



**House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport and Cities
Inquiry into Australian Government's Role in the Development of Cities**

Submission by the Australian Local Government Association

31 July 2017

Introduction

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport and Cities Inquiry into the Australian Government's role in the development of Cities. This submission builds on an increasing awareness and widespread acknowledgement of the importance of cities and towns in building sustainable growth and fostering sustainable and productive regions across Australia. The importance of Australia's urban and regional centres, be they capital cities, major cities or towns in terms of long-term economic development, sustainability and social harmony has been the focus of investigation by numerous reports, academic studies, government plans and inquiries.

This submission does not seek to repeat in detail what has been previously raised by local governments, but rather to highlight and reinforce those critical issues that continue to warrant specific attention by the Commonwealth now and in the future. An absence of an agreed national long-term strategy and bipartisan commitment to funding for our cities, towns and regions will cost Australia dearly, in a range of expensive inefficiencies and social dysfunction, that in turn will continue to place added pressures on public budgets required to fund and support transport networks, housing, critical infrastructure, health, community services and social cohesion and capital. Addressing the twin pressures of global competition and growing inequality in Australian cities, towns and regions is important and the challenge needs Commonwealth leadership.

Background

ALGA is the national voice of local government representing the collective national interests of 537 local governing bodies across the country. In structure, ALGA is a federation of state and territory local government associations. It is therefore important to acknowledge that ALGA's submission should be read in conjunction with those submitted by state and territory local government association or councils, be they part of regional associations, alliances or as an individual authority.

As the peak local government association, ALGA represents local government on various national bodies and ministerial councils that impact on the development and sustainability of cities, towns and regions including: transport and infrastructure, emergency management and the environment. As one of Australia's three levels of government, the sector is also represented on the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) by the ALGA President – Mayor David O’Loughlin.

In Australia, local government is established under state/territory legislation and its structures, powers and functions are determined by that legislation. In all jurisdictions, the relevant legislation creating and regulating local government has been reviewed and significantly amended or replaced with new legislation that gives local councils greater general competency powers. Generally speaking, these changes enable local governments to provide a wide range of services and undertake functions to meet the needs of their local communities. These services and functions are aimed to enhance urban liveability through delivery of a range of quality of life outcomes, whilst ensuring the built environment and economy that supports our cities and towns are sustainable and respect local identity and character.

Local government can and does influence and control various aspects of Australia’s cities and towns: from deciding how land is used and in what locations, to the quality of urban design and public spaces, the provision of transport services, cycleways and walkways, the provision of waste collection, drainage, sport and recreation, and a diverse range of supporting human services. Through policies and partnerships with the community and other levels of government, local government has great influence in securing the quality of our urban and regional environments. If we are to realise a sustainable vision for Australia’s cities and towns, it will be necessary to leverage local government leadership and capabilities to achieve this goal. It is important to acknowledge the strong relationships all councils have with local and regional communities, as these are the people most affected by the quality or otherwise of our cities, towns and regions.

The political standing of local government also raises some dilemmas in the management of urban and regional areas, including cities and towns. For example, local governments are often treated as the poor cousins of state/territory governments, creating tensions over direction setting, resourcing, delivery, maintenance and accountability. The fact that local governments also have a measure of choice over the range of non-statutory functions they get involved in, as well as the manner in which they interpret their statutory functions, results in a considerable range of differences and diversity in local councils within and between jurisdictions. This diversity is a two-edged sword, given that councils have a responsibility to strive for sustainability outcomes; meet the needs and desires of their local and regional communities, whilst also seeking to deliver multiple societal objectives, with limited resources and against the backdrop of confusing and constantly changing directions and policy settings by not only the states and territories, but also the Commonwealth.

The diversity of local government is apparent through a number of characteristics, including their different powers and functions, the level of financial resources, population size, geographic area, location and availability of human resources. Any consideration of local government's role in the future of sustainable cities and towns must therefore be cognisant of the diversity of roles and functions and the diversity of issues confronting local governments throughout Australia.

