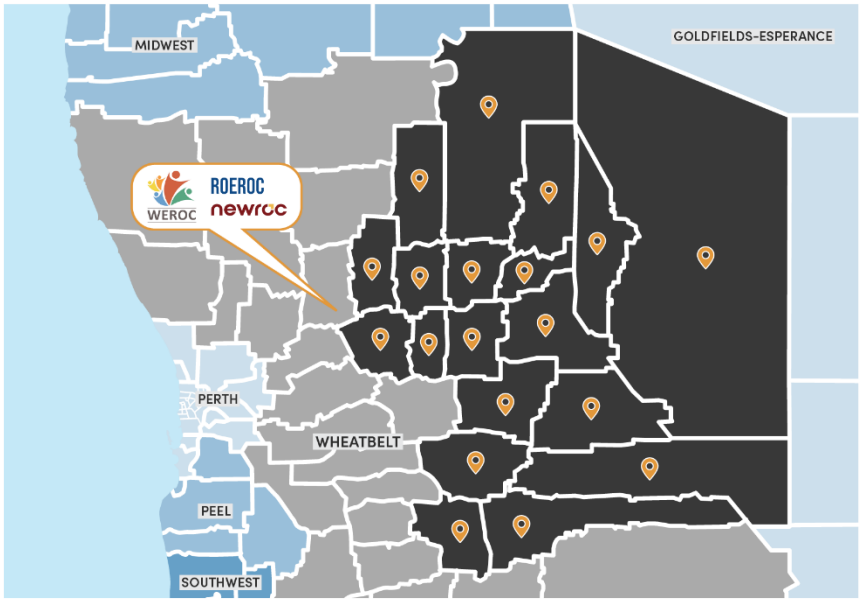
MADE IN THE EASTERN WHEATBELT

Media Release

Eastern Wheatbelt leaders' forum sets 50-year vision and calls for cross-portfolio action on housing, workforce, freight and power.

19 Shire councilors and CEOs from across the three Regional Organisation of Councils in the Eastern Wheatbelt gathered on Monday in Perth for the Made in the Eastern Wheatbelt: Shaping the Future Together Forum, a short, sharp and practical discussion focused on what it will take to grow population, strengthen essential services and unlock investment.



The forum brought together members of Parliament, senior representatives from State Government, and regional partners to focus on telling the story of the sub region and advocate for the enabling foundations the eastern Wheatbelt region needs to continue to contribute to the state's economy and thrive towards 2050: land and housing supply, workforce attraction and retention, power reliability and safe and efficient freight links.

"The 19 local governments are sending a clear message: decisions about our future must involve the people who live and work in our communities. The Eastern Wheatbelt is one of Western Australia's economic powerhouses. The future is bright, but we need the government working with us to unlock that potential" said Lachlan Hunter MLA, the forum host.

The Eastern Wheatbelt stands apart from the broader region, and this was a driving factor behind the event.

The communities face a unique combination of structural constraints and growth pressures that are more acute and interconnected than elsewhere. Shires in the three regional organisation of councils emphasised that smaller populations, geographical dispersion, capacity to compete with more resourced local governments for grants, the fact that many Shires also deliver non-core services such as medical centres and childcare as well as strong evidence that indicates the eastern Wheatbelt businesses need around 500 additional workers now to meet current demand, make it different and targeted support is required.

A central theme at the event was that the eastern Wheatbelt capacity to deliver jobs, health, education and community safety depends on overcoming workforce shortages — and the affordable housing constraints that sit underneath them.

ROEROC Chair and Shire President of Narembeen, Cr Holly Cusack, said affordable workforce housing demand is running at three to four times current build rates, directly constraining service delivery and business growth.

The ROCs' research also identified under-provision of affordable housing ranging from 113–194 dwellings in RoeROC, 149–271 dwellings in NEWROC, and 196–332 dwellings in WEROC.

Despite vacant residential land existing "in principle" across townsites, speakers highlighted that land activation is being blocked by constraints including tenure complexities (including native title), high servicing costs, environmental considerations and site suitability.

Examples presented included:

- NEWROC: ~384 vacant lots exist in principle, but only 26 are deliverable within the next two years across eight townsites.
- ROEROC: ~165 vacant lots identified, with only 16 fully serviced (110 partially serviced; 39 unserviced).
- WEROC: ~533 vacant lots, but only six shovel-ready sites across six townsites.

