



City of
Greater Geraldton
a vibrant future



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Your Ref:
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Enquiries: Brendan Wilson

20 March 2017

Economic Regulation Authority
PO Box 8469
Perth Business Centre
PERTH WA 6849

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Dear Sir/Madam,

REVIEW OF THE EMERGENCY SERVICES LEVY - CITY OF GREATER GERALDTON SUBMISSION

This submission is tendered by the City of Greater Geraldton in response to the Economic Regulation Authority's Issues Paper of 30 January 2017, regarding the current review of the Emergency Services Levy.

The City of Greater Geraldton (the City) is the service centre located in Western Australia's Mid-West. It lies 420km north of Perth, has a population of over 40,000 and is perched on a spectacular coastline.

The City:

- Manages and chairs a Local Emergency Management Committee (Batavia Coast) on behalf of several adjacent councils.
- Manages thirteen (13) registered Bush Fire Brigades.
- Supports the Geraldton-Greenough State Emergency Service.
- Is home to the Geraldton (Career and Volunteer) Fire and Rescue Service, and Geraldton Volunteer Marine Rescue Group.

The City has a proud history of supporting the efforts of local volunteers, and our community greatly value and treasure these services. However, in the current economic climate, the City is struggling to cover the increasing cost burden and is seeking increased funding from the Emergency Services Levy (ESL). The City expects that all of its costs should be covered by the levy that Local Government's collect.

The City provides ongoing funding to the operation of its Bushfire Brigades and other emergency services because significant expenses are currently ineligible for ESL funding. Examples of this include:



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1. To provide adequate facilities for local emergency services groups, the City is required to pay for site works for new buildings and facilities, employment expenses of officers, and incident related expenses. These costs prevent the City moving forward on critical projects. A current example is the construction of a new SES facility. The City is required to find approximately \$400,000 to facilitate the project. Current ESL arrangements as detailed in the Local Government Grant Scheme 'Manual for Capital and Operating Grants' note that demolition or removal of existing buildings, road works, removal of vegetation and topsoil from sites, grading and compacting sub grade, imports of sand fill, or cart away soil not needed, grade site to final levels, compaction of pad, provision of engineer's compaction certificate, construction of any retaining structures and utility connections to site boundaries are ineligible for ESL funding. This creates a significant cost burden to a Local Government Authority, particularly when considering the Local Government Authority surrenders land for each project, and is required to administer a loan through WA Treasury Corporation to finance the project, on DFES's behalf. A more feasible and logical solution would be for DFES to finance and manage building projects with limited support from Local Governments (including the surrender or acquisition of land). It is the City's' experience that ESL building projects typically originate from DFES officers whom are best positioned to inform and administer these projects.
2. The City should be fully reimbursed its actual costs for the collection of the ESL through its rating process. The City manages the billing system, take the phone calls from residents, collects the revenue and then forwards these funds to the state.
3. The City has historically supported neighbouring and other Local Governments in times of natural disasters, including support to the Carnarvon community post-Tropical Cyclone Olwyn in 2015. It is however discouraging to such efforts, to note that salary related expenses of officers assisting others are ineligible for ESL funding, despite the requests being supported by DFES. It is also noteworthy that volunteers frequently staff 'strike-teams' of City managed Bush Fire Brigade appliances to assist at DFES-controlled Level 2 and 3 bushfires including Bullsbrook (2015), Boddington (2016) and Dandaragan & Watheroo (2016-2017). Whilst the City views such support as charitable, and in the spirit of being Australian, it is again remarkable that salary and related expenses of staff members coordinating and facilitating this support remain ineligible, particularly when such requests are made by DFES, and require urgent attention away from the existing work duties.
4. The current Local Government Grant Scheme 'Manual for Capital and Operating Grants' contains an exhaustive list of items ineligible for ESL funding. This list should be critically reviewed utilising representatives from volunteer emergency services and Local Governments. Presently, the list includes significant equipment exclusions such as mobile pump units, Local Government radio networks, defibrillators, weather stations and fire hydrant maintenance and repairs – all items that may be critically relied upon during an incident.
5. A further disparity is created during incidents, where a DFES staff member's salary is entirely funded by the ESL, whereas a Local Government staff member (performing the exact same role) salary is ineligible for ESL funding. This issue is further exacerbated when considering that costs associated with managing an incident. For example: heavy machinery to create a firebreak and volunteer meals are ineligible to be ESL funded if the fire is under Local Government's control, as opposed to a DFES



managed fire, where all of the above expenses would be met by the ESL. A consistent approach is crucial and should result from this review.

6. To meet its legislative requirements, the City funds an emergency services unit. This unit manages the local emergency services meetings, conducts community education programs, prepares plans, completes fire break inspections etc. Funding for these legislative activities should be eligible for funding under the ESL.

Given the inability to fund the whole (and therefore, the real) expenses of Bushfire Brigades and other emergency services from the ESL, the City is of the view that transfer of volunteer emergency services from Local Government to State Government responsibility will represent more appropriate and transparent accounting of these services, and better value to the rate-paying community.

If you require any further information please contact Brendan Wilson, Coordinator Emergency Management on 08 9956 6600 or email council@cgg.wa.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Ken Diehm
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER