



An Australian Government Initiative



a new partnership

2008 ACLG ISSUES AND OUTCOMES JUNE 2009



MINISTER'S FOREWORD



Welcome to the second meeting of the Australian Council of Local Government at Parliament House in Canberra.

At our inaugural meeting last year, mayors and shire presidents shared ideas and raised issues around several topics.

These included the provision of infrastructure, recognition of local governments in the Australian Constitution, the efficiency and sustainability of local governments, support for regional economic development, tackling climate change, closing the gap at the local level between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and support for affordable housing in our communities.

This booklet provides you with a brief update on those key issues and the steps the Australian Government is taking to support local councils and local communities.

This year we will be focussing our dialogue on finding ways to build resilience in our local communities. It is a timely topic given the impact of the global economic recession as well as recent natural disasters on local economies and communities.

The Australian Government is committed to working with local government to respond to these economic and environmental challenges.

I look forward to discussing new ideas as well as progress made by both spheres of government in serving our communities.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Anthony Albanese', written in a cursive style.

Anthony Albanese

Minister for Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development and Local Government

ADAPTING TO OUR CHANGING LOCAL ENVIRONMENTS

In this session, jointly chaired by Senator the Hon Penny Wong and the Hon Peter Garrett MP, participants were asked to consider the challenges their communities faced in terms of water and climate change, as well as the need for collaboration and partnerships across all levels of government.

WHAT KEY ISSUES WERE RAISED?

The participants discussed developing renewable energy projects, whole of water cycle management practices in growth areas and sharing data on risk and vulnerability assessments.

Participants identified the need to undertake risk assessments and develop adaptation strategies to better address climate change. Some suggestions included: increasing sustainable urban planning; better building designs and low energy; and alternate transport systems.

The group acknowledged that one of the key challenges facing local governments in this area was securing rural and urban water supplies for the future.

ADDRESSING THESE ISSUES

The Australian Government has committed more than \$15 billion to support local government and its communities to implement a comprehensive response to climate change.

- The Government is developing a comprehensive adaptation policy to help Australia manage the serious social, economic and environmental risks from climate change impacts, and will invest in research to support communities, industry and governments for effective adaptation planning.
- In developing adaptation strategies, the Local Adaptation Pathways Program has funded in excess of 90 local governments to aid them in preparing for the likely local impacts of climate change.
- In renewable energy, funding of \$1.365 billion is being provided for the Solar Flagships Program, to position Australia as a world leader in solar power generation.
- For better building design, the Government will provide more than \$4 billion for a suite of energy efficiency measures to reduce energy use and carbon pollution in communities.
- Funding of \$76 million over five years will establish the Australian Carbon Trust to provide households and businesses with vital information and tools on climate change responses.
- In securing water for the future, the Government will spend \$1.5 billion on new urban water programs and \$200 million on the Strengthening Basin Communities program to help prepare local governments for reduced water in the Murray-Darling Basin.

CLOSING THE GAP: INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

In this session, chaired by the Hon Jenny Macklin MP, participants were asked to consider how local councils can contribute to the 'close the gap' agenda and improve Indigenous engagement in local communities.

WHAT KEY ISSUES WERE RAISED?

Participants identified the importance of employment and agreed that through partnerships with local businesses and the Australian Government, local government can assist in improving Indigenous work opportunities.

A number of participants highlighted the critical need for infrastructure, roads, housing and clean water in Indigenous communities.

The group also identified the need for improved relationship building between the local government and the Indigenous community, and more engagement with Aboriginal elders in local government processes. Ideas to improve relationship building and engagement included local gathering places and reconciliation action plans for councils, as well as forming friendship alliances, and creating opportunities for staff exchange with remote councils.

ADDRESSING THESE ISSUES

The Australian Government has committed to a number of initiatives that support the Closing the Gap Strategy in social inclusion paper and improve Indigenous engagement in local communities.

- The Government will invest \$202.4 million to reform the Community Development Employment Projects program and the Indigenous Employment Program, to assist more Indigenous job seekers to prepare for and take up work.
- The Government is investing \$204.3 million in the 2009-10 Budget to improve health care in Indigenous communities, including: \$131.1 million for remote primary health; \$58.3 million for eye and ear health care; \$11 million for dental care; and \$3.8 million to improve pathology services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- An additional \$26.6 million for an Indigenous Healing Foundation to deliver practical assistance to help Indigenous Australians, especially members of the Stolen Generations, overcome the impact of trauma and grief.
- The Government will provide \$1.9 billion over ten years to address housing in Indigenous communities, bringing the total funding to \$5.5 billion over ten years for Indigenous Remote Housing National Partnership.

