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Shaping Effective Food Action Groups: Participant Perspectives on Structure and Stakeholder Involvement in Regional and Remote Western Australia

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ABSTRACT

Issue Addressed: Food systems strongly influence food security outcomes. Food Action Groups (often termed Food Policy Councils/Coalitions/Networks internationally) offer a co-ordinated and collaborative approach to local food system issues. Their organisational structure and stakeholder membership significantly impact their focus and impact. Therefore, it is imperative to understanding community member and food system stakeholders' perspectives on how regional and remote Australian Food Action Groups should be structured to maximise their impact on local food systems, and identify the most appropriate stakeholders to facilitate and drive their action.

Methods: A qualitative study using focus groups, was conducted in regional and remote townships across Western Australian regions of Peel, South West, Great Southern, Wheatbelt, Midwest (including Gascoyne), Goldfields, Pilbara, and Kimberley. Participants were community members and food system stakeholders. Focus group transcript data were thematically analysed.

Results: A formal structure with sustainable funding was important for Food Action Groups, as was adopting a bottom-up approach with local community needs driving the agenda, supported by an adaptable and responsive work plan. Involving community members and ensuring a diverse membership were viewed as critical to their success.

Conclusions: To effectively address local needs, Food Action Groups should adopt a formal structure with clear processes and involve a diverse group of community stakeholders. This would leverage local knowledge and evidence to guide actions and set well-informed priorities.

So What: The establishment of Australian Food Action Groups in regional and remote Australia has potential to follow suit of their US, Canada and UK predecessors, improve regional food systems and influence government policies.

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1 | Introduction

Although Australia is considered a food secure country [1] from a food production perspective, inequitable food access is an issue, particularly for those living in regional or remote communities [2]. The concentration of food companies with disproportionate market power is an increasingly concerning and impactful issue on food access. In particular, their potential to reduce competition, increase food prices, reduce product range and influence policy [3]. As a result, many regional communities have fewer food outlets offering nutritious, affordable and quality food options [4]. Compounding these issues is limited public transport making available food less accessible when individuals and families lack private or active transport opportunities [4], and posing challenges to transporting food to regional locations. Food system stressors, such as droughts, floods and other extreme weather events or seasonal road closures further disrupt key actors involved in local and regional supply chains including producers and retailers. These disruptions can lead to physical and economic breakdowns in food supply, resulting in food shortages and price fluctuations [5]. Food systems pose complex challenges that require a systemic approach. Embracing this approach requires a radical transformation of food system governance and structure, strengthening the ability to develop and implement effective policies and shifting towards more collaborative actions [6]. To enact this, food system actors, particularly government, could create infrastructure that supports a diverse food system across production, processing and distribution stages of the food supply chain, which better supports small to medium-sized enterprises [3, 7]. Also required, are democratic policy and governance opportunities for civil society and food system actors to engage in food policy making [3], a mechanism that Food Action Groups could provide [8].

Food Action Groups, also internationally known as 'Food Policy Councils' or 'Food Policy Coalitions' are cross-sectoral groups focused on improving local and regional food systems. They address social justice, health and environmental issues, while also aiming to influence government policy [9], and often support enhanced food security as an outcome. This co-ordinated and collaborative approach allows Food Action Groups to address broader issues within the food system, such as production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste [10, 11]. Common characteristics of Food Action Groups include: (1) their use of an interdisciplinary committee to guide decisions and actions, and (2) a comprehensive food systems approach that addresses multiple food-related issues [12]. Their organisational structure and membership significantly impact their focus. Cross-sector collaboration is considered important for addressing broader food system issues [13], as is having paid staff and long-term commitment from group members [12]. Additionally, the presence of a smaller, core committee facilitates the group's ability to maintain focus and efficiency [13]. Moreover, establishing a relationship with government, to influence policy outcomes, can be crucial [13, 14]. A New Zealand study of two Food Action Groups examined the role of stakeholders in each group, and responses to context-specific food issues. In the Dunedin group, local 'policy champions' were critical to garner support from government to embed food strategies into policy. In contrast, a Canterbury group deliberately remained 'at arm's length' from government to reduce the impact of bureaucracy. These case studies demonstrate the importance of deep knowledge regarding the

