

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMUNITY SERVICES ASSOCIATION  
OF AUSTRALIA NATIONAL CONFERENCE – JUPITERS HOTEL  
TOWNSVILLE – 30 JULY 2003**

**CONFERENCE THEME – JUST AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES**

- Thank you for the opportunity to talk to you today. My name is Steve Clay and I work for the Department of Transport and Regional Services, or DOTARS. The Division I work in is called Territories and Local Government.
  - I've only been with the Department for about 9 months. Previous to that I worked in Local Government for 29 years in a range of rural, city and coastal councils. My training is in environmental health and building control and I'm currently studying Urban and Regional Planning. I've also had experience with social planning both at a council and regional level. I'm also fortunate to have a wife who is a social worker. So I have a reasonable idea about Local Government issues and I think I can appreciate some of the challenges you face dealing with Australian Government agencies, having worked on both sides of the fence so to speak.
  - My Department, DOTARS pursues two outcomes for the Australian community on behalf of the Australian Government:
    - Firstly, a better transport system for Australia; and
    - Secondly, greater recognition and development opportunities for local, regional and territory communities.
  - While the first is very important it's the second outcome which is perhaps more relevant today.
  - DOTARS is a diverse organisation and through the Regional Programmes Division and the Division I work for –Territories and Local Government – the Department runs programmes aimed at promoting and meeting the needs of communities across Australia.
  - I would like to talk about the recently released Regional Partnerships Programme
- Regional Partnerships Programme
- The Regional Partnerships Programme comprises Regional Solutions, Regional Assistance, Dairy Regional Assistance, Rural Transaction Centres and structural adjustment programmes.

- Regional Partnerships brings together, into one streamlined programme, the Federal Government's key funding programmes administered by DOTARS.
- Under Regional Partnerships there is now ONE programme, ONE set of guidelines and ONE simple application process to make it easier for communities to access funding for local projects. The best contact point is your local Area Consultative Committee. There should be something in your satchels about Regional Partnerships.

### Sustainable Regions

- We also have the Sustainable Regions Programme which has identified 8 regions as undergoing major economic, social and environmental change. The objective is to provide a national approach to supporting these designated regions and promoting a whole of government approach to regions by Australian Government agencies.
- The expected outcomes for the regions include greater employment and business opportunities, closer community interaction, partnerships between the private sector and government and development of leadership in the community.
- One of these Sustainable Regions is the Kimberley in Western Australia. This ties in nicely with DOTARS being the lead agency in the recently announced Council of Australian Governments, or COAG Trial for the Tjurabalan Indigenous Communities. In a joint announcement on the 2nd of July this year the Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson said, and I quote, "I fully expect that the whole of government approach will ensure we have a better relationship with people in the region and that government investment is maximised and meets priorities identified by the Communities. This trial and the new way of working will be keenly followed by many around the country and not just those interested in Indigenous issues", end of quote.
- The key issue is for Aboriginal people to be in a position to take responsibility for the management and long term planning of their communities. This means a serious investment by the communities, and all levels of government, to build capacity and develop effective governance.
- Let me turn to the Territories and Local Government Division, and specifically to the work we do related to Local Government.

- We deal with Local Government issues such as the National Awards for Local Government and the \$1.5 billion dollars in Financial Assistance Grants that are distributed to Local Government. We also deal with natural disaster mitigation and relief, self-governing territories (that is the ACT, Northern Territory, and Norfolk Island) and non-self governing territories such as Christmas Island, Cocos-Keeling Islands and Jervis Bay. So you can see we have a finger in many pies.
- The National Awards for Local Government run through DOTARS are an important tool used to build capacity and a sense of community in Local Government and the people they serve.

#### National Awards for Local Government

- My Department, DOTARS plays its part in helping to strengthen the capacity of Local Government through the National Awards for Local Government. This year the awards entries are on line. We also plan to have the Leading Practice Guide book available on our website along with past years entries.
- Extensive networking opportunities are provided through participation in the Awards program. Local Government bodies which enter the Awards also get the opportunity to highlight their achievements at Leading Practice Seminars held around Australia.
- The Awards recognise and celebrate the ingenuity, resourcefulness, and self-reliance of Local Government and, most importantly, assist in the sharing of that expertise and experience
- The awards identify and promote innovation and excellence in local government. And they highlight the diverse role of local government in improving economic, social and environmental outcomes for their communities.
- Since the leading practice seminar series started in 2000, entrants have shared their experiences with well over 150 other councils around Australia.
- The capacity building opportunities for local government with this process are significant to say the least.
- Particular categories in the Awards are sponsored by a number of Australian Government Agencies such as the Departments of, Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Environment Australia, Family and Community Services Industry, Tourism and

Resources: Business Entry Point and Health and Ageing. In varying ways these agencies influence and affect Local Government and their communities. They also help to foster that whole-of-government approach that is becoming so important these days.