FACILITATING SOCIAL INCLUSION IN OUR COMMUNITIES

In this session, chaired by the Hon Brendan O'Connor MP, participants were asked to consider how local councils can work together with other levels of government to improve social inclusion in local communities.

WHAT KEY ISSUES WERE RAISED?

Participants acknowledged that all three levels of government must work together on a social inclusion agenda if it is going to be effective at the local community level.

Participants identified that local government was well-placed to provide information about their communities to other spheres of government in shaping a social inclusion agenda. In turn, local governments are also well-placed to feed social inclusion information back into the communities.

The group also stated that a social inclusion agenda would be more effective if it was place-based or took a regional approach, rather than just one national strategy.

ADDRESSING THESE ISSUES

The Australian Government has committed to a number of initiatives which will facilitate social inclusion in our local communities.

- The Government is developing a National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, which is expected to be available for public release in late 2009, early 2010. The Plan will include: an analysis of the nature and extent of social inclusion in Australia; a discussion of emerging issues; analysis of the costs and benefits associated with improving social inclusion; a description of current policy; and a map for building social inclusion over the next decade.
- In May 2009, the Australian Social Inclusion Board released a Compendium of Social Inclusion Indicators to contribute to, and stimulate discussion on, how to measure disadvantage and social exclusion in Australia.
- In February 2009, the Prime Minister made his first annual statement to Parliament on the Australian Government's Closing the Gap strategy.
- In December 2008, the Government released its White Paper on addressing homelessness, *The Road Home*, which outlines a plan for reducing homelessness in Australia by 2020, and provides an additional \$1.2 billion over four years to break the cycle of homelessness.
- In December 2008, the Government released a paper that sets the direction for the National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy to be released in 2009.

IMPROVING ENGAGEMENT OF LOCAL AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENTS, INCLUDING CONSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION

In this session, jointly chaired by the Hon Anthony Albanese MP and the Hon Robert McClelland MP, participants were asked to consider how the relationship between local and federal governments could be improved, including the importance of constitutional recognition in achieving improved engagement.

WHAT KEY ISSUES WERE RAISED?

The group noted the importance of enhancing the recognition of local government as a legitimate and independent third sphere of government in Australia, either through constitutional recognition or otherwise.

The group outlined that the key issue in this area was the need for clarification of the roles and responsibilities of local government.

The group also noted that local government has a significant amount of work to do before a referendum can take place on constitutional recognition.

ADDRESSING THESE ISSUES

The Australian Government has committed to a number of initiatives which aim to facilitate engagement between local government and the federal government.

- The Government has agreed to hold the ACLG annually to ensure there is a platform for a Federal discussion about the emerging challenges facing local governments nationally.
- The Government is committed to giving local government a national voice. As the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) has been elevated to a full member of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), it will play a key role in COAG working groups, including reviewing Australia's emergency management arrangements and future planning for major cities.
- On the issue of constitutional recognition, the Government remains committed to its 2007 election promise to support local government in its process for constitutional recognition. At its Constitutional Summit in December 2008, ALGA prepared a Declaration as the first step in local government developing its public case for constitutional recognition. ALGA will outline the progress of the process of constitutional recognition at its National General Assembly in June 2009.



COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM

The Australian Government has established the \$800 million Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program to help councils and shires build social infrastructure in local communities.

The Program was announced as part of the inaugural meeting of the Australian Council of Local Government in November 2008.

Since then, the Government has provided \$800 million to local governments through this Program to fund more than 3,300 community projects in rural, regional, remote and urban communities across Australia.

It was established to stimulate local economies and support local jobs during the current global economic recession and improve community facilities.

Every council and shire received funding for community projects that were ready to proceed and would improve the quality of local infrastructure.

In addition, the Australian Government is funding a number of larger strategic community infrastructure projects in partnership with local government.

Many of the smaller projects have already been completed, with both levels of government working quickly to deliver a local stimulus. A number of the completed projects are shown in the following pages.

Examples of infrastructure being built or upgraded include:

- social and cultural infrastructure, including town halls, community centers, libraries, parks, public squares;
- sport and recreation facilities, including sporting grounds, stadiums, pools, walking tracks and playgrounds;
- tourism infrastructure, including walkways and tourist information centers;
- access facilities, including footbridges and pathways, disabled access; and
- environmental infrastructure, such as energy efficiency measures and water treatment and conservation projects.

The Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program is a practical example of the partnership between the Australian Government and the nation's councils and shires.



ABOVE York Shire Council, *Avon Terrace Streetscape Development, York*

BELOW Sutherland Shire Council, *Entertainment Centre Upgrade*



ABOVE Warrnambool City Council, *Netball Courts Resurfacing*



ABOVE City of Armadale, *William Skeet Playground Upgrade, Forrestdale*

BELOW Glenorchy City Council, *Park Mountain Bike*



ABOVE Liverpool Plains Shire Council, *Quirindi Historical Cottage and Museum Upgrade*





ABOVE Shire of Quairading, *Playground Enhancement Project, Quairading*



ABOVE City of Armadale, *William Skeet Playground Upgrade, Forrestdale*



ABOVE York Shire Council, *Avon Terrace Streetscape Development, York*

ouncil, Wellington
e Trails



BELOW City of Armadale, *Morgan Park after*



BELOW Renmark Paringa Council,
*Changerooms and Viewing
Facilities, Renmark*



ABOVE Shire of Northampton, *Heritage
Building Restoration*



ABOVE Dubbo City
Council, *Lady
Cutler Complex
Cricket Pitch
Upgrade*

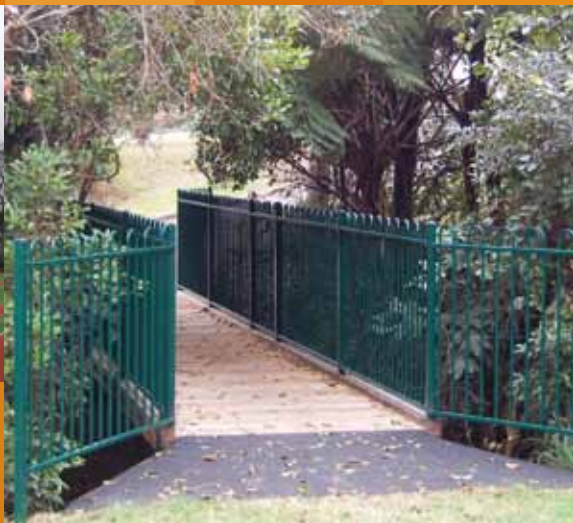


ABOVE Central Coast Council, *Refurbishment
of Turners Beach Hall*

BELOW Council of the Municipality of
Kiama, *Cooke Park Footbridge*



ABOVE Blayney Shire Council, *Tennis Court
Resurfacing, Blayney*



IMPROVING WELLBEING IN OUR COMMUNITIES

In this session, chaired by the Hon Nicola Roxon MP, participants were asked to consider how local councils can work together with other levels of government to improve wellbeing in local communities.

WHAT KEY ISSUES WERE RAISED?

The group noted that improved partnerships between local government, the Australian Government, the corporate and community sectors is needed if policies and programs are going to improve wellbeing in the community.

The group also noted that there are a number of issues that need to be addressed if community wellbeing is going to be improved, particularly in regional and rural communities.

The group identified three key issues that were currently impacting on the wellbeing of communities. These were: the limited number of doctors in regional and rural areas; limited aged care services; and limited capacity for councils to support people with mental illness.

The group also noted that there is a need to engage young people in activities that promote mental health.

ADDRESSING THESE ISSUES

The Australian Government is committed to a number of initiatives which aim to improve local governments' capacity to work with other levels of government, to promote wellbeing in the community.

- The Australian Government has committed \$3.2 billion through the Health and Hospitals Fund to improve and modernise the health system in Australia. This includes \$1.5 billion for hospitals and other significant health institutions, and \$1.3 billion for cancer care, including \$560 million for people living in rural and regional Australia.
- To promote rural and remote wellbeing, the Australian Government has committed \$134.4 million over four years to encourage more doctors to relocate to, and remain in, rural and remote areas.
- The Government will provide \$72 million under the Healthy Communities Initiative for lifestyle modification programs to be managed by local government organisations. The programs will reach around 115 local government areas by 2013.
- In the aged care arena, the Government will provide \$14.8 million over two years to increase the viability supplement for aged care providers in regional, rural and remote areas.
- To promote better mental health, the Government has provided \$6.7 million to extend the Mental Health Services in Rural and Remote areas Program, \$5.2 million to extend health support for drought affected communities, and a total of \$7.5 million for additional psychological support for communities affected by the Victorian bushfires.

