No. 10 of 2026

REPORT OF THE REMUNERATION TRIBUNAL

2026 Proposed Major Emergency and Disaster Allowance for Mayors

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This review concerns the establishment of a Major Emergency and Disaster Allowance for the Mayor of a Council where any part of their Council is subject to a Major Emergency or Disaster declaration under the *Emergency Management Act 2004* (SA) (**Emergency Management Act**), payable for the duration of that declaration (**Major Emergency and Disaster Allowance**).

2. The Tribunal contemplated establishing the proposed allowance during the review of Councillor Allowances which led to Report and Determination 6 of 2026 and sought further submissions on the topic.

3. As explained in this Report, the Tribunal has determined not to establish the proposed allowance in this review but will invite further consideration of the issue at the next review of Councillor Allowances.

BACKGROUND

4. Section 14 of the *Remuneration Act 1990* (SA) (**Act**) provides that the Tribunal has jurisdiction to set the remuneration payable to office holders as conferred under any other legislation. Section 3 of the Act defines remuneration to include allowances.

5. Both sections 76 of the *Local Government Act 1999* (SA) (**LG Act**) and 24 of the *City of Adelaide Act 1998* (SA) (**City of Adelaide Act**) confer upon the Tribunal the jurisdiction to determine allowances for Councillors once every four years, from the date of the local government election to the conclusion of that term.

6. On 2 July 2026 the *Local Government (Elections) (Periodic Elections) Amendment Act 2026* (SA) (**Deferral Act**) came into force and postponed the November 2026 Local Government Elections to April 2027 (**Deferred Local Government Elections**). It also extended the time within which the Tribunal could make a determination for allowances which would apply from the conclusion of the Deferred Local Government Elections.

7. In Report 6 of 2026, the Tribunal revised the allowance arrangements for Councillors and Mayors and noted submissions seeking recognition of the additional demands on Mayors during declared major emergencies or disasters. It proposed further consultation on establishing a Major Emergency and Disaster Allowance.

8. In this respect the Tribunal has exercised its jurisdiction under section 76 of the LG Act and section 24 of the City of Adelaide Act to review the extent to which such an allowance is appropriate.

9. The Tribunal's jurisdiction to determine allowances for Councillors pursuant to the LG Act and City of Adelaide Act is strictly limited to the criteria set out in the legislation.

10. The Tribunal has maintained the approach and methodology to consider allowances set out in Report 6 of 2026 when considering whether to establish this new class of allowance for Mayors.

THE REVIEW PROCESS

11. On 17 September 2026, in accordance with sections 10(2) and 10(4) of the Act, the Tribunal wrote to and invited submissions by 29 October 2026 in respect of this review from:

    a. the Honourable Premier of South Australia – as the Minister responsible for the Act who may make submissions or introduce evidence in the public interest;
    b. the Minister for Local Government, as Minister responsible for the LG Act;
    c. the Minister for the City of Adelaide, as Minister responsible for the City of Adelaide Act;
    d. the Local Government Association of South Australia (**LGA**); and
    e. the Councillors of each South Australian Local Government Council.

12. The Tribunal requested that details of the review be published in the LGA Circular inviting submissions by 29 October 2026.

13. The Tribunal also placed a notice on its website from 17 September 2026 inviting submissions from affected persons by 29 October 2026.

14. The invitations for submissions and notice on the Tribunal's website specifically sought comments on the issues the Tribunal flagged in Report 6 of 2026 with respect to the proposed Major Emergency and Disaster Allowance, being:

    a. The impact and effect on Councils and Mayors of different forms of declarations made under the Emergency Management Act;
    b. The impact of different types of major emergencies in terms of their impact on Councils and Mayors;
    c. The impact and effect of additional demands on Mayors if the major disaster or emergency extends over a significant time; and
    d. The overall principle of whether there should be such an additional payment, together with the considerations listed above.

