

Fair Food WA submission to the State Shipping and Supply Chain Taskforce

29 April 2022

Fair Food WA welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the State Government's Shipping and Supply Line Taskforce, established to address the resilience and utility of the shipping industry serving WA and the nation.

[Fair Food WA](#) is the key non-government body that brings together relevant sectors – business, government, university and not-for-profits to secure healthy food for all Western Australians who face food insecurity. The group was established in 2017 to lead the development of a strategy to improve the Western Australian charity food system, which culminated in the [WA Food Relief Framework](#) and generated a range of solutions-focused outcomes to reduce food insecurity and support the charity food sector. Fair Food WA is convened by the [WA Council of Social Service](#), who provides ongoing administrative and policy support to the group.

With an increasing amount of food being collected and redistributed via the charitable food sector across our state, it is imperative that any logistics and supply line system reform includes the transport and logistics of charity food.

Food security

Food insecurity is the reduced or unreliable access to nutritionally appropriate or safe foods, or reduced or unreliable capacity to obtain foods in socially conventional ways.¹ Food insecurity is a growing concern in Western Australia, with more than 270,000 Western Australians living in poverty² and an 8 percent increase in requests to charity food assistance since the onset of COVID-19.²

Food security is underpinned by four pillars: food availability, access, utilisation, and stability. *Food availability* refers to the supply of food to the community and the commercial systems that provide access to that food, and considers the quantity of food, and the quality and range of foods available. *Access* refers to having the economic and physical resources to obtain appropriate foods for a nutritious diet. *Utilisation* includes knowledge of basic nutrition and cooking skills, and *stability* refers to continued access that can withstand climatic or economic disasters or seasonal events.³ It is critical that all sectors of the community work together to ensure that every person in Western Australia is awarded the basic right to be food secure.

¹ WACOSS. (2019). *Food relief Framework*. <https://wacoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Food-Relief-Framework-report-sml.pdf>

² FoodbankWA (2021). *Hunger report 2021*. <https://reports.foodbank.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/2021-Foodbank-Hunger-Report-PDF.pdf>

³ Committee on World Food Security. (2014). *Global Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition*. https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/cfs/Docs1314/GSF/GSF_Version_3_EN.pdf

Remote food insecurity

Food insecurity increases with remoteness in Australia.⁴ Regional and remote communities are a third more likely to experience food insecurity than those living in capital cities.⁵ Aboriginal people and families in particular, who make up 3 percent of the WA population, are known to experience significantly higher levels of food insecurity, across both the metropolitan, and regional and remote areas.⁶ Recent studies on the prevalence of food insecurity amongst regional and remote Western Australians found that children were also especially vulnerable.⁷

The charity food sector

Food relief is the provision of food to people in need, and is delivered by the charity food sector. Current forms of charity food recovery and redistribution involve a variety of stakeholders in a diverse mix of initiatives, such as: food banks, warehousing and logistics, direct service provision via social supermarkets and community shops, street delivery, food pantries and hampers, soup kitchens and community/charitable programs delivered by a range of volunteer and employment models.⁸ The majority of charity food becomes available via surplus in the commercial sector, whereby food distribution organisations collect food and redistribute it to charity food providers or directly to people in need of food relief. Prepared and processed foods are most often collected from the food service industry such as café's, hotels and events. Perishable produce is generally obtained from wholesale and retail sources such as supermarkets and commercial distribution centres. The primary goal of food distribution programs is to collect food donated from commercial sources and redirect it to charitable food services, as described above.

The importance of all Western Australian's having access to culturally appropriate, safe, and nutritious food is undeniable. The not for profit sector does not have the commercial capacity to develop a parallel food storage and distribution network across the state, and the redesign of the states shipping and supply lines should ensure sustainability of free and low-cost food transport to meet the food security needs of the community and those who are unable to purchase commercial food supplies.

⁴ Landrigan TJ., Kerr DA., Dhaliwal SS., & Pollard CM. (2018). Protocol for the Development of a Food Stress Index to Identify Households Most at Risk of Food Insecurity in Western Australia. *International Journal of Environment Research Public Health*. 16(1):79. doi:10.3390/ijerph16010079

⁵ Ozharvest. (n.d.) *Food Waste Facts*. <https://www.ozharvest.org/food-waste-facts/>

⁶ Health Infonet. (2018). *Review of nutrition amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*

⁷ Godrich, S., et al. (2017). Prevalence of socio-demographic predictors of food insecurity among regional and remote Western Australian children. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*.

⁸ WACOSS. (2019). *Food relief Framework* <https://wacoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Food-Relief-Framework-report-sml.pdf>

Opportunities for Western Australia's Shipping and Supply Chain

1. Freight and logistics strategy for Western Australia

The Western Australian freight system is an essential mechanism that moves goods around the state. It connects us with our states supply of food, while also connecting us globally. Our freight system relies on a range of complex systems working together to ensure economic, social and community prosperity and good health.