National Summit on the Future of Australia's Cities and Towns

ALGA co-hosted a National Summit on the Future of Australia's Cities and Towns in June 2004. This Summit, initiated by the then Local Government and Planning Ministers' Council, brought together over ninety invited delegates from across Australia including: State and Territory Planning Ministers; representatives of local government; officials from Commonwealth and State agencies; industry; academia; environmental; youth and indigenous and social service groups. The outcomes of the Summit offered at the time new pathways to pursue a sustainable vision for Australia's cities and towns and as such remain of relevance to the terms of reference of this Inquiry some thirteen years later.

The Summit identified that to be successful into the future, the vision for Australia's cities and towns must:

- include diverse, vibrant and inclusive communities;
- be globally competitive;
- reduce ecological impacts;
- enhance equity of access; and
- demonstrate good quality design.

Strategies to achieve the vision included:

- developing a national shared vision;
- an integrated governance framework;
- fostering and improving the information base;
- developing a national settlement and population strategy;
- providing active citizen programs;
- improving infrastructure;
- conducting a sustainability audit of taxes and charges; and
- incentivised funding and pricing mechanisms.

At the time, a proposal for a Charter for Sustainable Australian Cities, as suggested by the Planning Institute of Australia to coordinate Commonwealth, State and Territory interests as they relate to urban development was considered to be one mechanism to secure such a national vision. However, there was also a recognition that it would be vital in the development of any such Charter that the diverse but crucial roles and

responsibilities of local government in the development and planning of Australia's cities needed to be recognised and respected.

Little has changed since 2004. Local government continues to be a major player in the drive towards a more sustainable future for Australia's cities and towns. If Australia is to enhance the full capacity of local government as a positive driver of change, it needs to be properly resourced. Our cities, towns and regions require strategic investment, both in a policy and infrastructure sense, if they are to be productive and sustainable over the long term. The Commonwealth, in partnership with the states and territories have

ALGA's submission to this Inquiry essentially continues to build on the themes raised during this National Summit with a focus on updating and modernising the context as it relates to the role of the Commonwealth in the current setting and the challenges facing Australian cities, towns and regions in the 21st century.

Sustainability and Integrated Place Based Planning

ALGA has consistently argued that the future of Australia's cities, towns and regions rests on the core concept of sustainability and place based planning. Sustainability provides an integrated approach to meeting our social, economic and environmental goals in a way that is equitable within and between generations. For local government, it is about planning, quality urban design and built environments, providing for the needs of individuals, communities and businesses, protecting natural ecosystems, whilst striving to deliver real prosperity and equity in our society.

Whilst terminology and government programs have changed over the years, local government's approach to urban development and management, continues to be based on the principles previously referred to as Integrated Local Area Planning (ILAP). ILAP offers a systematic approach to improving the overall well-being of communities, based on proper consideration of all relevant aspects of development, environmental quality and service provision. Integrated planning is concerned not only with achieving more broadly-based planning, but also more effective ongoing management of activities. ILAP seeks to balance 'top down' policy-driven approaches often adopted by state and federal government with a greater emphasis on bottom up implementation driven processes.

The essence of ILAP has in recent years transitioned into calls for integrated strategic planning, and greater emphasis on place based policy. The principles are very similar. In essence, urban and regional planning that seeks to devise appropriate planning responses to distinctive local circumstances and needs, including physical, environmental, economic, social and cultural issues. Whilst all levels of government have important roles to play, place based planning requires strong community involvement in the entire planning and urban management processes with local government playing a leading role.

Local governments should be recognised as the level of government immediately responsible for integrated land use planning and urban management. This requires an effective planning system, guided by appropriate and consistent legislation and a need to balance social, environmental, cultural and economic interests.

By working in partnership with other levels of government and the community, it is possible to reduce duplication and frustration, separate red tape from good and necessary regulation, make better use of limited public and private resources whilst enhancing the service delivery possible by all levels of government. Most importantly however, it is based on ensuring the community at large understands the range of challenges that require attention and is encouraged to take ownership in helping to make the necessary changes required.

Through a framework of integrated strategic planning, the future liveability, sustainability and prosperity of Australia's cities and towns can only be addressed through a long-term commitment to building solid and viable local government capacity.

