

DR23/007 2022 NATIONAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY DELEGATE REPORT

**S004-
T00019**

Responsible Officer: Alison Worthington - Councillor

Attachments: Nil

Community Goal: 5 Our engaged community with progressive leadership

Community Strategy: 5.2 Proactive, responsive and strategic leadership

Delivery Program Link: 5.2.1 Be proactive leaders with a focus on 'community better'

Operational Plan Link: 5.2.1.4 Provide professional development opportunities for Councillors

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Councillor Alison Worthington represented Eurobodalla Shire Council at the 2022 National General Assembly which was held on the 20 to 22 June 2022 in Canberra.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the delegates report from Councillor Worthington be received and noted.

BACKGROUND

Councillor Mayne and I attended the general assembly of the ALGA in Canberra on 20th-22nd June 2022, along with our GM Catherine Dale. The conference was themed 'Partners in Progress'.

Arriving on Day 1 of the conference we learned that the previous day a Regional Cooperation and Development Forum had been held and we encourage that councillors attending this conference in future also attend the Regional Forum beforehand. Kristy McBain, Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories addressed this forum. It is worth noting here that the Local Government ministerial portfolio has been reinstated by the new Albanese Government - there were motions submitted to the Assembly before the change of government advocating for just that.

One of the biggest partnerships under scrutiny throughout the conference was that between local and federal governments. Graham Jarvis, Portfolio Lead (Strategic Finance) at AEC Group, presented to the conference a paper on the importance of the Financial Assistance Grants provided by the Commonwealth Government to help councils provide local services and infrastructure. These important grants have fallen to just 0.53% of Commonwealth taxation revenue over the last 3 decades and ALGA policy is to advocate for a commitment from Federal government to restore the FAGs to at least 1% of that taxation revenue in a phased approach.

In fact Motion 4 on the business paper, submitted by Gunnedah Shire Council NSW, with 12 supporting motions from other councils, was carried that:

This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to conduct a review into the local government Financial Assistance Grant Act 1995 and the basis on which grant funding for roads is allocated, to create a more equitable approach to allocations and one that recognises the infrastructure managed by local government in the rural, regional and remote regions of Australia.

There was good news too from the Catherine King, Member for Ballarat and Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government who shared that local government is once again represented in National Cabinet, with the assurance that the representative is invited to 1 National Cabinet meeting per year. The ALGA position here is that we need a full commitment that an ALGA representative will be a **voting member** in the National Cabinet and there was an advocacy motion in the business paper for this also.

The new Labor government have stated that they will be re-forming the Federal Council of Local Government, first formed in 2008 when Anthony Albanese was then Minister for Local Government, to 'bring the mayors to Canberra'.

Minister King also flagged that there will soon be a Parliamentary Friends of Local Government working group formed. Parliamentary Friends groups provide a non-partisan forum for parliamentarians to meet and interact with stakeholder groups on matters relating to their focus subject.

The conference included a number of presentations and panels focused on Disaster Management and Planning - this is 2022 after all!

We heard that establishing a Disaster Mitigation Fund for councils was recommended by the Productivity Commission in 2014 but never implemented.

Since the May Federal election we now have a commitment from the government for up to \$200 million yearly to go to a new "Disaster Ready Fund".

The federal government has remodelled the Emergency Response Fund so that it can draw down from the a maximum of \$200 million in any given year (\$150 million on response and \$50 million on resilience projects) beyond what is already available to fund emergency response and natural disaster recovery and preparedness. This is designed to support sustained investment in disaster mitigation projects. The message from speakers was that local governments need to work up their ideas for that infrastructure and resilience: more stormwater culverts on unsealed road network anyone?

Muheed Jamaldeen, Director, Deloitte Access Economics presented on his work which has a particular focus on the economics of climate change and how they impact on the performance of our cities and regions. His powerpoint slides (attached) sent a powerful message about the need to shift our thinking on adaptation to climate change and the increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters. It was alarming to hear that 97% of all natural disaster funding in Australia is spent after an event, and only 3% before in preparation.

Muheed illustrated why the approach needs to be 'reimagined from recovery to resilience' and to reframe how we talk about the costs of what we do. We need to account for the additional costs to community including asset damage, family and domestic violence, evacuation costs, reduced economic activity from damage to agriculture and more. There is an investment dividend in acting before a natural disaster event and as a country we can realise a significant (\$380 billion) economic dividend as a result of pro-active resilience planning and climate adaptation initiatives. He also encouraged thinking outside and planning beyond your LGA boundaries in programs like the CRJO Resilience Blueprint this council is a part of.

Dr Marcus Spiller Principal & Partner, SGS Economics & Planning presented on Local Government and Productivity. The good news here is that local government is arguably the

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most productive sector in the three-tier system of governance. We do a lot with a little! How little?

In Australia investment in local government is small by international standards, in terms of share of GDP.

Remarkably, in an era of significant mistrust in government, trust in local government here is consistently higher than for other levels of government.

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