- An example is DIMIA, the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. Local Governments around the country are increasingly recognising the contribution of migration to nation building. The 2002-2003 State of the Regions Report highlighted the role of cultural diversity as an indicator of local development potential. The challenge for Local Government involves using immigration to reap rewards for local regions, responding to settlement needs, taking advantage of increased local cultural diversity, building community harmony and strengthening appreciation of the unifying nature of citizenship.
- The Government recognises that attaining quick and effective social and economic participation for migrant settlers is not only an essential part of a just community, but in the long term interests of Australia as a whole.
- The *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society* represents a whole-of-government commitment to this end, and it has been endorsed by all levels of government.
- Commonwealth multicultural programs, like the Productive Diversity program and the Living in Harmony initiative, seek to draw attention to our success as a culturally diverse society and the importance of maintaining and strengthening one of our most precious resources – our community harmony.
- Excellence and initiative in such nation-building by local governments is recognised and promoted through the ‘*Strength in Diversity*’ National Award for Local Government, being awarded for the first time this year.
- DIMIA has asked me to talk about a couple of projects that Department has been involved with. The first one is the Darwin project.

### **Darwin Project**

- This project explored opportunities for improving migrant and refugee employment in the Northern Territory (NT), and the benefits this will bring to business.
- An Action plan has now been developed and will be implemented collaboratively by the stakeholders involved.

- The second project I want to talk about is the Rockhampton project.

## ROCKHAMPTON PROJECT

- This a pilot project to develop a planning tool for helping businesses make better use of the State Specific and Regional Migration Initiatives to address skill shortages that can't be met by the domestic market. The project will occur in Central Queensland and is a partnership between DIMIA, relevant Australian and Queensland government agencies, Rockhampton Regional Development Ltd and 7 local government areas which are (*Rockhampton, Livingstone, Gladstone, Emerald, Banana, Mackay, Fitzroy and Mount Morgan*).
- The overall purpose of the project is to develop a web-based planning tool that can be accessed by businesses to make effective use of the state-specific and regional migration visa categories to meet their skill needs.
- The tool will then be evaluated to determine its broader application across other States and Territories.
- Like DIMIA, the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) is very much aware of the contribution local government makes to the quality of life of Australia's communities, especially in non-metro urban and rural and regional areas. Local government is often not only the provider of significant community services, frequently taken for granted in metropolitan communities, but in so providing the services, is the major employer in town.
- FaCS actively fosters and develops relationships and partnerships with State and local government and with the community and business sectors. FaCS promotes activity and linkages between Commonwealth agencies for the development of whole of government partnerships to deliver targeted initiatives which encourage vibrant and inclusive communities. Through its programs and services FaCS aims to provide opportunities to ensure that individuals and families can participate in, and contribute to, community life. Strong inclusive communities help themselves by developing local solutions to local issues; they engage their members and are able to thrive by fostering partnerships between business, the community and government.
- The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy is also part of the Commonwealth's response to communities experiencing challenges and changes.

- The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy has been instrumental in encouraging communities not only to identify their own needs and to come up with solutions but also to better use existing skills, services and opportunities. For instance, the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy has funded a successful social enterprise project here in Townsville. The Young Families Support project, which operates out of the Centrelink Office at Aitkenvale, funded under the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, is a good example of what can be achieved when government at all levels and the community work in partnership.
- FaCS believes just and vibrant communities support each other by enabling individuals to reach their potential through opportunities to participate actively in economic and community life; to fully develop their capabilities and to work to their capacity. Such communities, large and small, are better able to meet and respond to life's challenges.

### Ageing Population

- I'd like to touch briefly on the issue of an ageing population.

The Department of Health and Ageing is also an award sponsor in the Planning for an Ageing Community and Health Services categories and is particularly interested in this issue. Population ageing will have significant implications for all sectors of the nation. It presents both challenges and opportunities for Local Government and local communities. These include the development of age-friendly infrastructure, employment, retailing, volunteering, and health and social services. Planning for the diverse needs of an ageing society will need an inter-disciplinary approach within councils, co-ordination with other levels of government, as well as a partnership with local institutions, businesses and community organisations.

- In recent years many Local Councils have significantly expanded their involvement in the delivery of a wide range of economic, environmental and social services. Some Councils have produced, or are cooperating in producing, local plans to address aged care and population ageing issues. They highlight the fact that individual councils are becoming more conscious of the wider social and economic implications of population ageing for their communities. The Office for an Ageing Australia is keen to encourage and support this trend.

- These projects, and the programmes I mentioned earlier which are run by the Department of Transport and Regional services provide you with an insight into the work being done at the individual departmental level and by the Australian Government as a whole to advance the opportunities for communities across Australia.
- Of course efforts by the Australian Government are just part of what is done by the community as a whole, and conferences such as this have an important role in promoting the need for advancing the benefits of just and vibrant communities. For that reason its been a great pleasure to be here and I hope you have gained much from your attendance at the conference. Thank you.