on Local Government capability, capacity and resourcing.

WALGA's 2025 Emergency Management Survey highlights how these demands are experienced in practice. Only two thirds of Local Governments have a dedicated emergency management officer or team, and fewer than half (46 per cent) report having sufficient staff to meet their emergency management responsibilities. Despite these capacity constraints, 62 per cent of Local Governments report increased investment in prevention and preparedness over the past two years, and most continue to regularly exercise their LEMA, with 60 per cent exercising annually and a further 31 per cent every two to three years. Together, these sector wide operating realities provide essential context for the scope and design of LEMA improvement, and for the constraints Local Governments face in developing and reviewing their LEMA.

Why LEMA improvement is needed

The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (2020) affirmed that emergency management is primarily the responsibility of State and Territory governments, with Local Governments contributing within State-led frameworks and



supported by appropriate coordination, capability and resources. The growing complexity of emergency management responsibilities for Local Governments across Australia was highlighted in the [Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster funding \(Colvin 2024\)](#) which found that emergency management responsibilities have shifted toward Local Government and that State governments should ensure Local Governments have the capability and capacity to deliver the responsibilities assigned to them.

Over time, Local Governments have raised concerns that requirements in the State Emergency Management Framework lack clarity and consistency, have become increasingly onerous, exceed local capability and capacity, and add limited practical value. There are more than 300 references to things Local Governments “must”, “should” or “may” do across the Framework. These references are distributed across the EM Act and *Emergency Management Regulations 2006*, the State Emergency Management Policy, Plan, Procedure, Guidelines, State Hazard Plans and State Support Plans, contributing to cumulative complexity and implementation burden for Local Governments.

These challenges impact the effectiveness and usability of LEMA, which are required to align with and give effect to the State Emergency Management Framework at the local level. As Framework requirements have expanded over time, LEMA have increasingly become lengthy, compliance-focused documents rather than practical tools that support governance, coordination and decision making before and during emergencies. This has reduced confidence that LEMA are proportionate, fit for purpose and deliver practical value, particularly for resource-constrained Local Governments. It has also been unclear exactly what is required to be included versus what would be of value within a particular Local Government’s LEMA to support Emergency Management.

The LEMA Review, and the LEMA Improvement Program sought to address these issues by providing a pathway that simplifies and clarifies LEMA requirements, clarifies alignment with essential components of the State Emergency Management Framework, and supports Local Governments through clearer guidance, improved templates and more consistent State-led support. Consolidated recommendations from the LEMA Review and the initial stages of the LEMA Improvement program are outlined in Table 1. **Error! Reference source not found.** outlines the objectives and outputs from WALGA’s work on the LEMA Review and Improvement Program

Further reform and improvements will be supported by integration of the findings of the LEMA Improvement Program within the planned Comprehensive Review of the State Emergency Management Framework.

Table 1 Consolidated Recommendations informing the LEMA Improvement Program

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Define Purpose and Scope: Clear and contemporary definition of purpose, roles and responsibilities for local government emergency management; focus on resilience, preparedness, disaster risk reduction and recovery. 2. Introduce Scalability and Minimum Compliance Requirements: Introduce a maturity scale that defines a minimum scope for LEMA incorporating essential operational information and optimal sub-plans/arrangements; provide compliance/audit checklist to align with the scale; omit documents that are not the responsibility of Local Governments. 3. Specify Review Requirements: define and clarify major and minor review requirements and timeframes for LEMA; ensure consistency of language and requirements; provide step-by-step guidance on review actions; introduce positive reinforcement model for compliance. |
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4. **Design a Fit for Purpose Risk Assessment Model:** Reform current emergency risk management requirements for Local Government, scale up risk assessment to the district and state level with local government input.
5. **Establish a Digital LEMA Toolkit and Knowledge Hub:** Provide clear interpretation of emergency management information to assist Local Governments in building their LEMA; make available templates, checklist and other online tools to assist LEMA development; expand the tool to store and share LEMA.
6. **Develop new Scalable and Flexible Templates:** Abolish the existing guidelines and replace them with a suite of guidance materials, tools and templates that are simpler and more focused on Local Government requirements.
7. **Integrate Bushfire Management Activities into the LEMA:** noting that bushfire management is not separate from emergency management.
8. **Elevate Emergency Management:** Include EM in the strategic and risk frameworks of local governments.
9. **Refine Requirements in State Support Plans:** Review, refine and define the role of local governments in supporting State Support Plans and clarify the requirements for local planning.
10. **Investigate Increased District Involvement:** Review opportunities for increased role of state agencies and district officers in supporting and developing emergency management at the local level.

