

City of Greater Geraldton

Submission on Disaster Management Reform Discussion Paper

6 July 2026

Submission to

Australian Government

National Emergency Management Agency

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Introduction

The City of Greater Geraldton (the City) commends the Australian Government for undertaking a review of Australia's disaster recovery funding arrangements and for proposing significant reforms through the establishment of a new Disaster Recovery Funding Framework (DRFF).

As a local government region directly impacted by severe weather events, including the effects of Tropical Cyclone Seroja in Western Australia's Midwest in 2021, the City is acutely aware of the challenges associated with local government's role in disaster recovery. The City considers that responsibility for disaster recovery should be equitably shared across all levels of government.

The City is generally supportive of the WALGA submission, *Proposed Reform – Disaster Recovery Funding Framework*, July 2026. This submission seeks to reinforce key elements of WALGA's position while highlighting matters of particular importance to the City and to regional local governments operating in rural and remote Western Australian contexts.

As an overarching principle in the transition from the current Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) to the proposed DRFF, the City supports WALGA's position that no local government or community should be disadvantaged as a result of the transition.

In particular, the City emphasises the need to reduce the administrative burden, financial risk and cashflow impacts experienced by local governments in undertaking disaster recovery functions. These impacts were significant for the City following Tropical Cyclone Seroja and were evident across activation, approval, claiming, reporting, audit and reimbursement processes, including the timing of reimbursement.

This issue was also identified in the Department of Fire and Emergency Services report, *Severe Tropical Cyclone Seroja April–May 2021 Department of Fire and Emergency Services Community Report*, as one of five lessons learned:

Lesson 2: Incident-specific financial processes and suitable personnel, are required to ensure appropriate financial administration during an incident.

The volume of expenditure and acquittals overwhelmed incident management teams due to a lack of financial management processes and dedicated personnel.

A specific issue experienced through TC Seroja that is not addressed through the Reform Discussion Paper is the Rapid Damage Assessment (RDA) process. Following TC Seroja, a RDA was undertaken across the impacted region, however the approach taken by responsible agencies to fly over Mullewa only and do a cursory door knock exercise in that township resulted in much of the damage to properties outside Mullewa township, including rural lands and Moonyoonooka as examples, not being recorded. The City's own door to door welfare check across the areas outside the townships of Geraldton, Walkaway and Mullewa uncovered significant damage,

including loss of houses, that led to a more accurate record of damage for use in understanding the extent of damage and in assessing claims. The City therefore also seeks consideration of the Rapid Damage Assessment (RDA) process as an integral part of the review and reform due to its importance in accuracy of post-incident damage assessments, including implications for resource allocations and funding support.

Additionally, post-incident welfare checks, whilst not specifically related to funding, proved vital in providing immediate psychosocial support, reassurance and information on available services and support at a time when communication channels were limited due to loss of power.

As a final general comment, the City supports an approach that recognises the diverse capacities and operating environments of local governments across regional and remote Western Australia, including the differing levels of workforce, contractor availability, financial capacity and administrative resources available during and after disaster events.

Specific Feedback

New Event-Based Activation Trigger Points

Noting the proposed change to event-based financial trigger points, the City seeks confirmation that agreement between the Australian Government and the States will be finalised in a manner that provides certainty regarding access to recovery assistance and ensures local governments are not exposed to unreasonable recovery costs.

The City also highlights the need for the proposed framework to account for the escalated cost of recovery in regional and remote environments, including higher contractor, transport, materials and construction costs.

Standardised Packages – Resilient Infrastructure Scheme

The City supports, in principle, the recommendation of the Colvin Review that, “wherever possible, recovery measures progressed under the DRFA should seek to reduce future risk (including betterment provisions) and build future resilience”.

The proposed Resilient Infrastructure Scheme is therefore supported by the City, subject to the following specific feedback.

Cost Sharing to Rebuild Damaged Assets

- The proposed cost-sharing contribution of up to 15 per cent by the Australian Government and States for rebuilding damaged assets to a more resilient standard does not adequately reflect the cost escalations associated with construction in regional and remote locations.

- In recognition of regional and remote rebuilding costs, the framework should include flexibility for negotiation of additional financial support where justified by local circumstances.
- The Resilient Infrastructure Scheme should provide sufficient funding to deliver approved resilience measures without requiring local governments to contribute financially beyond the proposed agreed Australian Government and State cost-sharing arrangements.

Asset Eligibility

- Eligibility criteria should encompass a broader definition of essential public assets, including community, recreational and cultural assets, recognising their importance to community resilience, recovery and wellbeing.

Standardised Packages – Community Recovery

Post-Disaster Clean-Up Activities

The Australian Government's Discussion Paper states that the proposed community recovery category could provide funding to states, territories and local governments for immediate post-disaster clean-up activities. Based on its experience, the City accepts that immediate post-disaster needs are a key area in which local government is often required to play a practical and visible role, and that the clean-up of public assets must occur in a timely manner. The ability to do so is closely linked to the responsiveness, accessibility and timing of financial support, as well as available workforce and contractor capacity.

The Discussion Paper also references potential immediate clean-up activities on residential properties. While insurance may address some of this need, the City's experience following Tropical Cyclone Seroja was that there was significant community demand for clean-up support due to the limited capacity of many residents. Anecdotally, some rural residents experienced fewer challenges in undertaking short-term clean-up, potentially due to greater access to suitable machinery and equipment.

The City is concerned that responsibility for immediate post-disaster clean-up activities on residential properties may be assigned to local government at a time when local capacity, including workforce, contractor availability and access to funding, is already stretched and fully engaged in the clean-up and repair of public assets. The City is also concerned about potential risk and liability exposure should local government be required to undertake or coordinate clean-up activities on private properties.

The City does not dispute the community benefit of such support. However, it seeks consideration of a flexible approach that would allow this role to be assigned to an alternative delivery agent, such as the State, where that entity is better placed to draw on broader contractor support and deliver the service effectively.

Community Recovery Officer

The City supports the potential provision of funding for impacted local governments to employ a Community Recovery Officer, subject to the following considerations:

- The appointment timeframe should be flexible, up to a period of two years, to ensure the role can respond appropriately to the specific community recovery needs arising from a disaster event.
- The Community Recovery Officer should be located within the impacted local government, recognising the value of local government's place-based knowledge, community relationships and coordination role in recovery and resilience-building activities.

Streamlining Data and Reporting

The City is strongly aligned with WALGA's submission in seeking to ensure that any review and resultant changes deliver streamlined administration, reduced evidence requirements, lower reporting burden, faster reimbursement and access to upfront funding.

The City is confident that its disaster recovery efforts would benefit significantly from a simplified audit and assurance process that places less burden on officers who are already heavily engaged in the management, coordination and delivery of necessary recovery works.

council@cgg.wa.gov.au

089956 6600

Po Box 101 Geraldton WA 6531

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