



SUBMISSION TO THE DROUGHT RESILIENCE FUNDING PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

The Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) is the united voice of Local Government in Western Australia. The Association is an independent, membership-based group representing and supporting the work and interests of 138 Local Governments in Western Australia.

The Association provides an essential voice for over 1,200 elected members and approximately 14,500 Local Government employees as well as over 2 million constituents of Local Governments in Western Australia. The Association also provides professional advice and offers services that provide financial benefits to the Local Governments and the communities they serve.

During the public comment period for Drought Resilience Funding Program (DRFP), the Association attended two of three consultations sessions undertaken by the Drought Consultative Committee in Western Australia and sought comment from the Western Australian Local Government sector to inform a representative submission to the Department of Agriculture. This submission reflects the main issues and opportunities raised by WALGA members, together with those of the Association.

BACKGROUND

Western Australia has been heavily affected by climate change, with the States south west land division and southern rangelands experiencing years of steadily declining rainfall, with the drying trend expected to continue. Much of the State's rangelands and areas of the wheatbelt, particularly in the Great Southern, Eastern Wheatbelt and Southern Rangelands are all experiencing the impacts of drought and sustained drying conditions.

The Western Australian Government does not have a process for a formal drought declaration. It relies on a 'water deficiency' declaration process, which can apply to part, or all, of a Local Government area that is affected by drought conditions. It is of concern to WALGA that this lack of a formal drought declaration process may prejudice any drought relief funding made available by the Commonwealth through the DRFP.

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITIES WITH RESPECT TO WATER

The supply of potable drinking water is a State responsibility in Western Australia, and in many cases Local Governments have a limited involvement in water supply except for its own use such as for road works and reticulation of public open space for amenity and recreational purposes. Increasingly however, Shires are getting involved in water harvesting to secure water for these responsibilities.

A number of Shires have put in place infrastructure to connect dams, pipe run-off from rooves into tanks or dams, and improve catchment performance. Water from these efforts is increasingly being used by communities for stock watering and farm spraying as individual water resources diminish on private properties. Increasingly however, Shires are getting involved in water harvesting to secure

water for their communities. However there is no overarching program for water infrastructure planning or delivery to assist Western Australian Local Governments in building community resilience to drought in Western Australia.

As rainfall becomes less certain and seasons become less predictable it is obvious that these water resources are not sufficient for all of the services that are drawing on them. In a drought year many of these sources will fail and lead to significant economic and social costs for Local Government, and can seriously undermine the economic sustainability of their respective jurisdictions.

It is recognised that a small number of Shires and the City of Kalgoorlie Boulder own and/or operate waste water treatment facilities, that also have a reuse capability for irrigation of public open space.

FUNDING PROJECTS

WALGA supports the principles and objectives of the Drought Resilience Funding Program, and considers the following as important elements in the design of the DRFP if it is to support those drought affected communities in Western Australia:-

Local Drought Resilience Framework and Strategies

The development of an overarching Framework within which individual **Local Drought Resilience Strategies** are to be delivered by Local Government is required to identify both the program design elements for the strategies and the appropriate funding levels required to deliver strategy elements including, but not exclusive to:-

- Hydrological studies, water use audits and technical studies to assist in developing water management strategies at a local and regional level.
- Identification and delivery of water management capacity building requirements for Local Governments
- Rehabilitation and enhancement of existing local water infrastructure
- Construction of new local water infrastructure, including identification of strategic watering points for emergency management requirements.
- Water harvesting projects, water security and monitoring projects.
- Community facilities and commercial enterprises eligible for funding towards water harvesting and retention resources (to reduce their reliance on scheme water and Local Government water resources).
- Structural adjustment and community support programs for affected local communities.
- Local economic development opportunities through the local procurement of local water infrastructure, and social capital and economic development projects, as identified through each individual Local Drought Resilience Strategy.
- Rate rebates to affected farmers and pastoralists within an individual Local Government jurisdiction that improves cash flow through rate relief, offset by an equivalent Commonwealth rebate to the Local Government.

It is considered that funding for farmers and pastoralists to upgrade existing private water resource infrastructure and identification and realisation of new water resources is best delivered at the State Government level, through existing State Government programs.

It is understood that the Western Australian State Government is seeking a similar outcome through its **Enhancing agricultural community water supply security** funding proposal.

While this is supported in principle, it is critical for both the State and the Commonwealth Government to understand that local communities (through their Local Governments) are best placed to determine local drought conditions and issues, asset infrastructure upgrade requirements, local procurement opportunities (to enhance and diversify local regional employment opportunities) and that Local Government has the financial and governance processes in place to deliver projects in an efficient and effective manner.

The State Government (through the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development) will have critical partnership role in enhancing the technical capacity of Local Government, particularly in order to deliver the water planning and infrastructure program design aspects of a Local Drought Resilience Strategy.

These elements would include, but not be exclusive to, local and regional water infrastructure requirements and identification of current and future technologies (such as reverse osmosis/desalination plants), and local and regional water management capacity building.

WALGA contends however, that to truly build local social, economic and environmental resilience, only an **integrated localised approach** will be the most efficient and effective approach that can realise Commonwealth investments in:-

- research and innovation
- research adoption and transfer (i.e. capacity building at the local level)
- adopting new and existing technology,
- improved natural management outcomes and,
- fit-for-purpose infrastructure and community initiatives

Local Drought Resilience Strategies - Funding options

The Federal Government, as the provider of Financial Assistance Grants to Local Government is aware of the asset holdings of local governments in rural areas and the cost of maintaining, renewing and replacing those assets.

It is envisaged that if funding is available for Local Governments to take on the building of significant new assets for water harvesting, retention, and security for agriculture, commercial, emergency firefighting, and community uses, that additional grant funding will be available either directly through a dedicated funding stream under the DRFP or as part of the Financial Assistance Grants (FAG) process, in recognition of the additional cost of maintaining any new infrastructure to acceptable levels.

Summary

WALGA welcomes the opportunity to input into the Consultation draft. In promoting the development of a Local Drought Resilience Framework for delivery by Local Government as individual strategies, WALGA asserts that to truly build local social, economic and environmental resilience to drought scenarios, a dedicated and robust program at the local level is required.

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