place-based context in which to create the most appropriate Food Action Group model for the context [15]. In a review of Food Action Groups across the United States, Western European countries, Australia and Canada, most articles outlined the importance of diverse membership from sector and social perspectives. Examples included involvement from across public, private and charitable sectors and members from varied backgrounds [12]. Commonly discussed in the articles, was the need for the integration of Food Action Groups into government structures or having direct government links or Group staff funded by government. At the other end of the spectrum, some articles outlined the Food Action Groups' deliberate establishment external to government. A 'hybrid' model demonstrated a level of formal government relationship (e.g., funding), but maintained the Food Action Group as a not-for-profit organisation [12, 16].

Food Action Groups are increasingly recognised as one strategy to address food system issues, and there are many lessons to be learnt from the United States of America (USA), Canada, Europe, and the United Kingdom (UK) in relation to their effectiveness. It is imperative to gain a thorough understanding of the perspectives of community members and food system stakeholders concerning a local Food Action Group, to establish the model most appropriate for the geographical and social context. One strategy to achieve this is actively engaging community members and stakeholders incorporating their lived experiences through co-design in the establishment of Food Action Groups. The aim of this research is to investigate (1) how regional and remote Australian Food Action Groups could be structured to maximise their impact on local food systems; and (2) the most appropriate stakeholders to facilitate and action regional and remote Australian Food Action Groups.

2 | Methods

2.1 | Setting

This qualitative research study was conducted across regional and remote Western Australia (WA) including Peel, South West, Great Southern, Wheatbelt, Midwest (including Gascoyne), Goldfields, Pilbara, and Kimberley regions. Figure 1 provides some background context regarding the estimated socio-economic position of residents within each region. Focus group sessions were held in community venues within at least one regional or remote township in each region, with two townships selected in some regions.

2.2 | Sampling/Recruitment

Participants included community members and food system stakeholders. Community members received a \$30 gift voucher incentive and were recruited through the sharing of promotional flyers via Facebook community noticeboards, with some additional flyers printed and displayed in community venues. Potential stakeholders included key food supply actors identified by the collaborative framework for food systems transformation [6]. A database was created for each region and included stakeholder details including name, stakeholder type, organisation, contact phone number and email. Two hundred and sixty-five