In addressing the terms of reference for this Inquiry, there are six key action areas that the Commonwealth could focus on to improve how it can better manage the complex challenges facing Australia's diverse cities, towns and regions:

1. Commonwealth Leadership and addressing cost shifting between Governments;
2. Infrastructure Investment and Productivity;
3. Sustainability and Resilience;
4. Manage demographic and societal changes;
5. Sustainable urban and regional transport; and
6. Smart Cities and Digital Transformation.

1. Commonwealth Leadership

Commonwealth governments have not clearly articulated a consistent approach to their role in the development and sustainable management of Australian cities, towns and regional development. The Commonwealth's interest and influence in this area of public policy have shifted and transformed in ways that do not reflect substantive policy or program sophistication. Departments, grant programs and previous initiatives such as ILAP, Development Assessment Forum, national e-planning, National Housing Supply Council – have come and gone. The focus by successive Commonwealth Governments over the past two decades appears to have been on being seen to be engaged, rather than appreciating the legitimate role the Commonwealth plays in our cities and regions through taxation, immigration, infrastructure investment, telecommunications, environmental regulations and energy policy, international trade, and increasingly through a range of international obligations. Australia being a signatory to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 is a case in point. In addition to the above, the Commonwealth is also a large land owner, employer and property portfolio manager.

Over many years there have been substantial increases in unfunded tasks allocated to councils resulting in cost-shifting from the Commonwealth and state and territories. This cost shifting can be partly attributed to the Commonwealth not accepting the critical role it plays in cities, towns and regional development. Cost shifting has impeded the ability of local government to deliver core services, deliver new infrastructure, let alone maintain or strengthen existing infrastructure. This issue is not new and was investigated previously by the House of Representatives Economics, Finance and Public Administration Committee; *Rates and Taxes: A Fair Share for Responsible Local Government* tabled in November 2003.

The issues raised in the *Fair Share* report remain relevant today and need to be addressed to ensure a more secure financial future for local government. But fixing cost shifting, whilst critically important, will not in itself resolve the overall financial crisis facing local government. The *Fair Share* report recommended a new funding system for local government based on access to a fair share of national taxation revenue, backed by an intergovernmental agreement and effective compliance mechanisms to stop cost shifting. In short, there are three key recommendations from the *Fair Share* report that continue to have currency with respect to this Inquiry. These being:

- Intergovernmental agreements to address cost shifting, determine the roles and responsibilities of local government and ensure funding and resources are available to match;
- A COAG summit to be convened on intergovernmental relations when it comes to Cities, towns and regions. This may result in a new and contemporary COAG Ministerial council on planning and local government being established;
- An overhaul of the dated system of financial assistance grants to local government to provide local government with a fair share of national taxation revenue with which to meet local infrastructure and service needs.

The need for broader grant reforms and addressing the inherent problems of vertical fiscal imbalance across the levels of government is fundamentally important for councils to build and improve local communities, be they in cities, towns or regions. In addition to the challenges associated with limited own-sources of revenue, where grant programs are offered on a competitive basis grant funding becomes unpredictable and administratively costly for local government to access. This unpredictability in Federal grant funding undermines the ability of councils to plan for the future and contributes to the difficulties councils can have in managing their assets and achieving financial sustainability.

Structural reforms of grant funding arrangements are needed, including stronger coordination between the three levels of government, with the inclusion of local government as a genuine partner in the design of grant funding arrangements to local government. Programs that allocate funding to local government across multiple years (such as the Roads to Recovery Program) greatly assist with long-term planning and

asset management by local government. To deliver infrastructure and services that are responsive to community needs, grant program arrangements should be based on the following considerations:

- Are a genuine partnership with local government;
- Are strategically focused on achieving outcomes for communities such as security of essential services (e.g. water and sewerage), community well-being (e.g. public housing), jobs and economic growth (e.g. trade and investment), and resilient communities (e.g. disaster management);
- Have stable and long-term funding parameters that are underpinned by local government planning and asset management requirements;
- Develop councils' capability and capacity and incentivise innovation;
- Are administratively simple; and
- Include regular evaluation and communication of program outcomes, with lessons learned incorporated into future programs.