We have seen the fragility of our freight system with the impacts of COVID-19, combined with weather events which shut down the north-west rail link in early 2022. Even outside of these events, our freight system remains challenged by Western Australia's geography and dispersed population. We know via well-established evidence that the further one lives from the metropolitan centres, the higher one's risk is to food stress and insecurity.⁹

COVID-19 provided the Federal Government with the opportunity to develop new ways of working, collaborating and coordinating food freight, including the establishment of the [Supermarket Taskforce](#) and [Food Security Working Group](#). This submission highlights opportunities based on what we have learned both nationally and within our state, with recommendations that can be undertaken by the State Government to reform the freight system.

Recognising the critical nature of our logistics and supply line system and the unique impact it has on our state, Fair Food WA recommends the development of a comprehensive state logistics and supply line strategy. Queensland has developed their own [Freight Strategy](#) and accompanying [action plan](#), and we recommend the WA Government follows suit by developing a strategy and plan that responds to our geographic, environmental and social context.

This submission outlines key considerations for any proposed state logistics and supply line strategy, with a key focus on improving the equitable, sustainable access to affordable and appropriate commercial and charity food supplies for geographically isolated communities. Our submission will include recommendations that will contribute to a more reliable and resilient logistics and supply line system that responds to our states food security needs¹⁰.

Recommendation: *State Government develops a compressive Logistics and Supply Line Strategy and accompanying action plan.*

Comprehensive logistics mapping

As previously mentioned, while there have been multiple Commonwealth inquires dedicated to the costs associated with providing healthy and sustainable supplies of food to geographically isolated communities, we have so far been unsuccessful in reducing food insecurity for these communities.

⁹ National Rural Health Alliance. (2016). *Food Security and Health in Rural and Remote Australia*. <https://www.agrifutures.com.au/wp-content/uploads/publications/16-053.pdf>

¹⁰ Godrich, S., et al. (2017). Prevalence of socio-demographic predictors of food insecurity among regional and remote Western Australian children. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*.

Fair Food WA proposes a new approach to our state's logistics and supply line systems, starting with a comprehensive mapping exercise across the entire system. This comprehensive mapping process would be complex, mapping food product supply lines from produce to consumption, current workforce and future projected workforce needs, identifying sources of cold supply chain breaks and appropriate mitigations, through to mapping warehousing and transport infrastructure. It is only by undertaking comprehensive mapping and analysis that we will identify where our logistics and supply line system strengths and weaknesses are. This will enable a range of responses that will contribute towards building a resilient, contemporary system that can withstand business as usual challenges while also having the scalability and appropriate contingency plans in place for when emergencies and disasters hit.

***Recommendation:** Undertake a comprehensive systemic analysis of the WA Logistics and Supply Line system by utilising experts across identified system segments, such as primary and agricultural producers, transport and infrastructure, workforce, warehousing and distribution through to where and how food is consumed and utilised.*

Mapping and analysis of shipping and ports

Geographic isolation and the routine shutting down of road supply links due to weather events is a key factor impacting food security in Western Australia.¹¹ The movement of people due to tourism, workforce and cultural business results in a greater demand for food, exacerbating the pressure on already limited supplies.

Western Australia has 18,000 km of national and major roads, and it is 3,199 kilometres from Perth to Kununurra, with food travelling this distance predominantly by road and rail. At least 75 percent of Western Australia's food supply comes into the state via the Nullarbor, Fremantle Port, or through Perth Airport, and all of these routes are at risk of major disruption.¹² Many factors can impact the stability and integrity of the food supply chain to regional and remote communities. These include; distance, road conditions, channels and barge ramps, transport infrastructure such as cold chain logistics, and seasonal weather impacts and events, which are commonplace in regional and remote parts of the state.¹³ These factors are likely to be compounded in times of disaster.

The Australian Government's response to the *Inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities*, indicates the need to investigate upgrades to the infrastructure and shipping lanes that supply food to remote parts of Australia.¹⁴ Developing a detailed map of the states shipping lanes and ports, will help identify the opportunities to improve the way food is transported, stored and distributed, simplifying the logistical process and helping to ensure stability of food supply to geographically isolated areas. Increasing the use of shipping infrastructure in

¹¹ Public Health Advocacy Institute. (2020). *Submission to the inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous Communities*. Submission #101 https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Indigenous_Affairs/Foodpricing/Submissions

¹² Pollard, CM., & Bornman, J. (2012). *The way forward: Food security & healthy food in Western Australia*. Curtin University, Western Australia.