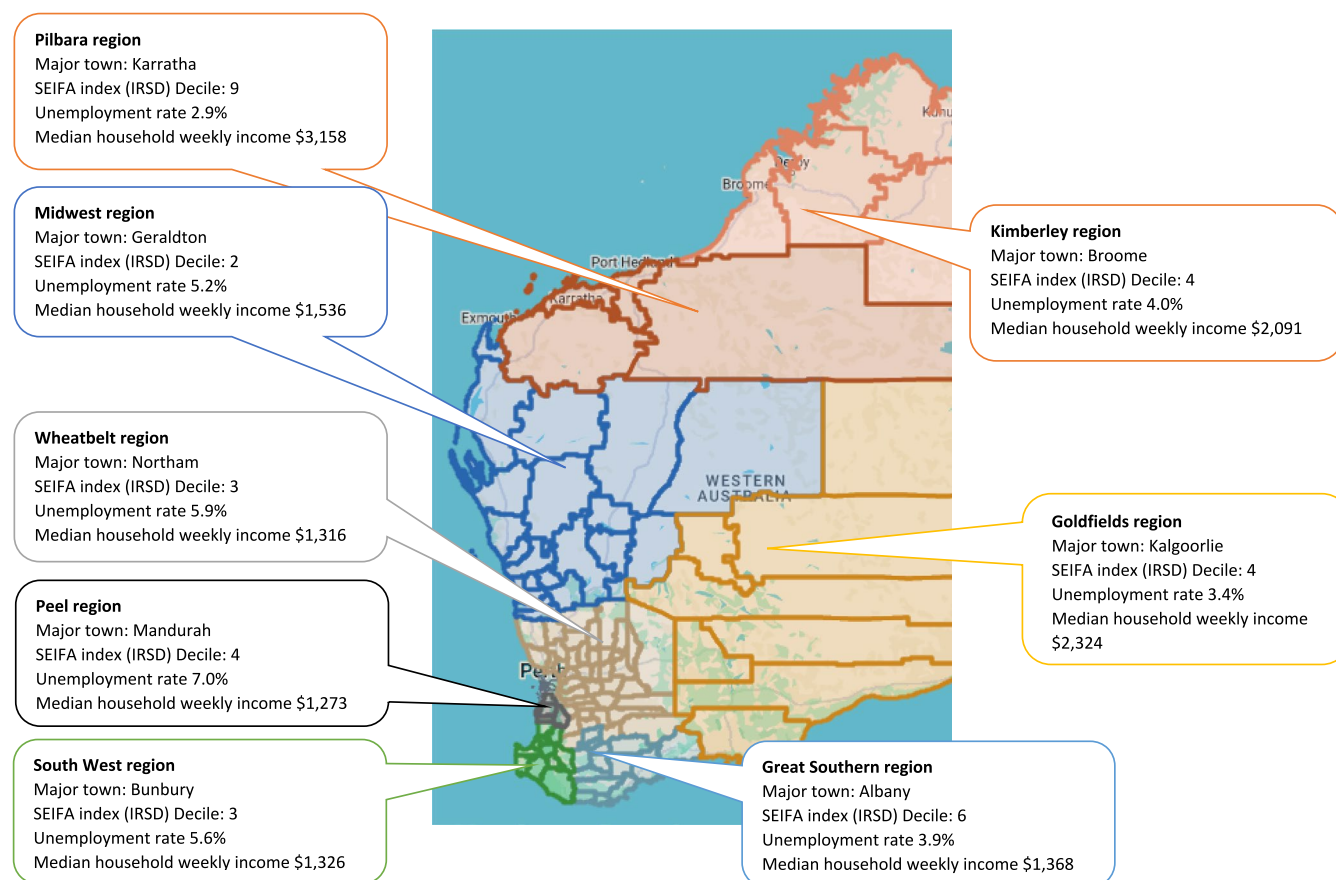


FIGURE 1 | Socio-economic background of residents living in major Western Australian towns [17–24]. (Adapted from REMPLAN MapBuilder)

potential stakeholders were emailed a focus group invitation together with a consent form and participant information letter. Additional stakeholders were recruited through online presentations to local groups and organisations. Promotion through the overarching Food Community project's Facebook Group, print media and radio interviews were also used to recruit stakeholder and community participants.

2.3 | Focus Group Guide

A focus group guide was developed to guide each session and included seven questions. It was developed based on insights from two scoping reviews [12, 25]. The questions addressed: (1) what a good food pathway looks like to participants; (2) local food problems that impede the local food pathway; (3) positive drivers of the food pathway; (4) proposed impacts from a local Food Action Group; (5) proposed stakeholders to involve; (6) governance structure and (7) anticipated barriers that would prevent the group from having a positive impact. The final section included the facilitator reading back to the group what had been heard during the session, as a form of member checking.

2.4 | Data Collection

Where possible, two focus groups were held in each town, one with stakeholders and other with community members. The average session time was 85 min, (range of 61–124 min). A laptop and portable recording device were used to record session audio and

placed at opposite ends of the group. Microsoft Teams recorded audio and auto-generated focus group transcripts. A minimum of two facilitators conducted each session, except for one session, with one team member asking questions and the other scribing and providing the summary. Each focus group commenced with a brief overview of the project, an explanation of Food Action Groups and some evidence supporting their effectiveness at an international level. While initial questions examined participants perspectives on local food problems and solutions, latter questions and prompts, sought insight into the groups potential structure and membership. For example, regarding potential structure, questions related to whether the Food Action Group should be embedded in or separate to government; the inclusion of a cross-sectoral committee to guide decisions or inclusion of individuals from agriculture, health, youth, social services, education, government or community members with specific backgrounds or experiences.

2.5 | Data Analysis

Team members and students (undergraduate and postgraduate) cleaned Microsoft Teams auto-generated transcripts. The process involved listening to session audio to ensure data were accurately recorded. Cleaned transcripts were uploaded into NVivo and three team members conducted a thematic analysis of the data, utilising a 17-step protocol, informed by Braun and Clarke [26]. The manual coding process consisted of four phases: (1) a summary of key points from each transcript was created and saved as a memo; (2) initial codes (focus group guide questions) were developed and data were coded to each question; (3) data driven themes were

developed and (4) themes with five or fewer coded statements were reviewed by team members for potential consolidation and combined according to team consensus. The team developed and followed a coding framework to ensure consistency. An NVivo journal was utilised to monitor progress and provide updates. All team members received training by Lumivero (NVivo software owner) and internal team qualitative data analysis training following a detailed analysis protocol.