2. Infrastructure Investment and Productivity

Adequate resourcing for local government is essential for the effective ongoing provision of infrastructure and services fundamental to the sustainable development of Australia's cities, towns and regions.

The increasing demand for the provision of community and related services by a growing and changing community, together with funding constraints and cost shifting obligations, has caused the diversion of funds away from maintenance and development of local infrastructure and asset management. Local government building and other construction infrastructure including roads are worth around \$438 billion, including roads, bridges, airports, waste management facilities, water supply and storm water infrastructure, libraries, pools, sport stadiums and other community facilities. Much of the built infrastructure dates from the post-war period and is in need of replacement, repair or strengthening.

Adequate and timely provision of physical and social infrastructure in Australian cities, towns and regions is fundamental to Australia's development, productivity and community wellbeing. Provision of well-designed and planned roads and other transport and community infrastructure is one of local government's most important responsibilities.

Local government has a long history calling on Federal, state and territory governments to recognise that the key to efficiency in transport and infrastructure provision is the integration of planning and program management at community and regional levels. All levels of government should cooperate fully with local government's efforts to promote such integration, and meet reasonable local government requirements for infrastructure improvements necessitated by population growth, intra and inter migration, technology advancements and the growing impact of changing climate and weather patterns.

It is worth noting that ALGA's commissioned *State of the Regions* reports have continuously recognised that Australian cities and towns need to be viewed in a regional context - regions are the engine room of economic growth. Large cities (global cities) are in fact the most successful knowledge based regions. The innovation/knowledge capacity of an economy is now largely determined at the regional level. Policies to establish a successful knowledge-based economy require a whole of government approach and must focus on cities, towns and regions.

The greater the connectivity between regions and cities, the greater the overall capacity to benefit from globalisation, particularly if strategies to connect people and places are combined with other strategies to stimulate the growth of high value-added industries and jobs. Public policy must focus on developing and strengthening the industry clusters on which knowledge based economies are constructed. This can be achieved by more effectively linking regions with each other and the world. Cities and towns must be considered within regional frameworks and opportunities to strengthen the links between regions need to be further explored and developed.

It is therefore not surprising that ALGA raises in successive Commonwealth budget submissions that a priority and ongoing commitment for the Australian Government is to assist with the funding of capital works programs for provision of essential infrastructure in both metropolitan and regional Australia. This also includes: water storage, conservation and supply; sewerage treatment and disposal; and major stormwater drainage. Increasing pressure on council infrastructure further highlights the need for local government to secure access to a fair share of national taxation revenue.

3. Sustainability and Resilience

Local governments across Australia are committed to progressing sustainability, community resilience, including to the impacts of natural disasters. Think Global and act local continues to be the philosophy behind local communities' commitment and approach to planning, engagement, policy development, investment, implementation and evaluation.

Sustainability, needs to be holistic and incorporated into social, cultural, ecological and economic principles. Local governments continue to be the lead agencies for sustainable development. They are continuing to develop and implement systematic approaches to provide for Australia's long-term future in terms of the health and well-being of their communities and environments, whether they are urban, regional or rural in nature.

Local government is a major player in the environment, spending billions a year on environmental protection, conservation, management of landscapes and open spaces as well as broader natural resource management.

When it comes to sustainability, the Commonwealth should work in partnership with existing successful initiatives and programs, rather than confuse or dilute efforts by creating new programs and approaches. For example, local councils have been active in pursuing Local Agenda 21, and more recently have signed up to 100 Resilient Cities.

Local Agenda 21 provides the opportunity for Local Governments to work with their local communities to create ecologically sustainable development (ESD) agendas for the 21st century. The main focus of Local Agenda 21 is to involve all groups in sustainable development planning in the major areas of economic, social and environmental development. At the heart of the program is a strong partnership between local government and the community.

In 2013, the US based Rockefeller Foundation pioneered 100 Resilient Cities to help more cities build resilience to the physical, social, and economic challenges that are a growing part of the 21st century. Cities from around the world can apply to become part of the 100 Resilient Cities Network. Once selected, they are eligible to receive four types of support: Support to hire a Chief Resilience Officer, an innovative new position in government that will lead the city's resilience efforts; and expertise to develop a robust resilience strategy; access to a platform of partners providing technologies and services to help cities implement a resilience strategy (partners include Microsoft, Swiss Re, and the Nature Conservancy).