¹³ Lovell, I. (2008). *Freight and health in remote Indigenous communities*. Issues (83).

¹⁴ Parliament of Australia. (2020). *Report on food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities*. https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Indigenous_Affairs/Foodpricing/Report

northern Western Australia will both improve the efficiency of the existing system and strengthen the supply lines capacity to upscale at times of extreme disruption or disaster.

***Recommendation:** Map and analyse the states shipping lines and ports to identify opportunities to strengthen the efficiency of the network to maintain food supply to geographically isolated areas.*

Mapping and analysis of infrastructure

The location and quality of facilities used to store, package and distribute food can considerably impact the efficiency of food transport and ultimately the quality and availability of food supply.

The State Government has previously noted that many remote community stores in WA do not have the infrastructure capacity (dry and cold storage) to hold large supplies of food at any one time.¹⁵

This indicates a need to review the current infrastructure capacity in Western Australia and consider how best logistical practice could be integrated in order to strengthen food supply systems.

Food distribution centres and warehouses should be located in areas that enable efficient access.

Optimising the locations of storage infrastructure can minimise the distance, time and subsequently the cost of transporting food.¹⁶ Adequate facilities should exist within regional locations, with near proximity to major transport routes, suppliers and remote communities.¹⁷

In response to the 2020 *Inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities*, the Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs recommended that governments encourage the establishment of more local distribution centres by wholesalers in major regional centres closer to remote communities.¹⁸

***Recommendation:** Include the mapping of existing infrastructure to identify where facilities are currently located and where there is a need to establish new storage infrastructure to improve food supply chain performance. This will enable the targeting of new infrastructure builds to address gaps.*

Workforce strategy

Western Australia's freight system relies on much more than physical infrastructure. For example, critical to our system is the workforce for areas such as transport, logistics, communications and technology. These are in addition to the policy makers and researchers who shape the legislative, commercial, and economic environment that our system operates within. Our logistics system should be mapped to ensure that our workforce can respond to the challenges of both today and into the future. This may be achieved by the development of a Transport and Logistics Workforce

¹⁵ Parliament of Australia. (2020). Report on food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities. https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Indigenous_Affairs/Foodpricing/Report

¹⁶ Health and Wellbeing Queensland. (2022). *Evidence based review" freight and supply chain*. Queensland Government. Brisbane, Australia.

¹⁷ Mittal, A., Krejci, C., & Craven, T. (2018). Logistics best practices for regional food systems: A review. *Sustainability*, 10(1), 168. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10010168>

¹⁸ Report on food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities (2020) page 27.

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Indigenous_Affairs/Foodpricing/Report

Advisory Committee, an example of such a committee can be found in QLD's [Freight Strategy Action Plan](#).

The capacity for our logistics workforce to adequately adapt and respond to the complexities of our food logistics system is essential. This includes the establishment of specialised skills, such as cold chain management for transport workers.¹⁹ Further, appropriate workforce opportunities need to be provided to First Nations people in place, to ensure that they see the economic benefits to their local community. By mapping where workforce opportunities intersect with First Nations and place based economic opportunities, we can help improve the wellbeing of people and communities in addition to the efficiency and stability of our logistics system.

Recommendation: Undertake the comprehensive mapping of the WA logistics workforce, including current capability gaps. Mapping should include the workforce needs of today and the projected workforce needs of the future. These should include consideration of the geographical, environmental and social context of Western Australia and provide workforce opportunities to those people who live where infrastructure assets are located.

Fair Food IT- Connecting demand with supply

As the charity food sector coordinated its response to COVID-19 in early 2020, FFWA members identified the urgent need to more effectively integrate with the states commercial freight and logistics systems with their operations. Through research and stakeholder consultation, Fair Food WA identified that by integrating food supply chain and logistics data sets with the [Food Stress Index](#) and [emergency food baskets](#) data we could better match demand and supply. As a solution to this, FFWA developed the FFIT model.

Fair Food IT WA (FFIT) involves the establishment of an online map that integrates food supply and demand data sets at a granular geographic level (ABS Statistical Area 1) across Western Australia, to increase food security. FFIT will visually identify and match the location and volume of the need for food, i.e. demand, with where food is produced, processed/ transformed, stored, transported and supplied. This will result in significant improvements in welfare policy, planning and service provision, emergency and natural disaster preparedness and response. It will also deliver environmental benefits by reducing food miles/kms and food waste. FFIT can play a significant role in our State logistics system, as FITT can map not just charity food, but the states whole food system, providing a significant opportunity to map segments of our logistics system. Please see Attached FFIT Prospectus for further details.

Recommendation: Identify appropriate technology and innovation solutions which will contribute to a more efficient and resilient logistics and supply line system.