3 | Results

3.1 | Proposed Food Action Group Structure and Governance

Focus group participants were consulted about the ideal governance structure for a Food Action Group in their location. The drivers for an effective Food Action Group are synthesised below and visually depicted in Figure 2.

3.1.1 | Formal Structure With Sustainable Funding (29 Coded Statements)

Many participants identified that establishing a formal structure with stakeholders representing various sectors was essential for the success of a Food Action Group. Suggestions included formally

incorporating the Food Action Group and developing a constitution to provide a clear structure for decision-making and facilitate grant applications. Participants emphasised the need to secure sustainable funding through collaboration with stakeholders in management positions, local government and the private sector.

... sometimes government funding ... we only get so much and then that fizzles out too with the funding ... it needs a sustainable solution (Stakeholder Member Focus Group).

It doesn't have to be a tight, tight structure, but it's some sort of structure that keeps information and resources and networking flowing (Community Member Focus Group).

3.1.2 | Driven by Community Needs (19 Coded Statements)

Participants believed Food Action Groups should be flexible and responsive to the specific needs of each community. They acknowledged that diverse food issues exist across geographical and social contexts and a 'bottom-up' approach was required where structure is determined by local community needs and adaptable to change. These approaches often define the entry

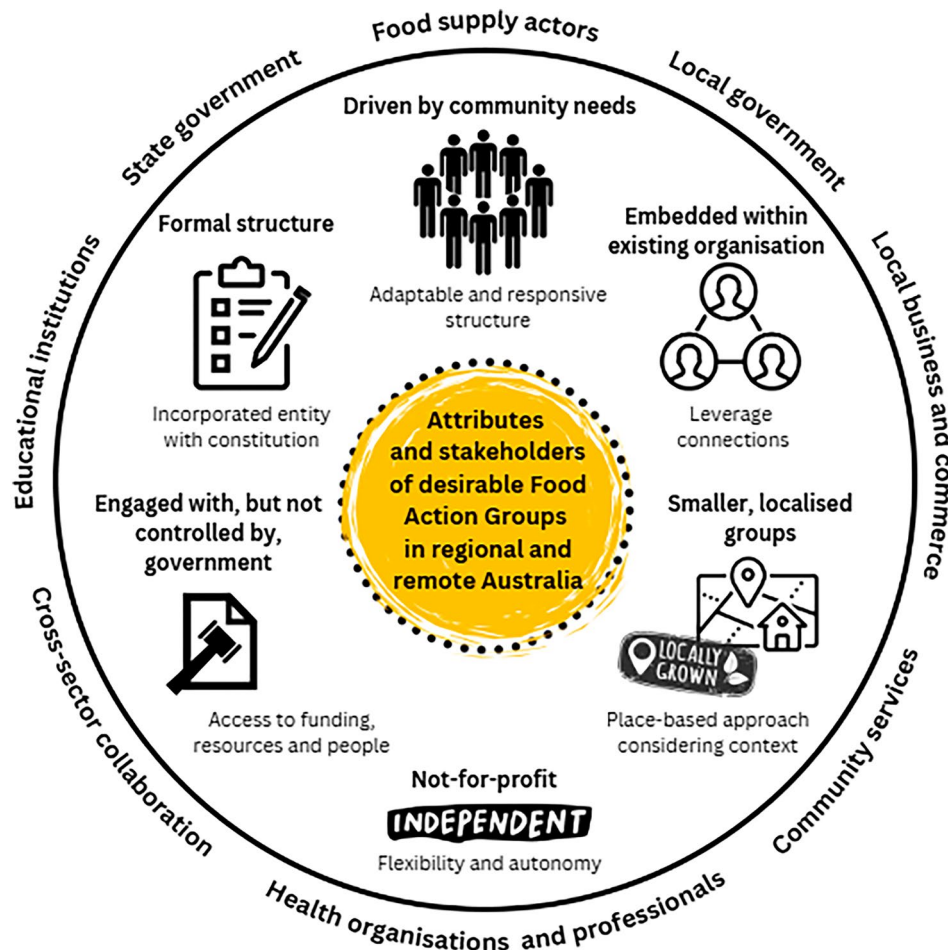


FIGURE 2 | Attributes and stakeholders of desirable Food Action Groups in Regional and Remote Australia.

