



2023 Local Government Emergency Management Survey Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) conducts a 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. The survey provides critical information to underpin WALGA's Emergency Management policy and advocacy work.

The 2023 survey results will inform WALGA's policy development and advocacy on behalf of the sector, including the [WALGA 2024-25 State Budget Submission](#), and in the lead up to the next State and Federal elections, with a focus on the need for adequate resourcing for Local Government Emergency Management, increased support for volunteer Bush Fire Brigades (BFB) and State Emergency Service (SES) through the Local Government Grants Scheme (LGGs), and ensuring matters important to Local Governments are considered in the development of the Consolidated Emergency Services Act.

This online survey was designed by Research Solutions and conducted by WALGA and follows an approach similar to that used in previous years. 102 of the WA's 137 mainland Local Governments completed the survey, a response rate of 75%.

1.1 An overview of Emergency Management

The **preparedness of the community for a major emergency** was the most frequently mentioned key issue of concern, with over half of Local Governments (56%) including this as one of their Top 5 most important Emergency Management issues.

The areas in which Local Governments felt least effective were **engaging the community in risk reduction and building community resilience**, with only around 1 in 5 responding Local Governments stating they were either mostly or extremely effective in these areas. Only 25% of respondents have a community preparedness/resilience plan.

Just under half of Local Governments reported that they had programs in place to support community preparedness or disaster resilience. These were common among Band 1 Local Governments (71%) but were much less prevalent in the smaller Band 4 Local Governments (29%).

The **capacity to manage recovery after a significant emergency** (51%) was the next most frequently mentioned Top 5 issue of concern for, all respondents except Band 1 Local Governments. This was followed by the **capacity of the Local Government to respond to a significant emergency** (44%).

Management responsibility for Bush Fire Brigades and **inadequate LGGs funding** were next in importance for those Local Governments with Bush Fire Brigades (41% and 38%). However, 26% of Local Governments with Bush Fire Brigades identified one or other of these issues as the most important issue for them. Management responsibility for Bush Fire Brigades was one of the two most important issues for 60% of Band 4 Local Governments; the capability to respond to a significant emergency (60%) was the other most important issue.

1.1.1 Emergency Management plans, policies and agreements

In keeping with requirements under the State Emergency Management Framework, almost all Local Governments have Council-approved **Local Emergency Management Arrangements (LEMA)** (85%) or are in the process of developing them (12%). Similarly, almost all Local Governments have a **Local Recovery Plan** (79%) or are in the process of developing one (16%).

Most had completed (51%) or were in the progress of completing (26%) a **Risk Register of Priority Hazards**, which is also part of the LEMA, with bushfires and storms the most commonly cited hazards (94%) followed by flood (84%) and pandemic (74%). Many Local Governments with a Priority Risk Register also include Hazards on their **Corporate Risk Register**. For example, 70% of those with bushfire on their Risk Register of Priority Hazards also included it on their Corporate Risk Register, and 67% included pandemic.

Two-thirds of Local Governments with Bush Fire Brigades had a **Brigade Local Law** in place (65%), an increase from 48% in 2021.

A collaborative approach between Local Governments is also clear, with 78% of Local Governments having an Agreement, Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or Commitment to share resources for emergency management with other Local Governments completed (59%) or in progress (19%).

Many Local Governments have completed or are in the process of developing Emergency Management policies and plans that are additional to those required under the LEMA. These included:

- A policy for urgent liquidity /funds during an emergency (41% completed, 10% in progress).
- A plan for what to do if an emergency occurs when there is a major local event (34% completed, 18% in progress).
- A plan for supporting community members who are at greater risk in an emergency (32% completed, 20% in progress).

1.1.2 Integration of Emergency Management in non–Emergency Management plans and policies

Most Local Governments include Emergency Management in their **Business Continuity Plan** (82%) and their **Strategic Community Plan** (69%). Fewer Local Governments are including Emergency Management in policies beyond these key documents. For example, only 43% of Local Governments consider it in the Community Safety Plan.

