



LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRACY

ELECTED OFFICIALS, COMMUNITY CONSULTATION, PARTNERSHIPS

Local councils are the voice of their communities. The greatest strength of local government is its closeness to communities and its ability to identify community needs and find solutions.

Councillors and council staff live locally and make decisions from a local perspective. Elected councillors and staff are in many cases the closest point of contact between people and government.

Local government consults with the community to find local answers to issues. Through community liaison groups, regular stakeholder engagement and genuine personal contact, local government is the most accessible and most appropriate conduit for Australians to communicate with their leaders and legislators.

Local government works in partnership with federal and state governments, as well as with business and other service providers, to deliver the most appropriate services to the community.

As the third level of government, local government sits at the table with the federal and state governments to develop programs and initiatives. Local government is involved at the national level on the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and 13 other Ministerial Councils, where the Australian Local Government Association represents the views of over 560 local government bodies.

Local government is diverse. Each council has unique features and circumstances. For example, Murchison Shire in West Australia has a population of 110, compared with Brisbane City Council, which has a population of 1,027,847. Peppermint Grove Council in Perth covers an area of 2 square kilometres, compared with the East Pilbara Shire in West Australia which covers 371,696 kilometres.

The requirements of one community will inevitably vary from another. Local government's 5,200 councillors are elected by local communities to provide the best mix of services for their needs.

Where councils and shires face similar issues and challenges, they often group together to form strategic alliances and discuss regional initiatives. These regional groups then benefit from economies of scale and greater purchasing power.

Local councils spend around \$25 billion, or 6 per cent of total public sector expenditure each year, providing an increasingly broad range of infrastructure, economic and community services to residents. Local government employs around 178,000 people, or almost 10 per cent of the public sector.

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.