points for Food Action Groups. The importance of having paid positions, particularly to employ locally based personnel to drive action was highlighted to ensure stability and continuity, as reliance on volunteers often led to burnout. Diverse representation from various sectors and stakeholders including local producers, along with fostering partnerships among community groups, local government and other stakeholders was seen as essential for comprehensively addressing food system issues and creating a unified voice for regional issues.

I think you need ... a key stakeholders' group who are paid, can actually implement changes... But they also need to have community representation ... So you have like your ground roots based feeding up to you around what the issues are what's going on what you need to maybe change ... and that gives the key stakeholders' group clear direction in terms of what should happen (Stakeholder Member Focus Group).

Diversity because different people are going to bring in different skills and different problems and different solutions (Stakeholder Member Focus Group).

3.1.3 | Engaged With Government (12 Coded Statements)

Participants perceived government engagement as important, either through embedding Food Action Groups within a government department or entity or by having government representatives on the committee. This collaboration was viewed as creating sustainability, encouraging local buy-in and providing access to funding, resources and personnel. However, maintaining connections with the local community was emphasised.

... it has to have its roots in community and ... supported by, not controlled, but given opportunity to make changes to do things, which only government and council, are going to be able to do at the end of the day (Community Member Focus Group).

Whenever it's government, there's money, someone's employed. It's part of their job responsibility. If you if we do it the other way, you gonna [sic] rely on volunteers. We're talking about a small population ... those volunteers are probably already overworked anyway (Community Member Focus Group).

3.1.4 | Embedded Within an Existing Organisation or Group (Nine Coded Statements)

Comments related to embedding a Food Action Group within an existing organisation or group such as a Community Resource Centre (CRC) or region-based government entity, to leverage a regional lens, resources and community connections. Participants emphasised the importance of integrating food issues into local government agendas and promoting regional collaborations to

utilise existing structures effectively when addressing food security challenges.

They have access, they have information and then your committee on that would be made-up of someone from there but also members of the community (Community Member Focus Group).

You call for interest from the community, from community groups to be part of that group ... so you don't start from scratch (Community Member Focus Group).

3.1.5 | Smaller, Localised Groups (Seven Coded Statements)

Participants expressed the need to adopt a place-based approach due to large distances across regions and the nuanced environmental and social contexts in communities and towns. Smaller, localised groups were proposed to address the unique issues within each community, which would then form part of a network that fed into an overarching body.

Our environment and landscape are completely different [to other towns in the region]. I think that's where a lot of issues arise ... when you're right here and we're lumped in with them, you just think all [those projects] won't work for us (Community Member Focus Group).

Just keep it small, tight, local (Community Member Focus Group).

3.1.6 | Not-for-Profit, or Independently-Run (Six Coded Statements)

Some participants favoured a not-for-profit, independent structure for Food Action Groups to ensure flexibility and autonomy. Proposals included independent groups enabling faster action, and more efficiency, compared to groups that are embedded within government-departments or entities. The need for an independent chair to avoid politicisation while leveraging government resources for optimal impact on regional food systems, was also emphasised.

I think if you're independent, not-for-profit, you may have more flexibility. Sometimes, the big government organisations ... you've got this policy and that policy and by the time you get through all the policies, nothing gets done. Or it gets done slower (Community Member Focus Group).

If there was a community group that was kind of really focused on it and a not for profit that could really get involved I think that would probably be your best option (Stakeholder Member Focus Group).

3.2 | Proposed Food Action Group Stakeholders

Participants described the types of stakeholders who should be engaged in the establishment and implementation of a Food Action Group in each location, and these are outlined below.