2. Coordination and collaboration across the supply chain

Recent disaster events and the impact of COVID-19 have highlighted and exacerbated the complexity of food supply to Western Australia and the unique challenges faced across the geographical,

¹⁹ WA Department of Health (2003). *Food North: Food for health in northern Australia*.

environmental and social context of our state. At the onset of COVID-19, the National Indigenous Australians Agency established the Food Security Working Group (Working Group) and Supermarket Taskforce which was convened by the Department of Home Affairs under the National Coordination Mechanism. The [Supermarket Taskforce](#) worked closely with the [National COVID-19 Commission Advisory Board](#) across multiple sectors to ensure that essential supplies were reserved for remote communities, and that supply lines were maintained despite COVID-19 border closures and logistic challenges. As a member of the Supermarket Taskforce the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission activated an exemption on regular conduct between supermarkets, enabling supermarkets to collaborate in the face of ongoing food supply issues and contributing to the continued supply of food and groceries to regional and remote areas.

The Western Australian government now has a unique opportunity to draw on the success of these two groups and consider the establishment of a dedicated state remote food security and supply chain coordination office. The purpose of the office would be to coordinate across state supply issues in times of emergency while also providing strategic coordination for ongoing state shipping and supply line reform. This concept is also supported by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, who recommended the establishment of a National Remote Indigenous Food Supply Chain Coordination Office, which would provide government oversight to investment funding and resourcing²⁰ in response to the [inquiry into and report on the operation of community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities](#).

***Recommendation:** State Government progresses a dedicated remote food security and supply chain coordination office to provide oversight to the development of a State Logistics and Supply Line Strategy and corresponding action plan. This office would lead policy transformation to promote coordination and collaboration between commercial, private and government stakeholders for the purpose of building a resilient logistics and supply line system.*

3. Freight subsidisation

The costs associated with the transport and logistics of food are a well evidenced barrier to food security in geographically isolated regions. During the Australian Government's *Inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities* in 2020, many research bodies, local governments, health associations, and advocacy organisations endorsed the development of freight subsidy or equalisation scheme, particularly for fresh produce.²¹ Similar recommendations have been proposed in the literature.^{22 23}

²⁰ Lovell, I. (2008). Freight and health in remote Indigenous communities. *Issues* (83).

²¹ Health and Wellbeing Queensland. (2022). *Evidence Based Review: Freight and Supply Chain*. Queensland Government. Brisbane, Australia.

²² Pollard, C., Landrigan, T., Ellies, P., Kerr, D., Lester, M., & Goodchild, E. (2014). Geographic Factors as Determinants of Food Security: A Western Australian Food Pricing and Quality Study. *Asia Pacific Journal Clinical Nutrition*, 23(4), 703-713.

²³ Godrich S, Davies C, Darby J, Devine A. (2017). What are the determinants of food security among regional and remote Western Australian children?. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 41(2):172-177

While freight subsidies appear to be a viable option for improving the food security of remote communities, concerns about the proposed schemes have been raised.²² For example, there are questions around whether subsidies provide an incentive for freight operators to purchase more expensive food varieties to increase their subsidy amount.²² Similarly, there is concern that the benefit of the subsidy would not be extended to community in the form of lower food prices.²² Such implications highlight the need for improved governing, oversight, and regulation of supply chains and freight operations to ensure accountability and transparency.²²

These may be addressed by the design of the subsidy, by ensuring that administrative processes include increased transparency and reporting. This could include, for example, how the subsidy is used by transport companies. Any state freight subsidy scheme should include the routine monitoring of how the subsidy decreases costs for consumers.

While the State Government administers a range of freight subsidies, none are dedicated to reducing the costs of food for geographically isolated communities.

To overcome the hardship imposed on communities isolated from their normal means of supply, the *State Isolated Communities Freight Subsidy Emergency Management Plan* (1999) was developed to overcome the increased costs associated with freight for geographically isolated communities. The State Government provides a freight subsidy for the difference between the normal freight cost and the cost incurred using an alternative route or means of supply. The freight subsidy only applied to approved life sustaining commodities for communities with retail outlets, and applied to either alternative supply lines that incurred additional cost or the use of air transport when road access is not viable. The *State Isolated Communities Freight Subsidy Emergency Management Plan* (1999) is planned for a review in December 2022.

Recommendation: The December 2022 review of the State Government funded State Isolated Communities Freight Subsidy Emergency Management Plan includes the design of a freight subsidy and uses established evidence to identify and mitigate the risks of freight subsidies with a focus on adequate reporting and transparency.

Fair Food WA, 2022

Please direct any questions regarding this submission to WACOSS Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Rachel Siewert at socialpolicy@wacoss.org.au