



**Australian Government**

**Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities**

C10/19821

Mr Adrian Beresford-Wylie  
Chief Executive  
Australian Local Government Association  
8 Geils Court  
DEAKIN ACT 2600

Dear Mr Beresford-Wylie

I refer to your letter of 8 December 2010 to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, the Hon Tony Burke MP, concerning resolutions 33 and 33.2 of the National General Assembly of Local Government. The Minister has passed your letter to me for reply. I regret the delay in responding.

The department welcomes local government attention to the issue of sustainable water supplies and security and welcomes the active engagement by Australian councils in the state and regional water planning activities that are a central feature of Australia's sustainable water management. We have therefore outlined the Commonwealth's position in relation to the resolutions your Assembly has made (Attachment A). In many respects, all levels of government are already working together to deliver healthy rivers, strong communities and sustainable food production for current and future generations.

In the coming year, we look forward to continued local government involvement in the Murray-Darling Basin and engagement with the Murray-Darling Basin Authority in the next phase of Basin Plan development.

The Australian Local Government Association is welcome to join national discussions on future water reform through participation on the COAG Water Reform Committee (Attachment B: WRC Terms of Reference). If you would like to nominate an officer, please contact the WRC Secretariat (contact: [wrc@environment.gov.au](mailto:wrc@environment.gov.au)).

Yours sincerely

David Atkinson  
A/g Assistant Secretary  
Water Policy Branch

04, February 2011

<b>ALGA MAIL</b>	
ITEM No:	880
DATE RECEIVED:	10 Feb 11
FILE No:	



## COMMONWEALTH ACTIONS RELEVANT TO ALGA 2010 RESOLUTIONS NO.33 AND 33.2

Strategic Motion No: 33

*That the Australian Local Government Association call on the Australian Government to ensure sustainable water supplies and security by:*

- 1. Consultation and engagement of local and state government in all national, state and regional water planning.*
- 2. Water Conservation planning measures to include strategies that meet the challenges associated with drought and Australia's future food production needs.*
- 3. Providing appropriate funding to safeguard communities water needs at a local level within a national plan.*

The Australian Government is working to ensure sustainable water supplies and security through:

- working with state and local governments to fully implement the National Water Initiative (NWI),
- developing the Murray-Darling Basin Plan under the *Water Act 2007*,
- making a multi-billion dollar investment in 'Water for the Future' to deliver healthy rivers, strong communities and sustainable food production for current and future generations.

To assist in implementing the NWI, the draft *National Water Initiative Policy Guidelines for Water Planning and Management* have been developed jointly with states and territories and in consultation with key stakeholders including ALGA. These draft guidelines incorporate the principle of stakeholder engagement into the planning process including the local community and all relevant stakeholders. The guidelines will assist water planning and policy development at all levels.

The Australian Government's 'Water for the Future' initiative provides a single, coherent, national framework that integrates rural and urban water issues. 'Water for the Future' provides funding for a number of complementary Commonwealth programs that operate to ensure sustainable water supplies. In many cases the Australian Government is working directly with local governments to encourage and fund water planning activities and improvements in water security and efficiency. Local government representatives often play an important role on advisory panels and stakeholder engagement processes designed to influence the implementation of Commonwealth programs and policies.

- The *Strengthening Basin Communities* program provides funding of \$200 million, in the Murray-Darling Basin, to assist both community-wide water planning, and to enable local government authorities and urban water service providers to support projects that improve water security. The program has offered grants for three funding rounds totaling \$44 million for 75 projects involving 107 councils.
- The *National Water Security Plan for Cities and Towns* provides funding to local government and local water authorities for practical water saving initiatives. A total of \$78.4 million for 36 projects was committed under a competitive grants process in 2009-2010.
- The *National Urban Water and Desalination Plan* provides funding for eligible projects in water recycling, desalination and stormwater harvesting and reuse that help secure urban water supplies in cities and towns. Details about a funding round for stormwater harvesting and reuse projects will be available on the department's website in early 2011.

Proposals can be submitted by the private sector, state and territory and local governments.