3.2.1 | Community Members (40 Coded Statements)

Most participants agreed that involving community members in Food Action Groups is vital to the success of local food initiatives, highlighting the importance of volunteers and local champions to drive efforts. There was a strong emphasis on ensuring diverse and inclusive representation, particularly from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and leaders, to ensure all community members' needs were met and local knowledge respected. Participants highlighted the importance of incorporating individuals with lived experience to inform food security strategies and also engaging young people to ensure the group's long-term sustainability.

... it should have some representation of the different groups ... so that at least there's an impact ... certain representation has to come from community members that we're trying to sort of serve ... (Stakeholder Member Focus Group).

There's definitely some notable figures ... if you had them on board, you're going to gain more traction (Community Member Focus Group).

I would say the youth. If we don't have the next generation buy-in ... what was the point? (Community Member Focus Group).

Everyday person ... you can't discount a person's lived experience and the knowledge that they bring that to the table (Stakeholder Focus Group).

3.2.2 | Food Supply Actors (34 Coded Statements)

Participants discussed the importance of involving food retailers in the Food Action Group to support locally sourced produce and address food waste. Independent retailers were seen as offering more opportunities for local and regional food producers. Securing the buy-in of primary producers and farmers was considered essential for the success of community initiatives, while food processors and distributors were recognised as vital in supporting local food systems.

And I think if the IGAs [independent supermarkets] were strengthened and supported by local government policies or whatever, and state, federal, local, to help them grow and tap them, link these guys in with more, with the people in the regions that are growing the food (Community Member Focus Group).

Definitely going to need the primary producers. And they're possibly the keyholders of financial income in the town. So having their buy-in is going to be massive (Community Member Focus Group).

3.2.3 | Local Government (20 Coded Statements)

Many participants mentioned the crucial role of local government in Food Action Groups, particularly in influencing decision-making and shaping policies related to land use and food security regulatory oversight. With Public Health Plans within the local government being mandated, the involvement of this sector could be highly beneficial.

I mean you need to include local government, don't you? ... Cause [sic] there is so much regulation. And also, I mean, they're all meant to be developing public health plans (Community and Stakeholder Member Focus Group).

I think it's really critical that there be local government input to Food Action Group orientated activity. You know, they have so much of a role to play in influencing decision-making, looking at land use, commercial use, retail use ... event management, the whole lot (Stakeholder Member Focus Group).

3.2.4 | Local Business and Commerce (18 Coded Statements)

Participants viewed the role of local business and commerce in Food Action Groups as important in promoting and supporting regional food systems. Their involvement included the provision of essential resources, raising awareness about local food production and facilitating connections between consumers and producers. The strategic inclusion of large businesses and industry representation was also highlighted to enhance the groups' relevance and effectiveness.

... the link is for people to get closer to their producers and understand, you know, what's available, what is available here (Community and Stakeholder Member Focus Group).

Tying in small to medium enterprise. So approaching the Business Network Association (Community Member Focus Group).

3.2.5 | Community Services (12 Coded Statements)

Several participants mentioned the importance of leveraging existing working relationships among organisations and agencies to provide essential support, such as food, emergency relief and social services. Collaboration with these like-minded groups

was seen as vital for facilitating resource sharing and enhancing the effectiveness of Food Action Groups.

So your inter-agencies? That's what they're called ... Yeah [sic]. Like those ones, because you'll find they can get a bit of traction too or they might have access to resources or knowledge that we can access (Community Member Focus Group).

Support service organisations around social and community participation and microenterprise (Community Member Focus Group).

3.2.6 | Cross-Sector Collaboration (11 Coded Statements)

Discussion on the importance of diversity in membership across food system sectors was noted, stating this approach would leverage multiple perspectives and expertise, improve communication and optimise resource allocation within Food Action Groups. A collaborative approach was viewed as essential to enable stakeholders to effectively partner to address challenges and meet community needs.

... It's about stakeholders being able to come to the table knowing that there's a, you know, that the community is identified. You know, many communities have identified the need for better food and better food pathways. And how are the stakeholders work together to share information and to contribute to or facilitate the better pathways, to good food ... (Community Member Focus Group).

It would be sustainable if it was government, community and corporate bodies (Stakeholder Member Focus Group).

Departments have different priorities ... to the producers, to the retailers, to transport ... an Action Group getting all the key stakeholders together and opening that channel of communication is important (Stakeholder Member Focus Group).

