

Planning Reform and Funding for Regulatory Approvals

\$120m investment in additional frontline officers and funding commitment to planning reform.

The State Government as part of the 2021-22 State Budget has announced a considerable investment in additional officers tasked with regulatory approval roles across a range of portfolios. In total an additional 150 new frontline roles will be created.

Extra resources have been allocated to the Departments of: Planning, Lands and Heritage (DPLH); Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety; Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions; Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation; and Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER). The exact allocation of additional roles for agencies cannot be clearly determined at this time, however initial review of the budget papers indicates that the agencies have been allocated the following proportion of the additional funds (approximately) under the 'Whole-of-Government Regulatory Approvals' program: DWER = 40%; DPLH = 12%; DBCA = 8%; DJTSI = 4%.

The State has indicated that this investment is part of the expansion of their 'red-tape reduction team' and is designed to 'speed-up' project assessment and decision making. WALGA welcomes this additional funding as it will aid faster state approvals for all projects, including Local Government led projects.

WALGA hopes that this investment will also aid in the timely assessment of clearing permits by DWER, and Local Government Local Planning Strategies and Local Planning Schemes and amendments to these documents by DPLH. At present considerable time (up to 50% for scheme amendments) can be attributed to state approval processes such as WAPC endorsement and EPA consideration, while a recent audit of DWER indicated that only 50% of clearing permits are determined within timeframes, well below the agencies 80% target. Any additional resources allocated in this area would be welcomed by the sector as they will aid in ensuring that local planning frameworks are contemporary, reduce timeframes for environmental approvals for local infrastructure projects, and support economic investment at both the local and regional level.

The State Government has also allocated approximately \$2.8 million to deliver initiatives related to Phase 2 of its Planning Reform agenda. WALGA supports the underlying principles of planning reform and the continued focus on streamlining and simplifying the planning system. To this end, the Local Government sector worked collaboratively with the State during the first stage of Planning Reform and looks forward to this positive relationship continuing going forward. WALGA through its submission on Phase 2 put forward a range of initiatives to support a contemporary planning system with Local Government at its centre. WALGA will continue to engage with DPLH and the Minister for Planning's Office on these proposals.

WALGA will continue to keep the sector informed about upcoming changes to the planning system through our Planning Improvement Program and Planning and Building E-Newsletter.