Melbourne and Sydney are now members of the international 100 Resilient Cities Network, and are heavily engaged in tackling the challenges facing our cities when it comes to working towards a more sustainable and resilient urban form that enhances urban livability and tackles impending threats be they natural or made in nature. The experiences of Melbourne which launched its resilience strategy last year, has considerable merit in providing the Commonwealth with a global best practice model to support when it comes to dealing with all Australian cities, towns and regions.

Another best practice model worth contemplating is a former proposal for a Charter for Sustainable Australian Cities, as suggested by the Planning Institute of Australia. This Charter was a mechanism by which Australia could coordinate Commonwealth, State and Territory, and local government interests as they relate to urban development and the broader built environment of cities, towns and regions.

Local governments in Australia also have a key role in undertaking community disaster resilience and disaster mitigation programs to ensure more resilient communities and associated infrastructure to natural disasters. Ongoing Commonwealth collaboration with State and Territory governments to fund programs such as the National Disaster Resilience Program and the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements, is critical to assist local governments rebuild and address natural disaster risks in their local communities.

Proactively planning for the impacts of climate change is also an important role for local governments in creating sustainable and resilient communities. However, local

government not only requires appropriate financial support, but also require the appropriate policy and legislative frameworks from the Federal and State/Territory governments to allow necessary decision making and responses to climate change without prejudice or undue risk exposure.

In addition, it is important that local governments have timely access to high quality, nationally consistent but locally appropriate data, methodologies, standards and codes from the Federal and State/Territory Governments to ensure responses to climate change are safe, timely, appropriate and equitable. This includes supporting effective and consistent standards and regulations where necessary for cleaner and more efficient energy use management.

In the quest for striving towards more sustainable and resilient cities and towns, local government must be recognised as a major and valuable contributor. If the Commonwealth is serious in wanting to enhance the capacity of local government as a driver of change, the sector needs to ensure it is properly resourced to get the job done.

4. Manage Demographic and societal changes

Population ageing and demographic change present major challenges for cities, towns and regions in the future. The result of falling fertility, increasing life expectancy, changing compositions of households and the effect of the 'baby boomer' generation moving rapidly through older age groups, has contributed to an increase in the number and proportion of people aged over 75 years.

Ensuring that future development takes place in a manner that avoids urban sprawl, caters for changing housing needs, achieves high standards of urban design and promotes more compact and public transport/walking/cycling friendly areas will contribute significantly to the quality of life experienced by Australians.

The World Health Organisation has long argued that the development of age friendly standards for cities and towns will be essential if older people are to remain active and independent. Such standards would include age-friendly infrastructure, for example, making the physical environment more accessible through 'universal design' including how we provide adequate public lighting, and public spaces.

Demographic changes are a significant issue and again impose new obligations and financial burdens on local government. In October 2003, ALGA entered into a partnership with the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing to expand local government's capacity to address and plan for population ageing through the development of a strategic action plan. The subsequent plan outlined a range of activities that local government will need to undertake to address population ageing in the future. In particular the project facilitated the exchange of best practice information on practical responses to population ageing within the local government sector and encourage and assist local government authorities to develop plans that address both

the problems and opportunities of population ageing. More recently ALGA with the support of the Commonwealth Department of Social Services has produced a national Guide for Disability Inclusion Planning (October 2016).

In addressing demographic and societal change, which includes the growing and widespread impact of technology, the Commonwealth Government should also seek to ensure the importance of urban design is fully acknowledged and incorporated in government funding and policy initiatives. Addressing challenges of heatwaves, housing affordability, accessibility, energy use or water conservation is ultimately a function of how our urban and built environments are planned and designed. Both the Healthy Spaces and Places Initiative by the National Heart Foundation, PIA and ALGA, and the Creating Places for People: an urban design protocol for Australian Cities reinforce the importance of implementing best practice urban design.