15. On 21 October 2026 the Premier's representative advised that no submission would be made.

16. No submissions were received from the Minister for Local Government or the Minister for the City of Adelaide.

17. The Tribunal received submissions from ten Councils and the LGA.

18. The submissions are summarised below:

Submitter	Issues Raised

Barunga West Council	• In principle support for the allowance to recognise substantial expansion of responsibilities in a major emergency or disaster.
	• Council staff have operational responsibilities within the emergency management framework, but the Mayor may have a distinct role as the elected and public representative of the community resulting in greater duties:
	  o Leadership, reassurance and communication between all aspects of the community;
	  o Liaison with emergency services and State Government;
	  o Community advocacy;
	  o Participation in briefings and coordination meetings;
	  o Engagement with Councillors;
	  o Public and media communication; and
	  o Representation of the community throughout the recovery process.
	• These responsibilities can extend beyond the immediate emergency response into a prolonged recovery period.
	• Rural and regional circumstances warrant specific recognition. While small, they do not necessarily place less significant demands on its Mayor, who would usually represent multiple communities across substantial geographic areas.
	• Regional councils may have limited local resources and greater reliance on regional coordination arrangements during significant events.
	• Any eligibility framework should be objective and straightforward enough to enable consistent application across councils.
	• Allowance be paid in addition to other allowances and reimbursements.
	• Suggested Framework for additional allowance where:
	  o A major emergency or disaster declared under the Emergency Management Act; and
	  o The Council area is directly and materially affected by the declared event; and
	  o The event places significant additional responsibilities and demands upon the Mayor beyond those ordinarily associated with the role.
	  o Additional considerations:
	  ▪ type and duration of the declaration;
	  ▪ geographic extent of the event;
	  ▪ number of residents and businesses affected;
	  ▪ extent of damage and disruption;
	  ▪ duration of the response and recovery period; and
	  ▪ extent of the Mayor's additional representative, advocacy and community leadership responsibilities.

Naracoorte Lucindale Council	• Council broadly supports the overall principle of an additional payment. • Mayors routinely go above and beyond their legislated duties, providing immediate response to disasters and playing pivotal roles in any recovery efforts. For example, the River Murray Mayors during the floods and the numerous mayors whose districts have been impacted by significant fires.

Submitter	Issues Raised
	• While it may be appropriate, the intense enduring nature of the challenges arising from these events result in mayors working around the clock as spokespeople for their communities, facilitators, advocates and carers in tough times. • Mayors are at the frontline and working in the background. The demand on their time, impacts on their health and wellbeing and the additional activities should be appropriately acknowledged and remunerated. • Prolonged drought can also place substantial additional demands on Mayors, even though South Australia no longer makes formal drought declarations under the National Drought Agreement. During these periods, Mayors may be required to: o Develop and champion strategies to support affected communities; o Represent the interests of farmers and others affected by drought; o Advocate to decisionmakers for assistance and support measures; o Connect community members with mental health, financial and other support services; and o Act as a trusted point of contact for the media, the community, Members of Parliament and government agencies. • The Tribunal should consider how the proposed allowance could recognise the additional demands arising from prolonged drought where no formal declaration is made, rather than relying solely on a declaration as the basis for eligibility. The responsibilities described above can be sustained and intensive, adding significantly to Mayors' ordinary workloads.
Flinders Ranges Council	• Supports an allowance to recognise the additional workload, time commitment, availability and responsibilities that may be required of a Mayor where a Major Emergency or Disaster has been declared under the Emergency Management Act. • Emergencies can substantially increase demands beyond the Mayor's ordinary responsibilities, often at short notice, outside business hours and over extended periods. The responsibility and commitment required depend on the nature of the event, its severity, geographical extent, duration, and its direct and indirect community impacts. • Mayors should be allowed to choose if they seek payment of the allowance. • Additional responsibilities, which can also extend for extended periods into the recovery phase, include: o Responding to enquiries from the media, government representatives, residents and community organisations; o Providing media interviews and public updates on developing circumstances, available assistance, advice and recovery arrangements; o Liaising with the Chief Executive Officer, Council staff, Elected Members, emergency services and government agencies to remain informed, coordinate communications and address community concerns;