INVESTING IN LOCAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

In this session, chaired by the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, participants were asked to look at current local government priorities for infrastructure and how a partnership between the Australian Government and local government could be strengthened, in order to address the Nation's long term infrastructure needs together.

WHAT KEY ISSUES WERE RAISED?

The group welcomed the Prime Minister's announcement of the Financial Assistance Grants of \$1.9 billion in 2008-09, the additional \$300 million for Community Infrastructure Projects, and the increased roads funding of \$26 billion over six years.

The group highlighted the benefits that can be derived from greater joint working relationships between local governments on a regional or issue by issue basis.

The importance of sustainable funding arrangements for local government was mentioned. The Roads to Recovery program was noted as a useful model for further discussions.

Participants made calls for one-off funding for specific infrastructure projects, to support projects that are approved and awaiting additional funding to commence.

ADDRESSING THESE ISSUES

At the 2009-10 Budget, the Australian Government announced a significant investment in infrastructure, and will partner with state and local governments to ensure that this investment will create jobs and build a better 21st Century Australia.

- The Government is committing \$8.5 billion in new funding for critical road, railway and port infrastructure, as part of a record \$35 billion transport infrastructure package over six years. A package of \$21 billion will be invested in regional roads and rail.
- The Government will provide \$1.9 billion in Financial Assistance Grants, one quarter this will be paid in this financial year, to assist councils in providing basic services and quality infrastructure during the global economic recession.
- The Government is providing a record \$1.75 billion over five years under the Roads to Recovery program in direct payments to assist local government maintain and upgrade local roads.
- An extra \$500 million was added to the National Building and Jobs Plan for the Community Infrastructure Program, bringing the infrastructure spend to \$800 million to support local jobs, and stimulate local economies during the global financial crisis. The Community Infrastructure Program provides the largest ever one-off investment for local infrastructure.



MAKING OUR MAJOR CITIES MORE LIVEABLE, PRODUCTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE

In this session, chaired by the Hon Wayne Swan MP, participants were asked to consider how local government and the Australian Government can collaborate, to make major cities more liveable, productive and sustainable.

WHAT KEY ISSUES WERE RAISED?

The group agreed that local government should consider collaborating with other local governments and state governments on joint proposals for large scale and nationally significant infrastructure projects.

The group discussed the need for local government to review its governance, planning and decision making frameworks.

Leveraging of funding to achieve better outcomes through partnerships between councils, state governments, federal government and private sector was also discussed.

The group agreed that there should be a focus on sustainable development, through more effective town planning, including improved building and urban design.

The group also noted that the need for research that quantified the costs and benefits of current key challenges, such as urban congestion, and provides some solutions that local government could implement to meet these challenges.

ADDRESSING THESE ISSUES

The Australian Government has committed to a number of initiatives which aim to address the challenges councils face in planning for the future of major cities.

- The Australian Government established the Major Cities Unit to explore how the Australian Government can play a greater leadership role in urban systems and how it can advance integrated governance structures and best practice planning for major cities.
- The Unit has commenced work on a National Urban Policy. This will present a clear statement on the aspirations for our major cities, as well as the responsibilities and actions required of governments, the private sector and the community in transforming our cities.
- The Government will invest in excess of \$4.6 billion in the construction and planning of nine metropolitan rail projects across the nation, and also invest a further \$28 billion over six years, in both major and minor roads projects. This complementary rail and road investment aims to build a single, truly integrated transport system.
- The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has established a Taskforce to explore existing strategic planning frameworks within jurisdictions to ensure they support the ongoing integration of state and national infrastructure in major metropolitan cities with land-use planning and urban development. The Taskforce will report back to COAG by the end of 2009.

PARTNERING TO IMPROVE HOUSING AFFORDABILITY, INCLUDING MORE EFFECTIVE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES

In this session, chaired by the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, participants were asked to consider how local government, in partnership with state, territory and federal governments, could improve the provision of affordable housing within their communities.

WHAT KEY ISSUES WERE RAISED?

The key theme expressed by the group was the need for improved interaction between all levels of government to achieve more affordable housing outcomes.

Participants recognised the need for a clearer definition of the role and responsibilities between the different spheres of government, in pursuing affordable housing outcomes for communities.

The group noted that there is an increasing need for councils to have up to date demographic and population information, in order to effectively plan for future housing needs for their communities.