1.2 Recovery

Section 36(b) of the [Emergency Management Act 2005](#) states that it is a function of Local Government to manage recovery following an emergency affecting the community in its district.

Just under half of Local Governments have activated their Local Recovery Plan at least once in the last five years, with 28% activating their Local Recovery Plan for COVID-19 and 30% activating their Local Recovery Plan for another emergency.

The **capacity to manage recovery from a significant emergency** was identified as a key issue for around half of Local Governments, and many of the Band 2 to 4 Local Governments believe they will need a great deal of State Government assistance, including financial, expertise and other resources to manage and recover from a significant emergency.

The areas identified as requiring the greatest support were **infrastructure and the built environment** (63% of Local Governments feel they would need a great deal of support) and **social and community well-being** (51% of Local Governments feel they would need a great deal of support).

Although many Local Governments would require support to recover from a significant emergency, two-thirds of Local Governments felt that the responsibility for recovery from an emergency with significant local impact should be shared equally between Local Governments and State Government.

1.2.1 Commonwealth/State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA-WA)

Just over half of the survey participants had an natural disaster event activated under Commonwealth/State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, Western Australia (DRFA-WA) in the last five years, and just over two-thirds (69%) had sought or received DRFA-WA Category B funding for Emergency Works, Immediate Reconstruction Works or Essential Public Assets Reconstruction over this time.

Satisfaction with the DRFA-WA funding process was fairly low with between 50% - 60% of funding recipients rating themselves as not satisfied or slightly satisfied with all aspects of the process evaluated. Two in three funding recipients were not at all satisfied with the timeliness of the claims assessment.

Survey participants were told that WALGA is advocating for **betterment funding** so that essential public assets can be rebuilt to a more resilient standard to help them withstand the impacts of future natural disasters, and asked to identify areas that would benefit from betterment funding. Suggestions from Local Government for the areas that would benefit from betterment funding to rebuild and improve infrastructure included:

- Bridges and culverts
- Floodway
- Remote access roads, including unsealed roads
- Foreshore infrastructure
- Civic and recreational buildings.

1.3 Resources for Emergency Management

Local Government Expenditure

Local Government expenditure, excluding Local Government Grant Scheme (LGGs) expenditure on Bush Fire Brigades and SES, varied widely between Local Governments. Operational expenditure was very low in some smaller Local Governments, however some larger Local Governments expended up to \$1.4 million. The highest operational expenditure was amongst Band 1 and Band 2 Local Governments. Just under half of the Local Governments that provided expenditure information had capital expenditure on Emergency Management additional to LGGs. Similar to operational expenditure, this ranged from very low expenditure up to \$1.5 million.

Local government Emergency Management workforce

Most Local Governments (76%) employed staff directly in Emergency Management; however, three-quarters of these Local Governments employed one or fewer FTEs with a range of between 0.05 FTE and 10 FTEs.

Just under three-quarters of all Local Governments (73%) had staff who were not employed directly in

Emergency Management who were available to step into an Emergency Management role without having a critical impact on business as usual if a significant emergency or recovery effort was required. Staff numbers ranged from less than 1FTE up to a maximum of 25 staff, with a median of 2 staff.

One in three Local Governments felt that all their Emergency Management staff had adequate training or experience in Emergency Management, suggesting a need for further development of the Local Government Emergency Management Workforce; however, 44% believed that only some of their staff had adequate training or experience. Only 60% of Local Governments who had staff not employed directly in Emergency Management but available to step into an Emergency Management role had provided these staff with some training in Emergency Management, again suggesting a need for further training and development.

Emergency Management Grants

The most common Emergency Management grant received by Local Governments was the [Mitigation Activity Fund Grants Program](#) (MAFGP). To be eligible, the Local Government must have an Office of Bush Fire Risk Management (OBRM) endorsed Bush Fire Risk Management Plan (BRMP). In FY 2022- 23, there were 74 Local Governments with an OBRM-endorsed BRMP, and 55% of all these Local Governments received funding through the MAFGP. The median grant was \$195,370.