- The *Water Smart Australia* program aims to accelerate the development and uptake of smart technologies and practices in water use across Australia. The program also assisted to advance the implementation of the National Water Initiative through projects worth \$1.6 billion.
- The *National Rainwater and Greywater Initiative*, which provides rebates for households to help install rainwater tanks or grey water systems, complements existing state and local government schemes.

The *Urban Water Stakeholder Reference Panel* includes a number of local government representatives and provides advice on the implementation of the Australian Government's urban water programs and policies.

#### *Motion No. 33.2*

*That the Australian Local Government Association lobby for the vertical alignment of Federal, State and Local Government policy related to water and land use planning.*

The Australian Government supports cooperative action by all levels of government to achieve and improve sustainable water management in Australia. Through the framework of the National Water Initiative, the Australian government is encouraging the alignment of policies and planning at all levels of government.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) is the peak intergovernmental forum for cooperative action to address water reform. The Water Reform Committee (WRC) reports to COAG on matters requested by COAG. It promotes sustainable water use across Australia through inter-jurisdictional development, oversight, coordination and implementation of water reform policy initiatives, including those in the NWI and the COAG Work Program on Water. Under the WRC Terms of Reference, the Australian Local Government Association is welcome to participate in the Committee's deliberations.

The Australian Government's *Caring for our Country* program supports land use and natural resource management and complements 'Water for the Future' and other government programs. The Australian Government is working with many local governments through its Community Action Grant funding to support conservation of the Australian landscape and help rural, urban and Indigenous community groups across the country protect the environment and adopt sustainable land management practices. State, territory and local governments work with regional Natural Resource Management organisations to deliver 'Caring for our Country' projects in many parts of Australia.

## EXCERPT TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE COAG WATER REFORM COMMITTEE (WRC)

### Objective

The WRC exists to promote sustainable water use across Australia through inter-jurisdictional development, oversight, coordination and implementation of water reform policy initiatives, including those in the National Water Initiative (NWI) and the *2008–2011 COAG Work Program on Water*.

WRC will also consider and advise on water reform issues as required by NRMCC, the NRMSC or COAG.

The WRC is a reconstitution of the Water Sub Group of the COAG Working Group on Climate Change and Water (WGCCW) with both the reporting responsibilities of an advisory committee of the NRMSC, and reporting responsibilities to COAG Senior Officials as required. It incorporates and subsumes the work previously done by the National Water Initiative Committee (NWIC), which has ceased to operate.

### Method of Operation

The WRC reports primarily to the NRMSC, but will report direct to COAG SOM for matters requested by COAG.

The Australian Government Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts will chair the WRC and will provide the Secretariat.

The WRC will seek to meet in good time before meetings of the NRMSC and at least quarterly throughout the year. Meetings may be held by teleconference where the agenda permits, but members must be prepared to devote time and resources to the WRC to ensure its success.

The WRC shall have financial decision-making responsibility up to a limit of \$250,000 in any one instance, with the proviso that it report all such decisions to each regular meeting of Standing Committee.

The WRC shall review its work program annually and provide a forward-looking report to the Standing Committee on progress and expectations on the NWI, the COAG Work Program on Water and on water reform issues generally.

### Membership

The WRC is an inter-jurisdictional committee: each jurisdiction is invited to nominate up to three agencies. Agencies may include those with portfolio responsibility for water, Premier (or Prime Minister) & Cabinet, and Treasury. All agencies so nominated will have equal status on the committee, but each jurisdiction has only one vote. The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) would be welcome to participate.

It is expected that Committee members will have representative authority relevant to the task, and will also be able to draw upon specialists within their jurisdiction as necessary.

The initial membership of the WRC will be that of the former WSG – see [Annex D](#). Jurisdictions may nominate another person to represent them on the committee at any time.

Observers may participate in meetings at the invitation of the WRC. Access to WRC papers is provided through the GovDex service. Each jurisdiction controls access for its own state/territory and no limits have been placed on the number of jurisdiction agencies that may access WRC papers.

