

A strong economy: It's everyone's business

Blueprint for an enterprising Western Australia 2026

Co-operatives and mutual enterprises help to build an economy that is as strong, resilient and inclusive as the people of Western Australia. In the International Year of Cooperatives 2025, we call on Western Australian political parties to commit to an enabling policy environment for co-operatives.

Co-operatives and mutuals strengthen market competitiveness and diversity and improve social and economic well-being by generating employment and contributing to sustainable development. They spread wealth by focusing on delivering value rather than capital accumulation. They are always domestically owned, employ local people and pay domestic taxes.

Western Australian co-operatives and mutuals turnover more than \$15.11 billion, directly employ over 13,000 workers, and facilitate the operations of thousands of small, medium and family-sized businesses across a range of industry sectors.

Western Australia has over 100 co-operatives and mutuals. The people of Western Australia hold over 2.7 million memberships with co-ops and mutuals.

The Business Council of Co-operatives and Mutuals would like to engage directly with the West Australian Government to explore how co-operative and mutual enterprises can help to deliver progress in a number of priority policy areas:

Manufacturing growth:

The co-operative sector can contribute even more to economic growth by boosting advanced manufacturing, creating jobs and driving our export capability.



Energy transition:

As we move towards a greener economy and climate resilience, energy co-operatives can help to embed local ownership and engagement in the future of energy security.



Affordable homes:

Housing co-operatives and the mutual financial sector can be boosted to provide more secure, affordable housing – particularly for key workers priced out of the housing market.

Caring together:

Co-ops and mutuals give people a stake in the delivery of social care, particularly in regional, rural and remote areas where current models are not working.

The context

In the last few years, businesses and communities in Western Australia have faced new and rapidly evolving challenges. Emerging from Covid and a period of trade tensions, inflation and cost-of-living have become the leading issues facing people and small businesses. Supply, affordability and quality of housing, care, energy and other essentials are front of mind for many people. This has highlighted the need for greater diversity, resilience and fairness in our economy.

We have learned three things from this experience:

Western Australia needs more self-reliance – co-operative ownership guarantees local supply and control.

Western Australia needs new models of delivering affordable social care and housing – co-operatives are innovative and community-driven service providers.

The people of Western Australia expect more fairness – co-operatives are equitable wealth sharers.

Western Australia needs more self-reliance

The interruption to global supply chains caused by the pandemic demonstrated a need for greater domestic manufacturing. The importance of control over domestic production is just as relevant in the value-adding of manufacturing as with primary industries.

Western Australian-based food producers and processors like CBH Group, Geraldton Fishermen's Co-operative and WAMMCO International are the key to local food security. Agricultural co-operatives – owned exclusively by family farms – work together to add value to primary produce, export and return the value to regional communities.

Western Australia needs new models of delivering affordable social care and housing

Supply, affordability and quality are ongoing challenges across many essential sectors, including housing, social care and energy.

Co-operatives can bring together consumers, workers and small providers in these sectors to deliver more affordable solutions. Collaboration can address underlying worker engagement or provider capacity issues that are reducing supply.

A new co-op supported by the BCCM through the Care Together Program, Co-operative Care Wagin, is an example of how a co-operative can facilitate community-driven solutions to care services delivery.

The people of Western Australia expect more fairness

Co-operatives are equitable businesses. They share the benefits of business fairly with all stakeholders – employees, customers and other participants, ensuring that wealth remains in Western Australia. Co-ops spread their wealth among their communities through lower prices, access to otherwise inaccessible services, or sharing profits. For example, the Mount Barker Co-op is a consumer-owned grocery and hardware retailer where all surpluses are reinvested, returned to members or provided to local community causes.

The growth of a home-grown Western Australian medium-sized business sector can be delivered through co-operatives.

Unleashing the new era of co-operation

There now needs to be a new spirit of co-operation between the people of Western Australia, its government and the co-operative and mutual movement. Working towards the common goal of strengthening the business environment will help to release the full potential of these people-centred businesses to do good for Western Australia and its people.

The 2025 UN International Year of Cooperatives is a catalyst for global change, fostering inclusive economies, strengthening communities and paving the way for a more sustainable and equitable world.

The policy, legislative, regulatory and business services environment play an essential role in deciding the success or otherwise of businesses. If we look around the world, these factors significantly influence the size and scope of each country's co-operative and mutual sectors.

Western Australian Government business policies are fundamental to securing the potential of co-operatives to create growth and spread prosperity. They should provide a supportive policy and legal framework for these businesses. By adopting recognised international best practice (e.g. ILO Recommendation 193 on the promotion of cooperatives), co-operatives should be considered as one of the pillars of Western Australia's economic and social development.

1.

The registration of co-operatives should be as rapid, simple and affordable as possible.

2.

Policies should support capital access and retention in co-operatives and mutuals.

3.

Regulations should treat co-operatives and mutuals on terms no less favourable than those accorded to other forms of enterprise.

4.

Policy should encourage the development of co-operatives and mutuals in areas where they have an important role or provide services not found elsewhere.



CBH Group



Geraldton
Fishermen's
Co-operative Chair
Basil Lenzo

To enable co-operatives and mutuals to play their full role in the future Western Australian economy, the Business Council of Co-operatives and Mutuals calls on political parties to commit to the following measures:

Create a co-ops and mutuals unit in an industry-focused department

Co-ops and mutuals are significant businesses in the West Australian economy, yet there is no policy capacity within Government to provide expert advice on the model. A co-ops and mutuals policy unit should sit within a core industry or economic department and provide a solid knowledge base and liaison point between co-ops and mutuals, Ministers and officials to deliver on shared social and economic goals.

Appoint a Minister for co-ops and mutuals in that department

A Minister should be formally responsible for all economic and social policy affecting co-operatives and mutuals operating in Western Australia, distinct from responsibility for operation of the co-op registry in Consumer Protection. As Minister for co-ops and mutuals, this would be an important cross-cutting responsibility and signal the significance that Western Australia places on the contribution of the sector and the fair treatment of collaborative enterprise.

A Western Australian co-op and mutual business development plan

Working in consultation with the co-operative and mutual movement, Western Australia can develop a plan to grow existing co-operatives and to facilitate their engagement with new sectors. This plan could focus on the immense opportunities to support thriving communities in regional Western Australia through the growth of established and new co-operatives and mutuals in agriculture, small business, care, housing, community retail and energy.

Modernise co-operatives regulation

Now that Co-operatives National Law has been consistently adopted across all states and territories, a process of regulatory modernisation for co-operatives should be instituted to ensure national consistency and access to full information about co-operatives. Because of the under-resourcing of the registry in Consumer Protection, co-operatives face a range of barriers including a lack of regulatory guidance on offer documentation in relation to member and public offers of securities. Regulation of co-operatives should be designed and implemented under a principle of no disadvantage – adopting best practice from different jurisdictions and ensuring all types of co-ops are treated equally and fairly.

The BCCM has completed a national industry consultation with a final report setting out recommendations for modernisation priorities.



About the BCCM

The Business Council of Co-operatives and Mutuals (BCCM) is Australia's peak body for co-operatives and mutuals across all industries. BCCM is the representative body for Australian co-ops and mutuals, working with governments, regulators and policy makers to ensure the Australian economic landscape is able to fully benefit from a competitive co-op and mutuals sector. The BCCM is funded by our co-operative and mutual members.

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