

### 11.1 URGENT BUSINESS – COMMENT ON WALGA’S DRAFT COMMUNITY BENEFITS AND ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

SENIOR OFFICER:	Chief Executive Officer
PREVIOUS REPORT(S):	Nil
DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST:	Nil
STRATEGIC DOCUMENT REFERENCE:	Nil
ATTACHMENTS:	Confidential Attachment 1 – WALGA Renewable Energy Community Benefits and Engagement Guide

#### OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

**That Council APPROVES the draft comment regarding WALGA’s draft Community Benefits and Engagement Guide as contained in this report and recommends to WALGA that the document is not published in its current form.**

#### COMMENT

On Friday, 16 May 2025 WALGA requested feedback on their Draft Community Benefits and Engagement Guide. WALGA has requested feedback by 30 May 2025.

The guide has prepared by the Association to:

*“Support local governments in effectively managing large-scale renewable energy developments. It provides a structured approach based around five imperatives that every Local Government should pursue to get the best outcome from the energy shift.”*

These five imperatives according to the document are:

- Understand the energy shift and local risks and opportunities
- Establish local priorities, requirements and expectations
- Inform and engage the community
- Negotiate agreements with developers; and
- Develop a local approach to community benefit sharing

WALGA has identified the document as confidential and was separately distributed to Councillors.

Officers have significant concerns with the document and recommend that Council approve the response shown in the text box below:

The Shire of Wagin have significant concerns with the document and does not recommend its publication in the current form. These concerns relate to the fundamental premise of the guideline that it can ‘support local governments

effectively manage large-scale renewable energy developments'. This is because under the existing legislative and planning framework, local governments cannot effectively manage large-scale renewable energy developments.

WALGA as the State's advocacy body for local government would be weakening its own advocacy position by publishing a document that says that the local government sector can do something that it has not been empowered by the State Government to do.

Local governments have not been provided by the State Government with the legislative power to regulate developments in the design, detailed planning or operation of significant renewable energy developments. In fact, through the implementation of the significant development pathways, local governments' powers to regulate developments has been diminished by the State. There is no legislative pathway to achieve community benefit from development and no apparatus to command community benefit.

The guide creates a false and potentially damaging expectation on local government across the state. It raises an expectation on elected members and the administrations of local governments across the state that local governments have the power and capability to effectively manage the developments using the current set of tools.

The current guidelines place local governments in the position of trying to hold back a rising tide of renewable projects with nothing more than a bucket. This disconnect which is supported by the document sets local governments up for failure and risks eroding community trust when expectations cannot be met.

The document contains a range of false premises and factually incorrect information:

- local governments have access to detailed and accurate information about developments
- local governments are responsible for coordinating and collaborating with developers to engage with the community and their developments
- local governments are 'uniquely positioned to negotiate meaningful community outcomes' and can ensure transparency and reporting of community benefits
- there are pathways available to achieve community benefit through conditions of approval through the planning framework
- local governments have a responsibility to negotiate community benefit

The premises which are repeated throughout the document are not the case in the present regulatory and planning framework. Perpetuating these myths harms local governments directly and harms WALGA's advocacy efforts for a better regulatory and planning framework because it presents a case that none is required.

This is in direct contradiction to WALGA Advocacy Position 6.17 Renewable Energy Facilities. Publication of the guide in its current form would be a disservice to WALGA's members and their communities.

## **VOTING REQUIREMENTS**

Simple Majority