LEMA Pilot Methodology

The LEMA Pilot was sector led and took a staged approach including:

- establishment of a Local Government LEMA Improvement Working Group (April 2024)
- development of the WALGA LEMA Improvement Recommendations Report (February 2025)
- endorsement of the proposed approach by the Program Board (February 2025)
- design and testing of revised LEMA document set (March 2025), and delivery of a Pilot with participating Local Governments supported by ongoing Working Group input (March 2025 – April 2026).

The LEMA Pilot was guided by priority recommendations of the WALGA LEMA Improvement Recommendations Report (February 2025) and co-designed with the LEMA Improvement Working Group, who informed the structure, content and application of the draft LEMA document set. A set of guiding principles was also developed to inform the Pilot, based on the Recommendations Report.

LEMA Pilot Guiding Principles

1. LEMA comprise a suite of related documents and arrangements, rather than a single master plan.
2. Strategic, operational and implementation content should be clearly separated across the LEMA document set, with appropriate approval and maintenance responsibilities applied to each.
3. Minimum legislative and policy requirements for LEMA should be clearly defined, with compliance limited to responsibilities within Local Government control.
4. LEMA documentation should support operational use during an incident while also providing clear governance and compliance assurance outside an event.
5. LEMA review, amendment and assurance processes should be structured, scalable and proportionate to Local Government capability and context.

The LEMA Document Set

The LEMA document set was designed to meet the requirements of the EM Act and the State Emergency Management Policy, while allowing flexibility to reflect local context. This work was informed by DFES policy development, including the LEMA Development Model, which identifies essential LEMA requirements and provides a pathway for

developing LEMA maturity (

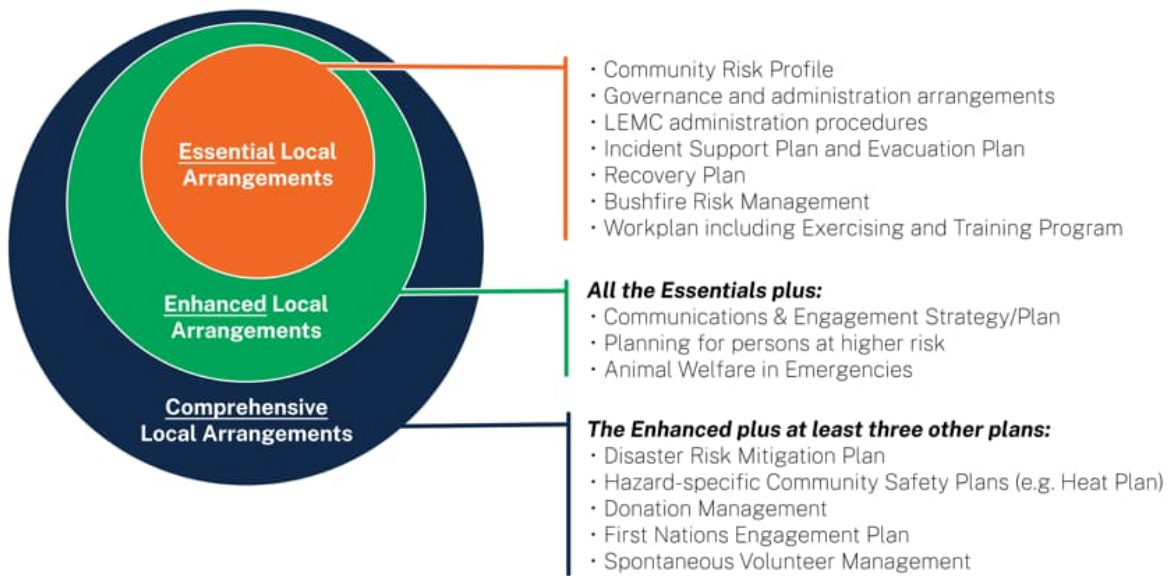


Figure 1).

The LEMA document set was refined through the Pilot and comprises:

- Local Emergency Management Plan
- Incident Support Handbook
- Emergency Management Work Plan
- Local Recovery Plan



While the EM Act does not prescribe a single standard format for documenting LEMA, use of this document set streamlines the development of a fit for purpose LEMA.

LEMA DEVELOPMENT MODEL

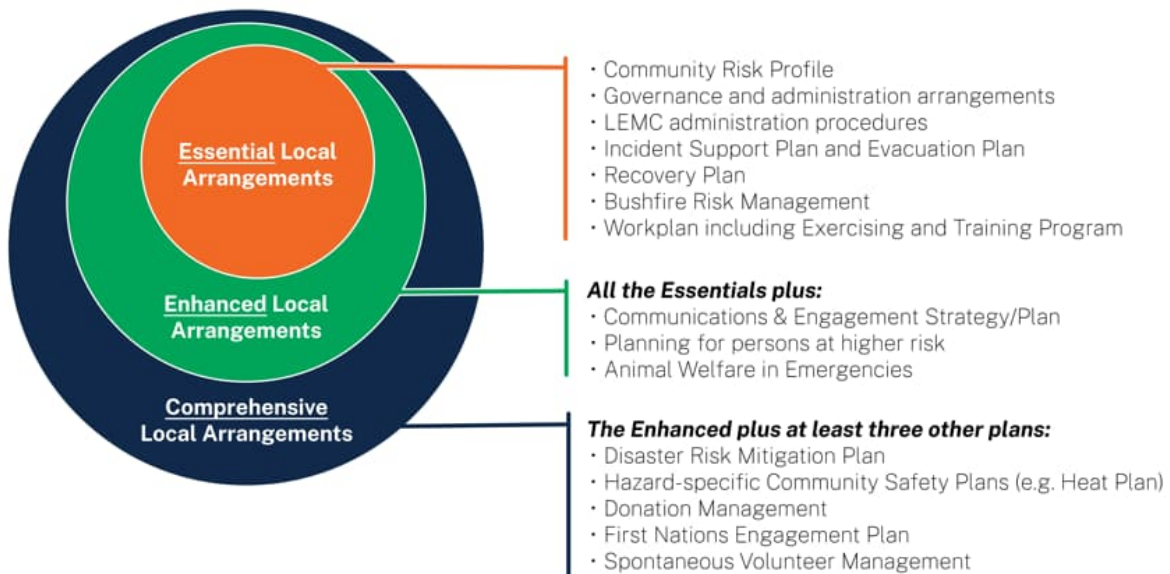
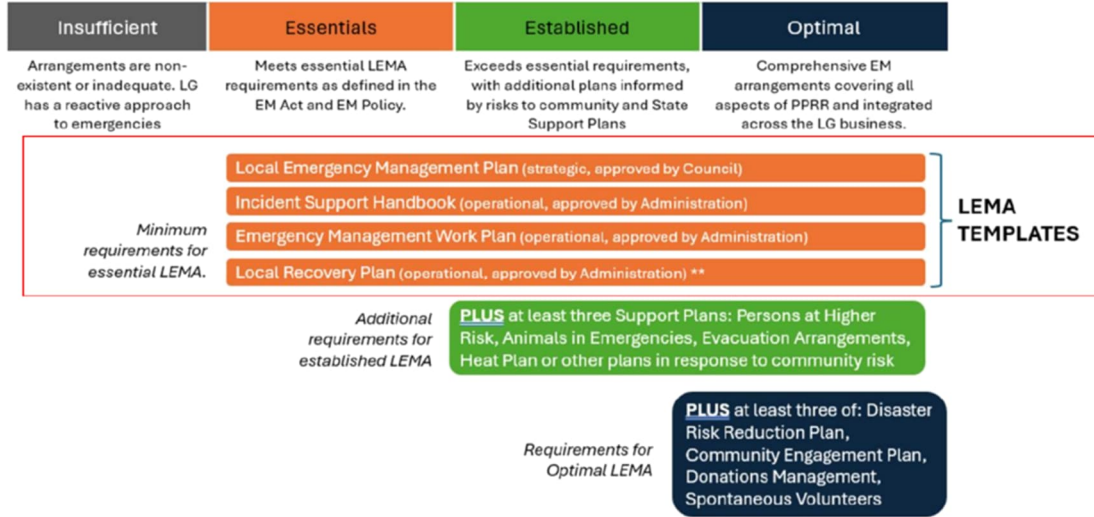


Figure 1 LEMA Development Model

Selection of Pilot Local Governments

Participation in the Pilot was open to all Local Governments through an Expression of Interest process. Five Local Governments were selected representing a diversity of Local Governments including metropolitan, regional, and remote locations, different Local Government bands, and different hazard profiles. All Pilot Local Governments were due or over due to review their LEMA and had capacity to commit resources to participation in the Pilot.