Submitter	Issues Raised
	○ Attending community meetings, public briefings and information sessions; ○ Responding to urgent requests from affected residents for information, reassurance, advocacy and support; and ○ Remaining contactable and ready to respond to changing circumstances, often outside normal working hours and at short notice. • In rural and regional councils the Mayor's responsibilities may extend across several towns and dispersed communities which all require significant travel to visit and engage. • The geographic spread of regional communities can make direct communication and access to information more challenging, here the Mayor may play a pivotal role in ensuring that residents feel informed, represented and connected with Councils and agencies responding to the emergency. • Eligibility and payment should account for the actual demands placed on the Mayor, rather than rely solely on the duration or classification of an event. The allowance should therefore be sufficiently flexible to recognise both the intensity and duration of additional responsibilities. • The COVID-19 pandemic is an example of an emergency declaration creating demands on a Mayor and Council beyond a short response period. • Ongoing attention and availability may be required for months or years, even as activity levels fluctuate. • The Allowance should be funded through the Disaster Recovery Program or an equivalent State or Australian Government funding mechanism so that additional costs are not imposed on ratepayers.
Adelaide Hills Council	• Council supports the proposed allowance to equitably recognise additional Mayoral responsibilities, time commitments and community expectations during emergencies and recovery beyond ordinary duties. • While Mayors have no operational response role, they provide community leadership, convene special meetings for emergency expenditure, engage residents, advocate for assistance and undertake media and stakeholder engagement. • Higher level declarations under the Emergency Management Act require greater coordination, and result in increased community disruption and heightened public expectations. As the scale and complexity of the event grows, Council is often required to dedicate significant staff resources to emergency response support, communication, infrastructure management and recovery. • Major and Disaster level declarations may result in a marked increase in leadership, advocacy and communication responsibilities beyond ordinary duties as the Mayor is a key point of contact between a council and community, while representing local impacts and advocating for recovery assistance. • Bushfire risk is a persistent risk for the Adelaide Hills with significant social, economic and environmental consequences.

Submitter	Issues Raised
	The region is also susceptible to flooding, extreme heat, extreme storms, animal and plant diseases and earthquakes. The unique geography off the region can exacerbate emergency situations and hinder response efforts. • Mayors also support resilience initiatives while balancing public safety, environmental protection, private property rights and community expectations. • Council submits that incidents lasting weeks or months substantially increase Mayors' usual workload, placing pressure on their time, personal commitments and employment arrangements. Duties may include regular community updates, participation in public events and recovery initiatives, and responses to continuing community concerns and enquiries. • Recovery activities often continue long after the response phase has concluded requiring ongoing leadership and advocacy.
Mount Remarkable	• Supports the introduction of the proposed allowance to provide a fair and reasonable recognition of the substantial additional responsibilities, time commitments and emotional burden associated with leading communities through emergencies and recovery. • An allowance would recognise that local government leaders play a critical role in the immediate response as well as the lengthy rebuild of community confidence, wellbeing and resilience. • Additionally, the duties of the Mayor in emergencies also comprise: o Being the public face of the local response and Council figurehead; o Key liaison between the community, the Council, emergency services and government agencies; o Trusted source of information and reassurance for residents, businesses, community organisations and volunteers; o Advocacy for immediate assistance, recovery funding and long-term resilience measures; and o Attending briefings, public meetings, media engagements and recovery activities outside normal working hours and over extended periods. • The demands are unpredictable, occur in addition to ordinary duties and other employment and personal commitments. • The Council has experienced several emergency events and prolonged recovery challenges including significant droughts, bushfire threats and impacts as well as the River Murray Floods. While all of these differ, the demands on the Mayor are substantial. • Emergencies affect dispersed communities across large geographic areas with extensive travel requirements, community engagement and direct interactions. During the 2026 River Murray Floods the Mayor travelled 140 km daily to addend the Council office from his personal residence. • Some emergencies are not short-term, droughts can extend for years requiring ongoing advocacy, support and community leadership. Similarly, the recovery from floods and bushfires.

