



# LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE COMMUNITY

ESSENTIAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND  
COMMUNITY SERVICES

Local government represents the community. As the closest level of government to the community, it is in a unique position to identify community needs and make sure that those needs are met in the most appropriate way. This means that services provided by local councils vary from state to state and council to council. A remote council in the Northern Territory, will have very different needs and characteristics from those of a council in inner Melbourne.

No two councils are exactly the same and this difference is what makes local government so valuable and so important to the people who live there.

To give some context to local government's infrastructure role, local government owns and manages over 80 per cent of the nation's road network by length – almost every trip begins and ends on a local government road. It also owns and manages around \$212 billion worth of physical assets. Whereas local government's traditional focus has been on essential infrastructure and municipal services, the past 50 years has seen a huge rise in the size, scope and role of local government. In addition to providing infrastructure, local government has become increasingly involved in delivering people services. It now delivers more than 150 services.

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES CROSS ALL AREAS AND INCLUDE:

- Roads, streets, pavements, traffic lights, bridges and car parks
- Stormwater and drainage systems and, in some states, sewerage waste water treatment facilities and water supply
- Recycling and household waste services
- Building standards, including inspection, licensing, certification and enforcement
- Engineering services to assist in design and planning of physical infrastructure

- Strategic planning and development assessment
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (in collaboration with state and federal governments)
- Local environment conservation initiatives, energy and water saving programs
- Emergency management to help communities prepare for and recover from natural disasters
- Parks and sporting facilities, including swimming pools, golf clubs, sports fields and courts
- Cultural facilities such as libraries, art galleries, performing arts centres and museums
- Social and welfare services such as childcare services, aged care services and accommodation, health care, welfare services, meals on wheels and counselling
- Public health and sanitary services such as food inspection, animal licensing and control, immunisation, public toilets and facilities
- Caravan parks and camping grounds
- Tourism promotion, economic development, business and industry attraction programs

Local government is the only supplier of many of these public services, and it is important to remember that if local government can no longer provide these services, no one else will step in. If local government is not adequately funded, the provision, safety and standard of essential services will suffer. Councils will have reduced capacity to respond to emergencies and provide support after disasters, such as fires or floods.

Over 560 local councils in Australia provide vital public services every day of the year. After 170 years, it is time to include local government in the Constitution as the third level of government. Constitutional recognition will protect what we already take for granted and give local government the funding security to better deliver the services that the community needs and deserves.