Feedback from the day strongly reinforced the need to accelerate land assembly and "remove the blockers" through coordinated approvals, enabling headworks funded and practical delivery partnerships.

WEROC's workforce presentation emphasised that workforce is the enabling condition for the region's future — with shortages creating a real risk of health, policing and education service withdrawal without intervention.

The forum also heard that councils collectively pay more than $2 million cash annually to support essential primary health care, with some councils contributing up to 16% of annual rate income — costs which are unsustainable for small rate bases and not core local government business.

Cr Robert Trepp, the NEWROC President highlighted new analysis showing the economic cost of infrastructure failure: a six-day power outage can cost the NEWROC economy around $11.1 million in lost economic output, while even a 12-hour outage can cost around $1.6 million. NEWROC outlined the case for a renewable microgrid model (solar/wind/battery with diesel backup) in their communities as a repeatable solution to protect business continuity and essential services in eastern Wheatbelt towns.

Transport discussions underscored that the Eastern Wheatbelt's road network underpins productivity for both existing and emerging industries — and remains WA's gateway to the eastern states, Kalgoorlie and the metropolitan area.

Cr Ram Rajagopalan from WEROC emphasised the importance of the Wheatbelt Secondary Freight Network — around 4,400 kilometres of local-government-managed roads connecting into state and national highways, essential to grain and mining freight and supporting tourism flows. There was strong support for a second round of State and national funding to improve safety and freight efficiency, reflecting feedback that freight reliability is foundational to growth.

A consistent message from all three ROCs was that the region's challenges — housing, workforce, health, education, transport, power and telecommunications — are interconnected, and must be met with cross-portfolio solutions and a joined-up delivery mindset.

Next steps flagged from the forum include progressing collaborative work on land assembly and affordable housing projects with the State Government, advocating for freight investment settings that recognise the national task carried by roads across the 19 Shires through the Wheatbelt Secondary Freight Network, and joint ventures for power reliability.

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ABOUT THE ROCS

North Eastern Wheatbelt Regional Organisation of Councils

The NEWROC is a voluntary regional organisation of Councils comprising Dowerin, Koorda, Mount Marshall, Mukinbudin, Nungarin, Trayning, and Wyalkatchem. With a combined contribution of over $460m in agricultural production, $250m plus in exports and over $300m in GDP we're working to grow vibrant, resilient communities by supporting economic development, improving regional services, and advocating for our shared future. We have a strong focus on collaboration and regional leadership. Recent highlights for the group has been the launch of our Economic Development Strategy, completion of the NEWROC Key Worker Housing Study and progressing towards a regional microgrid.

www.newroc.com.au

ROE Regional Organisation of Councils

RoeROC brings together the Shires of Corrigin, Kondinin, Kulin, Narembeen, and Wickepin to collaborate, share ideas, and address regional challenges. Covering 21,700 km² with a combined population of around 4,143, RoeROC supports a coordinated approach and has delivered projects including the Key Worker Housing Project, a joint approach to accounting software, the Renewable Energy Framework, and an Evacuation Centre Audit.

RoeROC focuses on strengthening community sustainability and resilience, with priorities in workforce development, regional waste management, and joint local planning strategies. Guided by shared strategic outcomes, the member Shires work together to improve services, infrastructure, and the long-term future of the region.

Wheatbelt East Regional Organisation of Councils

WEROC Inc. is an incorporated not-for-profit organisation representing seven Local Government areas: Cunderdin, Kellerberrin, Merredin, Westonia, Bruce Rock, Tammin, and Yilgarn. Covering an expansive 45,005 km², the WEROC region is home to a resident population of 8,345. At an estimated GRP of $2.5 billion, the WEROC local governments contribute 27% of the total GRP for the Wheatbelt, with $1.577 billion contributed by mining.

WEROC has undertaken a range of initiatives to support the region. This includes completing a Key Worker Housing Study, partnering in the delivery of the annual Wheatbelt Medical Student Immersion Program, securing State funding for sustainable water planning, and leading marketing efforts to promote the district.

WEROC's vision is for the Eastern Wheatbelt to grow and prosper. We achieve this through strong regional leadership, delivering projects and services that benefit the whole of the Eastern Wheatbelt, promoting our unique region, and fostering stronger collaboration between councils.

www.weroc.com.au