Submitter	Issues Raised
	• The burden on Mayors caused by emergencies extend beyond hours spent in meetings, briefings or emergency operations to continuous community availability. Frequent contact at all hours, including well after the declared emergency, concerns personal hardship, property loss, business impacts, mental health challenges and government support. • Council submits that the allowance should acknowledge the cumulative emotional and psychological burden of responding to emergencies and leading communities through them. Mayors support residents facing hardship and trauma, visit damaged sites, undertake emotionally demanding recovery activities and represent communities facing uncertainty while balancing community expectations with personal wellbeing.

Town of Walkerville	• Council supports a Major Emergency and Disaster Allowance for Mayors to recognise extraordinary demands beyond the normal expectations of the role.
	• Mayors are the public face of the community response, providing leadership, reassurance and representation, engaging affected residents, businesses and community groups, and advocating for State and Federal assistance.
	• In small metropolitan councils like Walkerville, limited elected leadership resources and the Mayor's role as primary community representative can make additional responsibilities particularly significant. Emergency impacts vary with the nature of the event and the extent of community disruption. Additional workload includes attending emergency briefings and stakeholder meetings, liaising with emergency services and government agencies, supporting recovery, undertaking extensive media and public communications, and responding to increased community enquiries and concerns.
	• Council submits that the allowance framework should reflect the emergency's scale and community impact, rather than solely the type of declaration. Demands on the Mayor vary with the event's nature and severity, including bushfires, severe storms, floods, public health emergencies, major infrastructure failures and other declared disasters.
	• Many emergencies extend beyond the initial response phase and require ongoing community engagement, advocacy and recovery efforts over weeks or months which may place greater demands on the Mayor than the initial emergency response period. The framework should consider:
	  o Length of the declaration;
	  o Duration of recovery activities;
	  o Extent of community impacts; and
	  o Level of participation required by the Mayor.
	• Any allowance framework should:
	  o Be linked to a declaration under the Emergency Management Act;
	  o Recognise the response and recovery phases and the additional duties in both;

Submitter	Issues Raised
	○ Be administratively straightforward and transparent; ○ Apply consistently across all metropolitan and regional Councils; ○ Be flexible to reflect the emergency's scale, severity and duration as well as its actual impact on each affected Council and community rather than relying solely on the type of declaration; ○ An allowance may be calculated on a hourly rate, daily allowance or percentage of ordinary allowance based on the length of the event; and ○ Should require reasonable evidence of material impact on the council or community and a substantial increase in mayoral duties for a Mayor to receive the allowance.
Mid Murray Council	• Council supports the establishment of the proposed allowance. • Major emergencies change the Mayor's role immediately and substantially with demands extending well beyond civic leadership and continuing for years through the recovery phase. • In an emergency, the Mayor's focus shifts heavily towards advocating for the community, communicating timely and reliable information, representing Council publicly and contributing to recovery efforts. • The Mayor's role during the recovery can be as important as, or more important than, the response role. Depending on the event, it may include ongoing advocacy for restoration funding, recovery programs and community assistance, responding to residents and local media, participating in or chairing local recovery committees, and remaining Council's public face throughout recovery. • **2022–23 River Murray floods Case Study:** ○ Council reports costs exceeding $13.7 million to date, with property damage, social isolation and other effects continuing across the river corridor and recovery dependent on external funding. ○ During the floods, the Mayor advocated for government assistance to construct levees and protect community assets; kept the community informed about preventative work by Council, government agencies and private individuals; responded to increased State and national media enquiries and residents' property concerns; and attended working groups, meetings and briefings to understand likely impacts, contribute local knowledge and relay information to Council and the community. ○ During recovery, the Mayor advocated for flood clean-up assistance and funding to restore uninsured critical public assets, continued responding to residents and local media, and engaged affected residents through door knocking, letterbox drops, informal community listening sessions and coffee catch-ups. ○ Council describes a practical change in the Mayor's role, not simply increased meeting attendance, with