Barriers to accessing Emergency Management grant funding

The majority of Local Governments described the barriers to accessing Emergency Management funding as sufficient enough to cause the Local Government to think twice about submitting an application for funding. One of the key barriers was the capacity to develop a grant-ready project.

For Local Governments in the Country Zones with a CESM based in their area, 95% said their CESM had a great deal or a lot of impact on improving their LGGS grant outcomes, and 67% said their CESM had enabled their Local Government to successfully apply for other Emergency Management related grants.

The analysis of the data provided by WALGA shows a **clear relationship between access to CESMs based in their area and BRPC/BRMCs, and access to the MAFGP and the size of the MAFGP received.** Local Governments with an OBRM-endorsed BRMP and either a CESM based in their area or a BRPC/BRMC (or both) were almost twice as likely (70%) to receive MAFGP as Local Governments with an OBRM-endorsed BRMP who had neither a CESM based in their area or a BRPC/BRMC (38%) and those with a CESM based in their area or a BRPC/BRMC (or both) received three times more MAFGP.

Further, an analysis of Local Governments responding to the survey who receive the MAFGP shows that as the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff employed directly in Local Government Emergency Management, including a CESM based in their area or a BRPC/BRMC, increases, so does the value of the MAFGP received.

Local Government Grants Scheme

The Local Government Grants Scheme (LGGS) is funded by the Emergency Services Levy (ESL) and is the primary funding source for Bush Fire Brigades and State Emergency Services (SES) Units. A total of 81% of all Western Australian Local Governments have one or more Bush Fire Brigades and receive an LGGS operational grant and access to LGGS capital grants for each Bush Fire Brigade and SES Unit in their jurisdiction.

Governments were asked to indicate if they supported a range of potential improvements to the LGGS, with the strongest support for:

- Clear advice on whether a proposal that had been declined is likely to be funded in a subsequent year (83%).
- A transparent LGGS assessment process (81%).
- LGGS Priorities to be informed by an audit of LGGS facilities (77%).

Just over half of Local Governments with one or more Bush Fire Brigades (54%) spent money on their Bush Fire Brigades in addition to their LGGS grant.

1.4 The impact of the CESM program

CESMs engage with the community and volunteers and act as a conduit between the Local Government and

the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) in achieving outcomes aligned with the principles of Prevention, Preparedness, Response & Recovery (PPRR). There are currently 34 CESMs providing support to 57 Local Governments. The seven CESMs working with Metropolitan Local Governments are fully funded and employed by DFES. The remaining 27 CESMs working outside the metropolitan area are employed by Local Governments under various cost sharing arrangements with the State.

The survey clearly showed that Local Governments with a CESM based in their area felt that the CESM increased their capacity a great deal, particularly in the areas of:

- Bush Fire Brigade management (96%)
- Coordination of operational response (92%)
- Communication between the Local Government and DFES (88%)
- Training of Bush Fire Brigade volunteers (88%).

Local Governments felt that their CESM improved LGGS outcomes, particularly amongst the Country Zone Local Governments, where the CESMs are all employed by the Local Government. Further, CESMs in Country Zone Local Governments had enabled two-thirds (67%) of these Local Governments to successfully apply for Emergency Management related grants.

Just under half of the survey participants (40%, representing 27 Local Governments) currently without a CESM were interested in having access to a CESM. Those Local Governments with a Bush Fire Brigade were more likely to be interested, and 81%, representing 22 Local Governments without a CESM based in their area who manage a Bush Fire Brigade in Country Zones were interested in having a CESM. Most who were interested felt that they had the capacity to co-fund a CESM.

1.5 The Consolidated Emergency Services Act

DFES is coordinating a review of the *Fire Brigades Act 1942*, the *Bush Fires Act 1954* and the *Fire and Emergency Services Act of 1998*, which are being consolidated into one piece of legislation, currently referred to as the Consolidated Emergency Services Act (CES Act). Once the Exposure Draft Bill is released, an extensive public consultation period will be undertaken.