ADDRESSING THESE ISSUES

The Australian Government is committed to working more closely with other governments to improve housing affordability and availability within communities.

- The Government will spend in excess of \$1 billion over the next four years to build another 46,000 new rental properties through the National Rental Affordability Scheme.
- The Government has committed more than \$512 million under the Housing Affordability Fund to deliver more homes, within tight timeframes and at lower cost.
- The Government has committed an extra \$800 million for new homes and services for the homeless across Australia.
- For first home buyers, the Government has extended the First Home Owner's Boost until 31 December 2009, providing up to \$14,000 for purchasers of existing homes, and \$21,000 for purchasers of new homes.
- Surplus Commonwealth land is being sold for housing and community development, where the land is suited to this purpose.
- Through the Local Government and Planning Ministers' Council, the Government has collaborated with other governments to develop the Affordable Housing Leading Practice Guide and Tool Kit, to assist planners working with the private and not-for-profit sector to build more affordable housing.

STRENGTHENING REGIONAL ECONOMIES, INCLUDING THROUGH BROADBAND, COMMUNICATIONS AND TOURISM

In this session, chaired by the Hon Gary Gray MP, participants were asked to consider what steps can be taken to strengthen regional economies, including the roles that local government and the Australia Government can play in improving broadband, communications and tourism in regional Australia.

WHAT KEY ISSUES WERE RAISED?

The group noted the importance that regional Australia plays in keeping the economy strong.

The group identified that there is an opportunity with new government bodies and funding programs, to provide a more tailored service to regional Australia.

Participants also requested that the Commonwealth consider increasing its engagement with regional economies, and support regional economic development opportunities, ensuring the survival of regional Australia in the future.

ADDRESSING THESE ISSUES

The Australian Government has committed to a number of initiatives which aim to support local government to strengthen regional economies.

- The Government will invest up to \$43 billion to build and operate a National Broadband Network, delivering high speed broadband to Australian workplaces and homes. The Regional Backbone Blackspots Program will fast-track a \$250 million investment in Backbone Fibre Optic transmission links, to improve broadband competition in regional Australia. The Government have also announced the Digital Regions Initiative of \$60 million over the next 4 years, to deliver the benefits of this investment directly to regional communities.
- The Government is delivering \$800 million through the Community Infrastructure Program for more than 3300 projects that support jobs in local economies, and deliver long term benefits. The Program was increased by \$500 million in February 2009, as part of the \$42 billion economic stimulus plan.
- The Government's \$650 million Jobs Fund initiative will support the creation of new jobs, with priority given to regions experiencing higher levels of unemployment and social disadvantage.
- The Government will invest \$4.5 million to support 11 regional projects, with the aim of promoting economic development through tourism in these regions. In addition, the Government will invest \$4 million to support tourism in tropical north Queensland, and \$5 million to encourage the return of tourism into areas adjacent to the bushfire affected regions of Victoria.

WORKING TOWARDS MORE EFFICIENT AND SUSTAINABLE LOCAL GOVERNMENT

In this session, chaired by the Hon Lindsay Tanner MP, participants were asked to consider the role that the Australian Government can play to assist local government to become more efficient and sustainable.

WHAT KEY ISSUES WERE RAISED?

The group noted that all levels of government should look at reviewing and realigning service delivery to a model which is based on more sustainable and efficient government.

Participants noted that the Australia Government needs to give further consideration to sources of revenue for local government, and consider the methodology for rates assessment.

The group also noted a number of initiatives to improve local government performance, including: increased information sharing; benchmarking; and regional collaboration.

The need for nationally consistent standards and processes for local government was also raised by the group.

ADDRESSING THESE ISSUES

While local governments are largely regulated by state governments, the Australian Government provides substantial funding to improve the capacity of local government to provide services to their communities.

- The Government announced an historic \$35 billion investment in nation building infrastructure over six years, providing record funding for roads, rail and ports. In addition, the Community Infrastructure Program will deliver \$800 million for local community projects. These investments will support jobs now, and will begin to build a more productive and competitive economy for the future.
- Through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), the Government has signed an intergovernmental agreement that provides a framework for the Commonwealth's financial relations with states and territories, to improve the quality, effectiveness and delivery of government services to the community.
- The Government, through the Local Government and Planning Ministers' Council, is exploring capacity building measures for local government, and has agreed to develop a local government workforce strategy. The Council has also agreed to enhance the existing national framework on local government asset and financial management, to assist councils to advance their asset and financial management practices.