3.2.7 | Health Organisations and Professionals (11 Coded Statements)

Participants spoke about the importance of promoting healthier lifestyles through education and support, noting that collaboration between health organisations, professionals and Food Action Groups could achieve this. Involving nutritionists, for example, could enhance the effectiveness of food and nutrition programmes and involving Environmental Health Officers could support the Food Action Group to understand the food regulations. Participants perceived involving these types of professionals could increase awareness and knowledge about food

security processes, monitor and improve community health outcomes.

Then they can monitor their health to see if it's improving after eating fresh vegetables straight out of the garden. You say righto [sic] six months ago, you know, you were like that. Now look at ya [sic] (Community Member Focus Group).

3.2.8 | Educational Institutions (10 Coded Statements)

Schools were viewed as critical partners in fostering the next generation's engagement in sustainable food systems. Participants suggested integrating relevant programmes such as vegetable gardens and waste reduction projects into the school curriculum and involving schools in skills-based community initiatives like cooking meals for community food relief programmes. Participants noted:

Maybe someone from the school, whether it be a teacher or a parent, they could be a part of the Food Action Group? (Community Member Focus Group).

Yes, imparting that wisdom. And probably advocating ... that we need to bring this in as part of the curriculum (Community Member Focus Group).

3.2.9 | State Government (Nine Coded Statements)

Participants emphasised the critical role of State Government in regulatory oversight for food processing and distribution, as well as influencing legislation. They perceived that state government play a leadership role in guiding local government policies through collaborative processes and multilevel governance. Both levels of government also align through strategic documents such as public health plans. As one participant stated:

... I think state and local government, definitely ... the state definitely has a responsibility for processing, distribution. Because yeah [sic], all of our food's coming from a different, you know, across the state (Community Member Focus Group).

Even, like, political parties ... could be supportive of this and be part of the conversations because they're the ones that are going to change the legislation (Community Member Focus Group).

4 | Discussion

This study aimed to understand: how regional and remote Australian Food Action Groups could be structured to maximise their impact on local food systems; and the range of proposed stakeholders for regional and remote Australian Food Action

Groups. The most coded statements ($n=29$) referred to structuring Food Action Groups formally with sustainable funding. Participants envisioned each Food Action Group would have its own constitution to provide a clear structure for decision-making, facilitating grant applications and securing sustainable funding. A 'bottom-up' approach was identified as being important, with local community needs driving the agenda, supported by an adaptable and responsive work plan. Community members were the most popular choice to involve in Food Action Groups, while ensuring a diverse membership to reflect local demographics was important. As most international Food Action Groups are embedded within an urban or urban-rural fringe geographic context, it was expected that the present study, being situated in a regional and remote context, would have different findings regarding desired structure and stakeholders. Yet, the present study's findings echo international evidence on Food Action Groups on structure and stakeholders required. For example, participants in the current study preferred their groups to be community-driven with fewer recommending they be embedded within government. Therefore, it appears the geographic context is less important to drive the structure and stakeholders of a proposed Food Action Group, as compared to the type of activities required to drive positive food system change. The latter is beyond the scope of this paper and is a focus of a separate paper.

This study's participants emphasised a desire for a formalised governance model. Internationally, internal governance processes have included the development of terms of reference, making meetings and associated documents such as meeting minutes publicly available, and undertaking member surveys [12]. In the formation of a German Food Action Group, 15 members were formally elected to serve a two-year term. Members formed four committees, each tasked with developing a work plan on a particular theme, such as 'producer-consumer relations' [27]. All meetings and associated protocols were publicised on the Group's website in advance [27]. In the United States, consensus decision-making was used by one group to mitigate power imbalances among members. Public meetings were held, where office bearers and sub-committee members were elected, after a series of 'closed' meetings [28]. Another group conducted a policy audit, member survey, developed a policy brief and undertook a subsequent agreement to expand the Food Action Group's programmes. These processes led to strategic planning that informed the Group's involvement in a government-led Local Food Action Plan [29]. While governance processes among Food Action Groups vary, outcomes have resulted in the development of a positive internal culture and increased efficiency, more effective information dissemination and the facilitation of transparency and openness to engage community members in food democracy [27].