Table 2 Pilot Local Governments and delivery context

Local Government	Band	Location type	EM FTE	Bushfire Brigade Management
City of Kwinana	1	Metropolitan	2.0	Yes
Shire of Manjimup	2	Regional	2.0	Yes
Shire of Chittering	3	Peri urban / rural	1.4	Yes
Shire of Gingin	3	Regional	1.4	Yes
Shire of Shark Bay	4	Remote	0.33	No

The Pilot Approach

Through the LEMA Pilot, WALGA facilitated, guided and evaluated implementation of the revised LEMA document set under real Local Government operating conditions.

The Pilot followed a consistent engagement framework to guide how participating Local Governments trialled the revised LEMA document set, with all stages occurring across each Pilot Local Government but adapted to the different paces, sequences and levels of support required. The Pilot engagement framework included the following stages:

- orientation and initiation, including briefing Council and the Local Emergency Management Committee on participation in the Pilot
- scoping and prioritisation, to focus effort on the most critical LEMA documents and content
- participation in a Community Emergency Risk Assessment (CERA) workshop (DFES led, WALGA supported) coordinated with the LEMC and relevant stakeholders to inform local risk assessments for LEMA
- support drafting of the LEMA document set, including internal Local Government review and consultation with the LEMC
- support for internal review, Council consideration and endorsement processes, including LEMC and Council endorsement of the Local Emergency Management Plan.

WALGA's activities included:

- coordinating and supporting Local Government participation in the Pilot
- facilitating consultation and engagement between DFES, Pilot Local Governments and the LEMA Work Group on DFES components of the LEMA Improvement Program, including CERA workshops, the Knowledge Hub and Policy work, with Pilot Local Governments and the LEMA Working Group
- working with Pilot Local Governments to engage their LEMC in the LEMA pilot
- capturing lessons learned to inform final LEMA document design, supporting guidance and user resources
- refining the LEMA document set based on Pilot experience and feedback, input from the LEMA Working Group, WALGA's Local Government Emergency

Management Advisory Group, and targeted engagement with Local Government emergency managers

- supporting testing and refinement of LEMA development and governance processes, including document structure and content, LEMC engagement, and approval and maintenance pathways aligned to existing Local Government practices
- providing policy and implementation insights to support future consideration of changes to the State Emergency Management Framework.

Evaluation and refinement of the LEMA Document Set

Delivery of the Pilot was informed by the LEMA Working Group, established by WALGA in April 2024 to ensure the LEMA Improvement Program reflects the diverse needs and risk profiles of WA Local Governments. The Working Group met regularly to review draft LEMA document set and to provide feedback to DFES-led components of the LEMA Improvement Program. Joint sessions were also held with WALGA's Local Government Emergency Management Advisors Group to present draft materials and capture broader practitioner feedback.

Working Group input informed:

- refinement of the LEMA document set and supporting guidance
- validation of governance boundaries between Council endorsed content and administratively maintained information within the LEMA document set
- identification of implementation considerations across diverse Local Government settings
- development of DFES-led LEMA Improvement Program components, including the Local Government Emergency Management Knowledge Hub, the LEMA Development Model and the Community Emergency Risk Assessment (CERA) trial.

Input from the LEMA working group contributed to iterative improvement of the LEMA document set and strengthened confidence that it is practical, scalable and fit for sector-wide application.

The final LEMA document set has been refined based on:

- practical insights and direct feedback and input from Pilot Local Government throughout the process of working with them to develop their LEMA through the pilot
- LEMC feedback and discussions during the delivery of the Pilot
- input and feedback from the LEMA Working Group, WALGA's Local Government Emergency Management Working Group, targeted engagement with Local Government Emergency Managers, and liaison with DFES project partners
- alignment with DFES' LEMA improvement policy work and the State Emergency Management Framework.

Complementary Emergency Management Sector Engagement

In addition to delivery of the LEMA Pilot, WALGA undertook targeted engagement with State agencies and other organisations that have a stake in LEMA. The aim was to identify and address gaps in LEMA, build shared understanding of Local Government operating contexts and identify opportunities to integrate aspects of emergency management across different Local Government business areas. This complementary engagement strengthened the revised LEMA model, provided practical support to the Pilot Local Governments, identified gaps where further work is required to support Local Government emergency management.

