

DR22/001 LGNSW SPECIAL CONFERENCE

**S004-T00019,
S012-T00025**

Responsible Officer: Alison Worthington - Councillor

Attachments: Nil

Outcome: 9 Innovative and Proactive Leadership

Focus Area: 9.1 Provide strong leadership and work in partnership to strategically plan for the future and progress towards the community vision

Delivery Program Link: 9.1.2 Implement effective governance

Operational Plan Link: 9.1.2.3 Provide professional development opportunities for Councillors

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Local Government NSW Special Conference was held on 28 February – 2 March 2022 in Sydney. The conference focused on how councils can drive a “Locally Led” employment and economic recovery, as we continue to grapple with the complex challenges posed by the global pandemic.

Councillor Alison Worthington was one of Council’s delegates at the Conference and presents the following report.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Delegate Report from Councillor Alison Worthington be received and noted.

BACKGROUND

As Cr Mayne was unavailable to attend as planned, I was a late enrollment to the LGNSW Special Conference in his place. Due to having only very recently rejoined the LGNSW Association we four ESC councillors at the conference did not have speaking or voting rights, however it was a great opportunity to attend as an observer and learn much from:

- the motions brought to meeting from various councils
- the debate and conduct of the conference meeting, which covered over 100 business items
- networking with councillors from a diversity of LGA’s across the state and
- the workshops and forums that were on offer.

On arrival there was a real buzz as mayors, councillors and council staff from member councils across the state gathered for the first time in person since the pandemic began.

It was noted a number of times throughout the conference that attendance was made up of roughly 50/50 returning councillors and first time councillors. It became apparent that across NSW there had been quite a ‘changing of the guard’ in local government at the 4 December election, and most attribute this to the postponement of the elections and the challenges of the last term for serving councillors, due to a series of natural disasters and the pandemic.

The first item of Association business was the endorsement of the Fundamental Principles of LGNSW and this was updated by an amendment from Shoalhaven Mayor Amanda Findley to add the circular economy and climate mitigation to the principles - a particularly significant

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inclusion considering the floods and latest natural disaster unfolding across NSW at that time in late February. Sadly there were councillors from the Northern Rivers and other flood affected areas that were unable to attend or left early due to the extreme weather and threats to their lives, homes and livelihoods.

The matter of IPART rate peg determination for 2022-23 at a puzzlingly low figure of just 0.7% was the hot topic of the conference. "Gross anomaly", "aberrant" and "shock determination" were just some of the terms used around this rate peg announcement and the items in the business paper addressing it.

From the LGNSW Board Motion to review the determination:

"This blow comes on top of the financial impacts on councils of successive natural disasters and the ongoing COVID pandemic. Councils have incurred tens of millions of dollars in increased costs in supporting their communities and lost revenue as the result of the downturn in economic activity.

This problem would not occur if rate pegging was abolished and councils had the ability to set their own rates in consultation with their communities. NSW has the lowest rates per capita of all the States."

I also learned from delegates that NSW is one of two states that bear this imposition of rate-pegging, The Mayor of Newcastle noted that a survey of Newcastle residents revealed that they were happy to pay a 5% Special Rate Variation over 5 years because they know it enables better investment in the future of their community.

The financial constraints on local government were also examined in the Day 3 keynote address by Michael Pascoe: Economic Outlook 2022-23 and Beyond.

Pascoe levelled his criticism at the Federal government's funding and investment failures and the roting of the delivery of Community Development Grants.

His view is that the current funding regime for local government denies council's needs for "predictable, plannable and investable" long-term planning for Australian communities.

Since the conference it has been great to see that with advocacy from the Association, the Local Government Minister Wendy Tuckerman has gained a special one-off rate variation for planned infrastructure and community services for eligible councils.

On Day 1 I attended a booked-out panel session on council involvement in the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The speakers on this panel were:

- Gomeroi man Cr Charles Lynch, Co-Chair NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (NSWCAPO) and Councillor, NSW Aboriginal Land Council.
- Cr Anne Dennis, a Gamilaraay woman and Councillor, NSW Aboriginal Land Council and
- Worimi man Joshua Mark Gilbert, Indigenous Co-Chair, Reconciliation NSW.

Launched in 2006, the Close the Gap Campaign is an independent coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and mainstream peak health and advocacy organisations, advocating for health equality by 2030.

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Local Government is a party to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap through the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA).

For councils, the panel explored how to drive Closing the Gap outcomes that are place-based and adapted to local need, through each council's plans and delivery programs under the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework.

We were directed to this [Closing the Gap Fact Sheet for Local Government](#) and the 4 priority reforms in the National Agreement developed to shift the way governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The NSW Implementation has a 5th priority reform relating to employment, business growth and economic prosperity.

The key takeaway messages from this workshop were:

- Closing the Gap initiatives must be 'whole of community' and must be place-based.
- the need for a review of councils' procurement policies (due later this year) to include Aboriginal Procurement policies.
- that there is work to be done around preferred tendering as postcodes should matter here if we adhere to place-based targets.
- this can be an impactful tool in building capacity in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO's).
- another way to help build that capacity is to break big projects into smaller stages to put out to tender.
- know your local ACCO's, know the full scope of what each of your local Aboriginal services offer and do.
- Like all local government, Local Aboriginal Land Council's have their own unique funding constraints and an example of council's assisting them is to provide traineeships for Aboriginal youth in admin and accounting to build capacity in LALC's for meeting compliance and audit responsibilities which can cost LALC's \$30,000/year out of a \$150,000 budget.

Joshua Mark Gilbert from Reconciliation NSW has since shared his presentation 'How can local councils include and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?' which I have attached here.

https://lgnsw.org.au/Common/Uploaded%20files/Misc/2022-28-02_REC_NSW_presentation_to_LGNSW.pdf

Joshua particularly encouraged councils to take up the Pathways to Reconciliation program in local councils, early learning centres and schools. It delivers art & storytelling workshops as a pathway to reconciliation in communities.