



ALGA President's Report to Country Mayors Association of NSW 18 November 2022

Federal Budget

Win! Strong advocacy from ALGA delivered millions of dollars of additional funding for councils in last month's Federal Budget.

This included an additional \$250 million for the Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program, which was extended through to 2025-26, as well as a new \$200 million per year Disaster Ready Fund.

This Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program extension will help councils build and upgrade playgrounds, libraries, cycling paths, and swimming pools right across our nation, and brings the total value of this fund to \$3.25 billion.

The Disaster Ready Fund will help local governments better protect their communities against natural disasters and is expected to be available from next July.

I recently appeared in front of a Senate committee considering the Disaster Ready legislation and made it clear that it's vital that all – or almost all – of this funding is allocated to councils for projects they have in the pipeline.

Regional funding

As expected, the Round Six of the Building Better Regions Fund was not included in the Budget but replaced by two new regional funding programs.

These two programs – the Growing Regions Program and the Precincts Partnership Program – will deliver one billion dollars over the next three years.

We are still waiting on further details but have been assured by the Government that regional councils will be eligible to apply for funding through both programs.

The Budget also included an extra \$100 million in Financial Assistance Grants, with councils now to receive \$2.92 billion in 2022-23 (\$2.1 billion of which was pre-paid in 2021-22).

Labor has committed to "fair increases" to Financial Assistance Grants, and ALGA will continue to work with the Minister and Department with a view to implementing these increases from next year as the first step on the path back to one percent.

Housing

Another key announcement in last month's Federal Budget was a new Housing Accord, which will bring together all levels of government, investors and the construction industry, and plans to deliver up to one million affordable homes for Australians.

I am pleased to report that ALGA has agreed to sign up to this Accord, which will include partnering with the Government to develop a National Housing and Homelessness Plan.

A lack of affordable housing is one of the biggest challenges councils and our communities are facing, and we look forward to working with governments, financiers and the housing industry to help facilitate more affordable homes for Australians.

Independent Inquiry into Australia's Response to COVID-19

The Independent Inquiry into Australia's Response to COVID-19 has identified that removing local government from COAG/National Cabinet at the start of the pandemic was a mistake.

The report states "Replacing the Council of Australian Governments with the National Cabinet meant local governments were often excluded from decision-making. This is despite their appreciation of local implementation and community networks. Established relationships with the community make communicating with local residents more effective. Local government expertise and the experience of councils in supporting communities were under-utilised during the pandemic."

It is encouraging that the new Government has invited ALGA to attend one meeting of National Cabinet and one meeting of the Council on Federal Financial Relations each year, but I will be strongly advocating for full membership at the first meetings I attend.

Regional banking closures

Strong advocacy from ALGA resulted in the Regional Banking Taskforce recommending in its final report that banks engage more closely with local councils when considering regional branch closures.

The Taskforce recommended that the Australian Banking Association strengthens its Branch Closure Protocol to make sure councils are forewarned of any closures

The Taskforce also recommended that banks produce impact assessment statements that will consider the impact a branch closure will have on the community and undertake genuine engagement with mayors and other local government leaders.

This is a good outcome and will hopefully ensure that councils are better informed about potential branch closures and can better support their communities through these processes.

New childcare legislation

It was fantastic to see Education Minister Jason Clare recognise ALGA's contributions to shaping the Government's new childcare bill as it was introduced in Parliament this month.

This bill will mean cheaper early education and care for families, while supporting local governments who provide these important services to our communities.

Cr Linda Scott
ALGA President