This complementary engagement included:

- engagement with WACOSS to explore how heat vulnerability tools could be incorporated into local emergency management planning
- work with the WALGA Community team to clarify the role of emergency management within Local Government Public Health Plans and delivering a webinar to guide Local Governments on inclusion of emergency management in Public Health Plans
- liaising with DPIRD to build awareness of Local Government capacity and responsibilities in animal welfare and identify where clearer guidance is needed
- engagement with the Department of Communities on community evacuation arrangements to support accurate, practical inclusion of evacuation centre information in the Incident Support Handbook
- presentations and briefings with local governments, DEMCs and a Zone forum to build awareness of the revised LEMA approach.
- regular meetings with DFES' District Emergency Management Advisors to seek feedback on the LEMA Pilot and ensure alignment
- in kind support to DFES on Disability Inclusive Emergency Planning Workshops, with three of five Pilot local governments participating
- engagement with the Community Disaster and Resilience Strategy team to identify alignment opportunities, reduce silos and ensure the revised LEMA model connects with broader resilience initiatives
- advice to Local Governments on LEMC governance following questions raised through the LEMA Improvement Program, that LEMCs are not required to operate as Committees of Council under the *Local Government Act 1995* (LG Act)

Insights from the LEMA Pilot

This section summarises key insights from the LEMA Pilot on what most influenced the effectiveness, usability and sustainability LEMA in practice. Drawing on the experiences of Pilot Local Governments, it highlights how governance settings, capacity constraints, risk assessment processes, organisational engagement and committee practices shaped both the pace and quality of LEMA development and review. These findings inform WALGA's recommendation on implementation if LEMA review aligned with Local Government operating realities.

Separation of strategic and operational components of LEMA

Key Insight

Separating strategic and operational LEMA components, with Council endorsement retained only for the Local Emergency Management Plan, streamlines governance, reduces LEMA review timeframes, and enables practical maintenance of operational documents that are otherwise delayed by extended LEMC and Council approval cycles. The Emergency Management Work Plan supports integration of emergency management priorities into the Local Government's Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework

Implementation requirements

Clear, State-level guidance confirming that alternative LEMA structures meet Emergency Management Act and Framework requirements is required to facilitate Local Government adoption of the revised LEMA model. This should be supported by Clear minimum LEMA requirements and to support consistent assurance.

Discussion

Pilot Local Governments supported separating strategic and operational components of LEMA, with a strategic, Council endorsed Local Emergency Management Plan supported by operational, administratively managed Incident Support Handbooks and Emergency Management Work Plans. This approach aligns with Local Government practice, streamlines governance, and enables ongoing maintenance of operational components without unnecessarily onerous approval processes.

Current LEMA governance and approval cycles significantly extend the time required to develop or review LEMA and first require input and discussion by the LEMC, followed by LEMC review and endorsement, then Council approval. While LEMCs are scheduled to meet up to four times per year, incidents, exercises and availability of members frequently disrupt this schedule. One Pilot Local Government held only one formal LEMC meeting during the Pilot period, with others redirected to operational debriefs and exercises. Following endorsement by the LEMC, the Local Emergency Management Plan requires review and preparation for Council and to be scheduled at a Council meeting.

While this process will remain for the strategic Local Emergency Management Plan, removing this level of governance for the Incident Support Handbook and Emergency Management Work Plan is a significant step in streamlining LEMA. The Pilot reinforced the importance of clearly differentiating major and minor review requirements and applying proportional review pathways and timeframes so that routine updates to

operational and implementation documents can occur without triggering full committee or Council processes.

Across the Pilot, Local Governments were cautious about departing from existing templates due to uncertainty about compliance and assurance expectations, with many assuming adherence to established formats was required to meet EM Act and Framework obligations. This highlights the need for clear, endorsed direction on minimum LEMA requirements, acceptable formats, governance and review pathways, and step-by-step guidance on review actions to support confident uptake of the revised LEMA document set and a more streamlined system across the State.

Capacity and competing operational pressures

Key insight

Capacity limitations and operational pressures significantly influence the pace of LEMA development and review. This highlights the importance of providing Support Local Governments to transition to the revised approach. Pilot Local Governments where the emergency management lead was supported by an administrative staff member and relevant expertise from across the Local Government were better able to progress through reviewing their LEMA.

Implementation requirements

Successful implementation of the revised LEMA model will require recognition of the different operational and corporate skill sets needed to develop and maintain LEMA. This requires a realistic understanding of competing demands and the need to balance operational priorities with the strategic, administrative and coordination requirements of LEMA.

Discussion

Capacity and capability gaps affected all Pilot Local Governments, and all Pilot leads faced competing operational priorities, including the seasonal nature of emergency management, with increased operational pressure in the lead up to and during the high threat period, reducing the capacity to focus on LEMA review. All five required more intensive support from the WALGA Project Officer than initially anticipated. In many cases, Pilot leads were operating in bushfire-focused roles, creating a mismatch with the strategic, administrative and coordination effort required for LEMA development.