5. Sustainable urban and regional transport

Whilst the Commonwealth has traditionally focused largely on important freight corridors around Australia, there has been substantial progress made in recent years in developing a stronger sustainable national urban transport agenda. By its very nature, transport infrastructure raises a range of interrelated issues including: opportunity costs, finance, value capture, congestion, air pollution, economic productivity, equity in access, urban sprawl, urban design, greenhouse gas emissions, and broader questions of community health, safety and social amenity.

When it comes to our cities, towns and regions, Councils have long argued for the Commonwealth to play a greater role in encouraging greater use of public transport, and increasing the role that can be played by heavy and light rail. Equally important is the need to support and encourage all modes of transport, which includes walking, cycling. Unless the Commonwealth accepts that transport is as much about questions of accessibility as it is about congestion and productivity, our built environments will struggle in maintaining their world liveability rankings.

ALGA also would like to take this opportunity to support the recent arguments made by Infrastructure Australia with respect to the important role of forward planning and government strategic intervention. As argued by the Infrastructure Australia Chairman, "Meeting Australia's future growth challenges requires long-term vision. As our cities and regions undergo a period of considerable change, strategically important infrastructure corridors need to be preserved early in their planning to avoid cost overruns, delays and community disruption during the project delivery phase. Australia's governments have an immediate opportunity to deliver an enduring infrastructure legacy to future generations.

Transport infrastructure planning needs to occur with a planning framework that recognises the inter-connection between what happens at the local scale – from the neighbourhood, to suburb, to the city, to region/state, and then ultimately to the nation. The Commonwealth has and continues to be a major investor in transport and as such needs to ensure this investment is complementary to achieving other community goals

including: affordable housing, environmental quality, and national productivity. Long term planning is fundamental to ensuring Australia not only has the infrastructure required to meet the needs of the nation, but that it is designed and located in the right places and at the right times. ALGA supports greater provision of development sequencing as responsible mechanism by which to manage growth in our cities, towns and regions.

6. Smart Cities and Digital transformation

The smart cities initiative has been associated with the new City Deals approach and the push for value capture as key elements of the Government's urban policy agenda.

There is recognition that significant resources and policy consideration need to be directed at ensuring our cities are able to meet the needs of increasing populations, including: infrastructure to deal with congestion; quality of life standards; improving service delivery through harnessing new technology which can improve efficiencies.

Increased urbanisation is a major issue globally. The populations of Australia's major cities are at record levels. The overwhelming majority of jobs are located in cities and it is where most new jobs are being created. At the same time, massive technological change is occurring, including new business models driven by Information and Communications Technology (ICT). Councils across Australia are now exposed to the Internet of Things (IOT) that will ultimately enable digital disruption to occur in any process which can have technology imbedded and passed to other areas (roads, bridges, buildings, planning, lighting etc). Examples such as Uber and Airbnb have been held up as models of such digital disruption.

Councils and communities around Australia are embracing new technologies. Councils are providing free wifi, communicating with and consulting through online forums and social media, and developing more sophisticated websites and mobile apps to enhance service provision to their communities. However, councils are at very different stages of the journey, and digital transformation is by no means uniform across councils.

Digital transformation is the current catch phrase, although tangible examples of how this can benefit users and simplify government services are harder to come by. Often the digital government agenda is focused on micro challenges such as the usability of government websites and mobile service delivery platforms. Arguably, while addressing these micro challenges is important, we have to keep asking how to focus our digital government capability on addressing the macro challenges where the greatest societal and economic gains are to be made. For local government, there are some significant gains from coordinated approaches to ICT, many of which State/Territory Associations are already leveraging. These include shared ICT and shared services, coordinated/joint procurement and the sharing of knowledge and approaches that deliver the greatest results. In a real way, the Smart Cities and Suburbs program is also trying to address this issue of scalability of IT solutions.

The concept of a “Smart City” is to foster efficiency and use the resources of the city wisely. Local governments understand the need for councils to be connected to smart technologies and the enabling role of smart technologies in the community. From Local Government’s perspective, the conversation should be focused on “smart communities” rather than “smart cities” - how the technology is shared, related workforce issues (skills, training and performance), and the potential to realise cost savings through smart technology.