Submitter	Issues Raised

	restoration works still ongoing some three years after the floods illustrating the prolonged demands of recovery.
	• **Drought Case Study:**
	  o Council has experienced numerous droughts, which by their nature can persist for extended periods of time. Effects include reduced livestock numbers and crop yields, rising input costs, financial pressure on farmers and local businesses, mental health and wellbeing concerns.
	  o During recent droughts the Mayor was required inform the community about available assistance, engage with residents to identify emerging issues, and respond to community and media enquiries, as well as advocate to State and Commonwealth Governments for:
	  ▪ Relief for affected farmers;
	  ▪ Assistance for affected off-farm businesses;
	  ▪ Support for affected communities;
	  ▪ Investment in stronger and more resilient communities; and
	  ▪ Mental health support.
	• Additional demands on the Mayor's time and resources vary between emergencies.
	• Council proposes an application-based allowance rather than automatic payment to every Mayor in a declared emergency area. Applicants would demonstrate materially increased workload, sustained duties beyond ordinary expectations, or employment impacts, such as taking leave or reducing other work commitments. This approach would enable targeted and justifiable payments.

District Council of Streaky Bay	• Council supports the establishment of a Major Emergency and Disaster Allowance, but that eligibility be broadened to recognise the exceptional communication and community leadership demands arising from significant local incidents which place considerable demands on a rural Mayor. • Examples of significant local incidents from the District Council of Streaky Bay which generate substantial additional responsibilities for the Mayor, but do not have a major emergency or disaster declaration attached include fatal shark attack incidents, the deaths if two people at Back Brach, prolonged drought, severe financial hardship and repeated deaths in the community by suicide. In each instance the community expect the Mayor to explain the situation, advocate for assistance, help bring agencies and the community together and provide leadership. Accordingly, the allowance should reflect the duties actually imposed, not solely the legal classification of an event. • Proposed Allowance Framework: o Broad eligibility to cover declared major emergencies and disasters with additional assessment pathway for other significant community incidents which impose comparable exceptional demands;

Submitter	Issues Raised
	○ Explicit recognition of communications and leadership: Eligibility duties include media engagement, community communication, liaison with agencies, advocacy for mental health, drought relief and public safety, and recovery representation and recognise necessary preparation and follow-up work. ○ Rural circumstances; factors of remoteness, necessary travel between communities, direct public accessibility and availability of administrative and communications support. Don't rely on population, council revenue or existing allowance groupings to assess demands; ○ Proportionate payments: fixed or tiered amounts reflecting intensity and duration of exceptional duties. Payments calculated as percentage of existing mayoral allowances could produce materially different recognition for comparable incident workloads. ○ Flexible periods with review: allow recognition from the commencement of demonstrable exceptional duties, including relevant preparation and recovery periods. Allow for extensions where duties continue, supported by proportionate review and avoid restricting payment to the dates of the declaration under the Emergency Management Act. ○ Council proposes simple evidence and transparent administration. A concise incident statement would be supported by available records, including media requests, briefings, meetings, correspondence, travel records and a reasonable summary of additional duties. The evidence would be verified by the CEO, with eligibility assessed against consistent criteria; continuing public interest alone should not create indefinite eligibility. The process should be practical for small councils managing an active incident and should not require time recording. Approved payments should be reported transparently, while expense reimbursement and the provision of practical support should remain separately identifiable. • Mayoral wellbeing and cumulative traumatic exposure: Tribunal should encourage Councils to provide appropriate debriefing, confidential wellbeing support and practical assistance to Mayors when serious incidents place sustained pressure on them. This should complement the allowance. • Broader recognition of the rural mayoral role: Future allowance reviews give explicit attention to the concentration of spokesperson responsibilities in small councils on the Mayor and the level of support available to fulfil them.
Berri Barmera Council	• Supports in principle a Major Emergency and Disaster Allowance for Mayors who are required to undertake significant additional responsibilities during declared emergencies. • Emergencies vary considerably in their duration, scale and impact, so any allowance should be linked to the scale and