Community Emergency Services Managers (CESMs) were central to delivery of the LEMA Pilot, acting as the Pilot lead in four of the five participating Local Governments. The CESM role is highly operational, with a strong focus on bushfire management, brigade coordination and seasonal preparedness.

Local Governments that directly employed their CESM progressed LEMA development more smoothly, as the CESMs were better positioned to identify existing plans and corporate documents, navigate governance and approval processes, engage internal stakeholders, and align emergency management priorities with broader Local Government functions.

Where CESMs were not embedded directly in the Pilot Local Government, there were increased challenges - reduced visibility of corporate information, community context and

Local Government values, and less clarity around internal review and endorsement pathways, which slowed progress and increased reliance on external support.

In Local Governments where administrative staff supported drafting and coordination across the organisation, the LEMA review process was more effective. Emergency management leads were able to focus on operational input, while administrative staff applied a corporate and governance lens, enabling steady progress despite competing operational demands.

In one Pilot Local Government, the CESM resigned and the position was not backfilled, with responsibility transferring to the Deputy Chief Executive Officer. While this arrangement provided continuity and executive oversight, progress was constrained by limited capacity and competing priorities.

Overall, the Pilot highlighted the operational constraints, resourcing dependencies and time-intensive nature of drafting, consulting on, endorsing and adopting LEMA, reinforcing the need for scalable and supported implementation of LEMA improvements.

Risk assessment and LEMA

Key insight

Local risk assessment is a critical dependency for LEMA, as it informs local emergency management priorities. While the Community Emergency Risk Assessment (CERA) workshops delivered in Pilot Local Government provided valuable, locally informed risk insights, these were resource intensive and additional work was required to convert risk assessments into actionable emergency management priorities.

Implementation requirements

Clear guidance is required on how local risk assessment should be undertaken and how it should be integrated in LEMA development and review.

Discussion

The CERA workshops generated detailed, locally informed information on hazards, vulnerabilities, consequences and community strengths. This provided a contemporary and consistent evidence base for LEMA development, reducing reliance on outdated or fragmented risk information and supporting more informed, cross-agency discussion. Pilot Local Governments and partner agencies consistently valued the workshops for strengthening shared understanding of local risks, consequences and roles. This helped to establish a foundation for ongoing collaboration in emergency management.

However, the addition of CERA workshops required more preparation and involvement from Pilot Local Governments than anticipated. Pilot leads required advance briefing to support workshop delivery and to understand the CERA methodology and outputs, adding to the overall time take and resourcing demands during the Pilot. All Pilot Local Governments deferred development of their Local Emergency Management Plan until their CERA Outcomes Reports were finalised in August 2025, so that their emergency management priorities could be informed by the CERA outputs. This delayed progress through the Pilot and meant that Pilot Local Governments were still drafting their Local Emergency Management Plans in the lead up and through the high threat period.

While the CERA Outcomes Reports provided high-quality local risk information, additional work was required to translate detailed risk information into prioritised emergency management actions suitable for inclusion in the Local Emergency Management Plan. WALGA supported Pilot Local Governments to synthesise CERA outputs into a smaller number of locally relevant risk themes and to develop clear emergency management priorities aligned to risk as well as the Local Government's governance, preparedness and coordination roles and organisational priorities.

Embedding emergency management across the Local Government

Key insight

A whole-of-Local Government approach strengthens emergency management by broadening ownership beyond response and enabling clearer contributions across prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. The Emergency Management Work Plan supports integration of emergency management priorities into the Local Government's Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework, informing relevant actions and resourcing considerations within business planning processes and supporting the delivery of strategic outcomes related to community safety and resilience.

Implementation requirements

Implementation of the revised LEMA model will require explicit support for cross-organisational engagement, including guidance on how non-emergency management business units can contribute to emergency management outcomes based on their existing capabilities and capacity

Discussion

Pilot Local Governments varied in the extent to which internal business units recognised the Local Government role in emergency management beyond bushfire response. Where a whole-of-organisation approach was adopted, ownership shifted from a response and bushfire-centric view to shared responsibility across prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

In Local Governments with limited strategic capacity within emergency management teams, WALGA's delivery support and iterative refinement assisted in clarifying how business areas beyond emergency management contribute to LEMA. This included identifying support roles different parts of the organisation may play during response and recovery. Participants reported stronger internal relationships, reduced siloing, and increased engagement from non-emergency management areas, including involvement in preparedness activities and community education.