ALGA welcomed the Australian Government the release of the Smart Cities Plan in April 2016. Key elements of the plan include establishing City Deals (one for each capital city and one for a regional centre in each state), the \$50 million Smart Cities and Suburbs Program (to fund innovative technology solutions to fix complex local problems) and the establishment of an infrastructure financing unit to look at alternative infrastructure financing options such as value capture. City Deals are designed to be a collaboration of all levels of government, industry and communities. Given the program is limited to \$50 million (with an additional \$50 million in co-contributions) it remains to be seen what impact the program may have in addressing the challenges facing our cities and councils. At face value this level of investment is limited but it may be sufficient to trial some programs and learn from the experience.

The Australian Government has also committed to a Sustainable Cities Fund, with an investment that will come from the Clean Energy Financing Corporation of \$100 million a year and to exploring alternative financing options such as value capture to finance the investment in our cities.

With the issue of technology comes the concerns about cybersecurity. This is an area of increasing attention and concern as organisations and individuals move more of their information online and to cloud base solutions. Ensuring privacy policies and processes are well developed as well as IT security is well maintained is critical. As seen with the recent #censusfail experience, one failure in government systems can undermine community confidence in the systems of all levels of government.

As far as cybersecurity is concerned, it is important for local government to have confidence in the Commonwealth’s role in providing for telecommunication and policing. Ensuring the integrity and security of council IT systems is very important, likewise so is ensuring the privacy of citizens through the appropriate handling of sensitive data and compliance with privacy laws. Councils, especially smaller councils may need some additional support with cybersecurity. Support may be through the sharing of skills and experience of professionals from larger councils, through the development of standard operating practices or training in the protection of personal information.

ALGA notes that the Productivity Commission released its final report into Data Availability and Use in May 2017. The Government is considering policies to increase availability and use of data to boost innovation and competition.

It is anticipated that improved availability of reliable data, combined with the tools to use it, will create new economic opportunities. Increasing availability of data may facilitate the development of new products and services, enhance consumer and business outcomes, better inform decision making and policy development, and facilitate greater efficiency and innovation in the economy. This will be done by encouraging greater use of data through open data policies to increase the transparency and accountability of government processes.

Reforming access to public sector data should therefore be a priority for the Government. Reforms aimed at moving from a system based on risk aversion and avoidance, to one based on transparency and confidence in data processes, treating data as an asset and not a threat, are required.

Smart communities, whether in cities, towns or regions require access to the technology, infrastructure and an increasing number of data sets. The Commonwealth has a legitimate role in assisting with such a transition, and its funding of such bodies as the ABS, CSIRO, Geoscience Australia, BOM and AURIN needs to be acknowledged and encouraged.

Concluding Comments

Australian cities, towns and regions are complex, dynamic systems whose development and planning requires increasingly sophisticated methods to understand, model, predict and formulate strategies and plans for the future. Much is happening at the state and local levels, but the state of play at the Commonwealth level is at best variable and opportunistic. The current commitment to the Smart Cities agenda is promising. But should be the beginning rather than the end.

The future sustainability of Australia's cities, towns and regions is dependent on a coordinated, whole of government approach bridging relevant portfolios. Developing a shared national vision for Australia's cities must prioritise effective engagement with local communities and surrounding regions and should seek to meet their needs and aspirations for the future.

In this context, having stronger Commonwealth leadership, ensuring more robust and long-term partnerships between all levels of government, and recognising the role of local government, as the level of government most directly responsive to the community, is essential.

Whilst there are currently multiple strategies, plans and policies that have been developed to address the sustainability of Australia's cities, towns and regions, there is no overarching or consistent national framework or long-term position. Implementing such strategies will continue to struggle as they need to be accountable to a national vision or charter for our cities, towns and regions to have any hope of long term prosperity. Such a vision for Australia's cities needs to include an implementation plan and appropriate resources to ensure its effectiveness, as well as agreed tools for measuring and evaluating progress to date.

Stronger commitment at the Commonwealth level, must be complemented with increased and sophistication of resources allocation and investment. In this sense, more adequate resourcing for local government and/or recognition of the diverse roles and responsibilities they play in fostering sustainability at the local level, is also required.