Submitter	Issues Raised
	duration of the declared emergency and applied at the discretion of the responsible Minister. • This would provide flexibility to recognise circumstances where the demand on local leadership is exceptional and extend well beyond the ordinary expectations of the role. • Cost of the allowance should be funded by the State Government through established emergency management or disaster recovery funding arrangements, rather than by individual councils. • Major emergencies are matters of state significance and financial impact of recognising additional leadership responsibilities should not place additional pressure on council budgets or local ratepayers.
LGA	• Has not established sector position on the proposal due to insufficient feedback from the sector. • Major emergencies and disasters can place additional demands on elected representative through increased community engagement, media participation, coordination with government agencies and involvement in recovery over an extended period. • Extent of the role will vary, and additional responsibilities should only be undertaken where a council member has the capacity to do so, and it does not cut across the operational responsibilities of emergency services, council administration and other agencies. • Seeks that the Tribunal weigh the policy rationale, administrative burden, the financial impact on affected councils and how the allowance would operate when determining whether to introduce the proposed allowance.
City of Salisbury	• Does not support the proposed allowance. • Councils support communities, maintain essential services and infrastructure, and assist with emergency response and recovery. This work is shared by elected members, CEOs, staff and community partners. • Emergencies declared under the Emergency Management Act vary in duration and impact. Some are brief, while others, such as COVID-19, last much longer. Bushfires, floods, storms and pandemics affect councils and communities differently. • Community leadership during emergencies and unforeseen events is a core part of the Mayor's role. • Emergency responsibilities are shared by the whole council, elected members and volunteers. An allowance paid only to the Mayor may not reflect this collective effort. • Differences in the scale and duration of emergencies make it difficult to set fair and consistent rules for eligibility, payment periods and allowance amounts. • Events with very different impacts on councils and councillors include the Sampson Flat and Pinery fires, the 2016 Statewide Blackout, the Kangaroo Island Fire, the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2022 River Murray floods.

19. On 4 November 2026 the Tribunal met with Dr Andrew Johnson, the Chief Executive Officer of the Mid Murray Council.

CONSIDERATION

20. The Tribunal has noted that there are varying views about the basis for the proposed Major Emergency and Disaster Allowance.

21. There are differing views about how Major Emergency and Disaster circumstances should be defined and there is little consistency about the duration that any additional allowance should be payable.

22. Some submissions referenced different types of disasters or emergency circumstances as requiring different Mayoral responses.

23. The submissions also express differing views about whether the proposed allowance should be funded by the State Government or by the relevant Council.

24. The submissions do not propose a specific amount or an applicable multiplier for the suggested allowance. This is particularly relevant given the substantial increases to Councillor Allowances provided for in Report and Determination 6 of 2026. Mayors receive four times the Councillor Allowance applicable to their Council, except the Lord Mayor of the City of Adelaide, who receives a set allowance.

25. The Tribunal is acutely conscious of the potential for Mayors to be criticised for receiving allowance amounts which exceed the average income of ratepayers in a given council.

26. Unfortunately, the Tribunal did not receive any information which allowed it to make a realistic assessment of the normal income that a Mayor would forfeit in the circumstances of undertaking the additional duties during a Major Emergency or Disaster declaration.

27. All these factors have led the Tribunal to conclude that there is insufficient evidence available to it upon which to establish the proposed allowance.

28. The Tribunal intends to invite further submissions on the proposed allowance during the next review of Councillor Allowances in 2031.





Matthew O'Callaghan	Donny Walford	Mark Young
PRESIDENT	**MEMBER**	**MEMBER**

Dated: 11 November 2026