The Pilot also reinforced that Local Governments already hold much of the information required to plan for and manage emergencies. The value of the revised LEMA model lay not in generating new material, but in consolidating existing information into a practical, accessible structure that can be maintained over time.

Role of the LEMC in LEMA

Key insight

LEMCs have a clear statutory role in supporting LEMA development, but existing meeting structures and practices often limit meaningful engagement in local emergency management planning. Shifting meetings away from passive reporting and toward preparedness priorities and actions enabled LEMCs to contribute more effectively.

Implementation requirements

Effective implementation of the revised LEMA model will require clearer guidance on the role of the LEMC in LEMA development, including practical expectations for how committees support preparedness planning, coordination and review. This should be accompanied by targeted capacity building for LEMC members across agencies, to improve understanding of LEMA purpose, risk-based planning, and the responsibilities of all LEMC members.

Discussion

In accordance with section 39 of the EM Act, the LEMC advises and assists the Local Government to ensure LEMA are established and liaises with public authorities and other relevant persons in the development, review and testing of those arrangements. The Pilot demonstrated, however, that this advisory role is not consistently embedded in practice.

Across the Pilot Local Governments, existing LEMC practices limited effective engagement in LEMA development. Common issues included:

- meetings dominated by routine agency reporting and standing updates, often at a program or regional level rather than focused on local priorities
- limited time allocated to preparedness planning, coordination, shared actions or discussion of LEMA content
- LEMA documents being tabled with limited or no prior review by members, constraining the quality of feedback
- minimum meeting requirement not being met due to member availability, competing operational priorities and workforce turnover.

These challenges are consistent with the findings of the Local and District Emergency Management Committee Annual Preparedness Report 2025, which identified a strong compliance-focused, reporting-driven committee culture and noted that only 57 per cent of reporting LEMCs met minimum meeting requirements.

While the LEMC's role in LEMA development is clearly established in legislation and the State Emergency Management Framework, the Pilot showed that more active engagement required a shift from established practice. Improved engagement depended on additional facilitation, clearer expectations and more deliberate use of committee time. Targeted facilitation, clearer documentation and structured agenda setting strengthened LEMC participation, supported by involvement in CERA workshops that built shared understanding of local risks, roles and coordination arrangements, and Disability Inclusive Emergency Planning workshops in two Pilot Local Governments that broadened consideration of preparedness and recovery responsibilities.

During the LEMA Pilot, WALGA provided advice to clarify that LEMCs are not required to operate as Committees of Council under the EM Act or the LG Act, reducing procedural burden and improving elected member participation. Two Pilot Local Governments applied this clarification, with one transitioning away from a Committee of Council model and another avoiding it entirely, better integrating emergency management into existing governance arrangements without unnecessary formality.

Clarifying roles and expectations across the Local emergency management system

Key insight

Effective emergency management relies on a shared and practical understanding of roles, responsibilities and limits across all stakeholders in the local emergency management system.

Implementation requirements

Implementation of the revised LEMA model will require clearer articulation of Local Government, agency and committee roles across prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

Discussion

The Pilot highlighted that Local Government emergency management roles are often understood primarily through a bushfire and response lens, with less recognition of responsibilities across preparedness and recovery. This narrow framing contributed to gaps in role clarity and differing expectations across local emergency management stakeholders.

Discussions to clarify roles were frequent throughout the Pilot, particularly in relation to:

- the respective roles of Local Governments, Hazard Management Agencies, Controlling Agencies and Support Agencies
- the role of the LEMC and individual members
- coordination and escalation pathways
- the limits of Local Government authority during an active emergency.

The Pilot process, including use of the revised LEMA document set and concurrent CERA and Disability Inclusive Emergency Planning activities, helped surface and address these issues. Working through roles and expectations as part of LEMA development improved shared understanding across stakeholders and strengthened confidence in local coordination arrangements. This process also supported clearer conversations with Councils and community members about the Local Government role in emergency management.

The final LEMA document set has been designed to clearly articulate local emergency management roles. A key lesson from the Pilot was that effective emergency management depends not only on stakeholders understanding their own responsibilities, but also on understanding the roles, dependencies and limitations of others before and during an emergency.

Refining the LEMA Document Set

This section outlines how feedback from Pilot Local Governments, the LEMA Working Group and broader sector engagement, together with observations from the Pilot, informed refinements to the LEMA document set. The focus of these refinements was to improve clarity, usability and alignment with Local Government operating realities.