Participants in the current study aspired to establish Food Action Groups with a bottom-up, community-led approach, which reflects international groups. However, this has evolved over several decades; most groups now take the form of a grassroots organisation, as compared to an incorporated entity or being embedded within government [8]. This study's participants were cautious about too much government involvement. However, embedding Food Action Groups within government has been shown to be effective in catalysing food

policy change, as long as they are embedded within the community and less likely to be influenced by a change in government [30]. Buy-in from a range of politicians at various levels is therefore recommended from the outset. Evidence illustrates several government engagement models in Food Action Groups. In their review, Bassarab et al. (2019) outlined the proportion of Food Action Groups that: included government staff or elected members as members (86%); received in-kind government support such as through physical meeting spaces or administrative support (40%); received government funding (35%); had government-appointed members (21%) and had been catalysed by legislation (17%) [14]. The Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition is an example of a specific US Food Action Group, that successfully implemented urban agriculture policies by partnering with the council, community organisations and private sector entities. Their collaboration with the Cleveland City Council was crucial in passing the 'Chickens and Bees' legislation, enabling urban residents to keep small farm animals and bees [31]. In an Australian context, McCartan and Palermo acknowledged the benefits of having paid Food Action Group staff funded directly through government [13].

The findings relating to the importance of including diverse stakeholders in the establishment of Food Action Groups is consistent with existing literature. For example, in their 20-year scoping review of these groups, Schiff et al. (2022) described membership as a core strength of these groups, demonstrating how membership diversity could increase the effectiveness of Food Action Groups. In their earlier work, Schiff (2008) emphasised the role of Food Action Groups as networkers and facilitators, where membership across diverse system stakeholders created strong networks that translated into more effective community engagement and policy implementation [16]. Internationally, evidence suggests that involving community members has enhanced the legitimacy of groups and encouraged local governments and other organisations to support the groups. For example, the Chicago Food Policy Advisory Council successfully shaped food policies, such as urban agriculture and composting, by involving residents [32]. In Australia, McCartan, and Palermo (2017) reinforced the value of diverse membership, surmising that this 'extended the reach, influences and resources' of Food Action Groups [13] and offered a broad range of skills, connections and perspectives. This diversity supported the coalition to extend its influence and reach within the community and across networks, effectively pooling resources and enhancing its capacity to address food system issues [13].

Based on the findings from the current research and learning from existing international evidence, the following strategies should be considered when establishing Food Action Groups in regional and remote Australia:

- Strategically engage with a diverse range of community members and stakeholders to ensure representation across sectors to better identify community needs. For example, ensure representation from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and leaders, local producers, food retailers, community group representatives (e.g., charitable food sector, community gardens) and local government. Rely less on

volunteers as they potentially impact Food Action Group sustainability.

- Encourage Food Action Groups to develop formal governance mechanisms, such as incorporating as a not-for-profit organisation with a management committee, documenting meeting minutes and forming working groups focusing on themed action areas to guide their practices. Focus on collaborating with a range of local organisations to increase the potential for sustainable funding, impactful and efficient food system activities.
- Involve government in Food Action Group processes from commencement to maximise both the potential for food policy influence, and the implementation of food security initiatives in a coherent, comprehensive and systematic way. State and local government sectors contributions could vary, such as embedding the Food Action Group within policy, or in-kind committee membership and funding.

This study's strengths include the facilitation of focus groups with 93 participants across all WA regions and ensuring the focus group guide questions filled gaps identified by international evidence. Limitations include lower representation from the Kimberley and Pilbara regions.

5 | Conclusion

The establishment of regional and remote Australian Food Action Groups has potential to follow suit of their USA, Canadian and UK predecessors, by influencing government policies, improving food systems, and enhancing food security. This study provided new insights into how regional Food Action Groups could be structured to maximise their impact on local food systems, and described the type of stakeholders to include. Ensuring Food Action Groups include a formal structure and processes and involve a diverse range of community-based stakeholders will ensure local needs are identified, available local knowledge and evidence is used to drive and inform action and priorities are established priorities. This study is relevant and applicable for those seeking to influence change in local food policy in regional or remote settings.

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Ethics Statement

This project was approved by the Edith Cowan University Human Research Ethics Committee (2022-03547-GODRICH). The study conforms to the Declaration of Helsinki.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data are not available.

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