

ALGA National General Assembly



Attended: 26th to 30th November 2007

Location: Darwin, Northern Territory

Cr Alex Makin
Loughnan's Hill Ward

Monday, 10th December 2007

Introduction:

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) is the peak body representing all local councils across Australia at a Federal level. ALGA serves as a national-wide peak body and is the national equivalent of the state-based peak bodies such as the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV).

The annual National General Assembly, which for 2007 was held in Darwin, provides an opportunity for member councils to discuss motions of national significance to establish the direction of ALGA in terms of influencing national government policies.

The National General Assembly also included a conference that featured a number of prominent speakers including Dr. Tim Flannery and futurist Richard Neville. The theme of each speaker was sustainability, particularly in regard to the environment.

Motions for consideration:

This year Maroondah proposed two motions for consideration at the assembly. The two motions were as follows:

- That this National General Assembly call on the Federal Government to recognise the importance of public transport, provide specific funding for upgrading facilities, infrastructure and systems
- That the National General Assembly seek a commitment by the Federal Government to review, as a matter of urgency, the practicality and equity associated with the current

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funding arrangements for the National Immunisation program - Australian Childhood Register as these impact on the provision of services by Local Government.

Both motions were successful and will result in ALGA advocating for policy changes with the incoming Federal Government.

Local Government is predominately responsible for providing immunisation services but cost shifting is becoming an increasing issue with service agreements not adequately reflecting the cost of delivering the service. While local councils do not object to delivering the service, it is reasonable to expect an equitable arrangement to cover the cost of the service.

In regard to public transport, the motion demonstrates that local government across Australia stands united in calling for federal leadership in examining funding models for involvement in public transport. This motion expands upon the successful motion that was adopted last year at the 2006 National General Assembly:

- *That the National General Assembly calls on the Commonwealth Government to adopt the transport recommendations as outlined in the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage - Sustainable Cities Report (September 2005).*

While the motion last year established a direction for ALGA, it was now timely to specify exactly what local government was requesting, namely federal funding of urban public transport infrastructure.

Issues such as the rising costs associated with traffic congestion and greenhouse emissions have national repercussions and it is therefore appropriate that the federal government be involved in solutions, such as the provision of public transport infrastructure, to assist in mitigating these concerns.

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The purpose of this approach is not to shift blame from State to Federal Governments, but rather to improve governance and to ensure a national perspective on transport. This in turn can help shape State Government priorities to ensure that much needed public transport infrastructure is delivered.

Given that Maroondah is part of the Eastern Transport Coalition, the adoption of this motion will strengthen the region's advocacy in regard to federal involvement for public transport.

Conference speakers:

The National General Assembly also included a number of speakers at the accompanying conference. Speakers included futurist Richard Neville, who spoke about the challenges facing Australia and the need for action and foresight in mitigating detrimental environmental effects.

Environmental issues were also discussed by Professor Tim Flannery, who spoke extensively about the need for action in reducing greenhouse emissions. This is the case given that the latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has shown significant increases in Carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide within the atmosphere. Local government can lead by example in reducing greenhouse emissions and promoting the need for action to both the community and other levels of government.

The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report stated that:

- "Warming of the climate system is unequivocal."

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- “Most of the observed increase in globally averaged temperatures since the mid-20th century is very likely due to the observed increase in anthropogenic greenhouse gas concentrations.”

For reference, the IPCC defines ‘very likely’ as meaning a probability greater than 90%. It is therefore imperative that action is taken in regard to climate change. If there was a 90% chance of an adverse event occurring, most people would logically take steps to prevent this, as such prevention is required to mitigate the effects of climate change.

ICLEI Briefing:

ICLEI, formerly the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives but now known as ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability, is a world wide association of local governments focusing on promoting and encouraging sustainability.

The conference included a briefing from ICLEI on the 27th of November, which included an update of ICLEI activities. The organisation includes a number of Australian local governments, including the City of Maroondah. ICLEI includes the Cities for Climate Protection program, which focuses on water initiatives, energy conservation and other measures of sustainability, such as sustainable transport.

The briefing provided an update on sustainability initiatives being undertaken by local councils within Australia. Councils across the country are investing significantly in water and energy conservation to improve environmental sustainability. Actions included implementing water tanks,

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reducing water usage and installing low emission lighting, reducing greenhouse emissions and undertaking solar and wind power technology.

Through this presentation, the ICLEI briefing provided information on projects that may be adaptable for the City of Maroondah in improving the sustainability of the municipality.

Conclusion:

The ALGA conference provides a forum for local government to be seen as one united voice. While discussion does ensue around the proposed motions, the end result provides a solid platform for ALGA as the national body to advocate in the interests of local government and the community to the Federal Government based in Canberra.