By consolidating existing information, clarifying roles, and aligning documents with both the State Emergency Management Framework and everyday Local Government planning, governance and operational processes, the revised LEMA document set is better positioned to support confidence, accessibility and ongoing maintenance. Although tested with five Pilot Local Governments, the findings reflect sector wide conditions, including capacity constraints, workforce turnover and competing operational priorities, demonstrating that the revised approach is scalable across metropolitan, regional and remote contexts and suitable for broader sector wide implementation.

Cross-cutting feedback across the document set

Cross cutting feedback across the LEMA document set that was used to refine the final document set included:

- clear articulation of minimum requirements and expectations to provide confidence that revised document structures meet the requirements of the EM Act and State Emergency Management Framework
- aligning LEMA documents to existing Local Government planning, governance, risk and resourcing processes
- practical useability with clear and specific guidance focussing on locally relevant, actionable content, ease of document navigation, plain language and model text provided where it was applicable across a range of Local Governments
- minimising duplication of information already held elsewhere in the organisation, across agencies or at district level
- enabling whole of organisation contributions by articulating the breadth of Local Government roles and content related to emergency management in emergency management
- addressing the multiple audiences of LEMA including emergency management staff and LEMC as well as the whole of Local Government, Council and community
- clear governance and approval pathways.

Local Emergency Management Plan

Through the Pilot, the Local Emergency Management Plan was refined as an effective concise, Council endorsed strategic document that sets governance, priorities and commitment, rather than including operational detail better managed outside formal approval cycles. Perceived strengths of this document included its capacity to build whole of organisation ownership, provide a platform for Council and executive engagement, and to support resourcing discussions, grant applications and capability investment.

"This plan offers a common understanding of risks, responsibilities, and priorities for both the community and decision-makers" (City of Kwinana).

"Having the Plan framed at a strategic level makes it easier to pull the right internal people in. It stops emergency management being seen as only the emergency services team's job." (Band 1 Local Government).

"Having an endorsed Plan makes it much easier to justify why we need to invest in certain capabilities." (Shire of Shark Bay).

The final **Local Emergency Management Plan Guidance and Model Text** were refined to:

- clarify roles and responsibilities across the local emergency management system for a range of local stakeholders
- link to existing Local Government strategic documents
- link local risk and resilience directly to the emergency management priorities.

Incident Support Handbook

Through the Pilot, the Incident Support Handbook was refined as the primary operational LEMA document, intended to support readiness, role clarity and rapid access to information during incidents. For Pilot Local Governments, this involved gathering existing information from a range of places to consolidated and update.

"The Handbook gave us a single place to bring all our contact details together instead of updating the same information across multiple plans." (City of Kwinana).

"Because of the number of activations we've been involved in, we already knew what we needed on day one. The Handbook is a tool to bring it together clearly for those who are not familiar." (Shire of Manjimup).

The final Incident Support Handbook Guidance and Model Text were refined to:

- reflect better practice demonstrated across Pilot Local Governments and with reference to additional LEMA examples shared with WALGA
- clearly articulate the full range of incident support roles a Local Government may be requested to provide across Local Government functions
- provide model text suitable for a range of Local Governments, with clear guidance on where and how local content should be applied to streamline drafting
- enable use by staff who are new to the Local Government or with less familiarity of emergency management
- introduce a clear template with a simplified, standardised structure and layout to improve consistency, usability and drafting efficiency, and minimise formatting challenge.

Emergency Management Work Plan

Through the Pilot, the Emergency Management Work Plan was refined as an administrative and monitoring tool to support coordination implementation of local emergency management priorities and actions, and to monitor and track progress against the emergency management priorities set out in the Local Emergency Management Plan.

Prior to the Pilot, none of the participating Local Governments had an established LEMC business plan which limited consistent tracking of priorities and actions over time.



Participants viewed the Work Plan as a document that could help shift LEMC discussions away from passive reporting more purposeful consideration of progress, emerging issues and follow-up actions. In one Pilot Local Government, the refined Work Plan was adopted as the LEMC business plan, reflecting its suitability as a priority driven monitoring and coordination tool.

The final **Emergency Management Work Plan Guidance and Model Text** were refined to:

- focus on a small, manageable number of actions linked to the Local Emergency Management Plan and within the Local Government's sphere of influence
- introduce a simplified, standardised structure that can also function as an LEMC business plan where appropriate.
- supports integration of emergency management priorities into the Local Government's Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework, informing relevant actions and resourcing considerations within business planning processes and supporting the delivery of strategic outcomes related to community safety and resilience.