Local Governments have extensive roles under the *Bush Fires Act 1954* in relation to prevention, control, and extinguishment of bushfires, including the establishment and management of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades and the appointment of Bush Fire Control Officers. The CES Act is, therefore, of high interest and has a significant impact on Local Governments, particularly those that manage Bush Fire Brigades.

The sections of the Bush Fires Act that caused significant issues for 30% or more Local Governments with Bush Fire Brigades participating in the survey were:

- *Part II Administration Section 13 - Process for Local Governments to pass control of fires to DFES or Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) (30%)*
Comments included the need for provisions to enable the State to be responsible for bushfires from the start and the need for a more streamlined process for Local Governments to transfer control of a bushfire to the State (DFES or DBCA) should they wish to do so.
- *Part III Prevention of Bush Fires, Division 4 Total Fire Bans (32%)*
Comments included the need for better communication of Total Fire Bans (TFBs), a review of exemptions and controls for TFBs, and the need to address the impact of the transition to the new Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS) on the declaration of TFBs.
- *Part III Prevention of Bush Fires, Division 6, Section 33 Local Government may require the occupier of land to plough or clear fire break (30%)*
Comments included the need to standardise requirements for firebreaks/risk mitigation and the need to modernise the requirements for communication of section 33 notices.
- *Part IV Control and extinguishment of Bush Fires: Division 2 Bush Fire Brigades.* A potential new process to enable the transfer of Bush Fire Brigades from Local Government to State Government and vice versa.

Comments focussed on the need for the CES Act to include provisions to transfer responsibility for Bush Fire Brigade management to the State Government, with some indicating that all bushfire management responsibilities should be vested in the State Government/DFES as the Hazard Management Agency (HMA), and / or that a Rural Fire Service should be created.

Emerging issues identified as needing to be addressed through the CES Act included:

- Ensuring adequate funding to implement the CES Act.
- Standards for Bush Fire Brigade training and doctrine (including consistent minimum standards, recognising volunteer context and impact and being locally relevant and adaptable).
- The impact of changes in the CES Act on volunteer recruitment and retention (including volunteer recognition, support and incentives, managing change and uncertainty, and volunteers are already fully committed and focused on fighting fires).
- The movement from a bushfire focus to an all-hazards focus (including not taking the focus off bushfires, qualifications and experience on other hazards and resources).
- Emergency Services legislation that is adaptive to climate change and changing fire conditions (support for volunteers and resources, flexibility and recognising changing conditions).

1.5.1 Binding the Crown

Most Local Governments with a Bush Fire Brigade (82%) felt that the State Government should be required to comply with the provisions of the CES Act and any new regulations.

1.6 WALGA Emergency Management Communication, Engagement and Training

Satisfaction with the Emergency Management Team at WALGA was high, with two-thirds of Local Governments very satisfied or extremely satisfied with the support and information provided by the Emergency Management Team at WALGA.

The main ways in which Local Governments had engaged with WALGA over the past year were via the Emergency Management Newsletter and attendance at WALGA webinars.

Overall, 44% of Local Governments have had one-to-one engagement with WALGA's Emergency Management Team by telephone, email or via meetings since July 2022.

Satisfaction with each type of engagement was fairly high, particularly for one-to-one engagement with WALGA'S Emergency Management Team (80% very satisfied or extremely satisfied). Around 60% of Local Governments engaging with WALGA for webinars and the Emergency Management Newsletter on the Local Government Emergency Management Network were very satisfied or extremely satisfied. A further 30% were moderately satisfied with these engagements.

The majority of Local Governments responding to the survey (72%) felt that the suite of courses provided by WALGA adequately met the needs of Emergency Management staff and staff outside Emergency Management who need awareness or might have a role in an emergency (64%). However, they suggested a wide range of specialist areas for additional training modules, including community resilience and engagement and recovery training.