

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION OF QUEENSLAND**

### **122<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

#### **Presidential Address by Mayor Mark Jamieson**

**Tuesday, 30 October 2018  
Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre**

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:**

Good morning everyone and welcome to the 122<sup>nd</sup> Local Government Association of Queensland Annual Conference.

#### **Acknowledgement of Country**

Firstly I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we gather today and pay my respects to their Elders past and present for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of all Indigenous peoples.

I also wish to recognise all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders with us here today.

#### **Other acknowledgements**

- The Right Honourable Graham Quirk, Lord Mayor of the City of Brisbane
- My fellow LGAQ Policy Executive members
- LGAQ Chief Executive Greg Hallam and the LGAQ staff
- Representatives of our conference sponsors
- And I acknowledge all Mayors, Councillors and Council Chief Executive Officers who have joined us here today.

Friends - If there is one word that could describe what the past 12 months has been about in local government - indeed, all levels of government - that word is Trust.

Our communities are finding their trust in a lot of institutions being tested.

And, yes, I include local government in that list of institutions.

But at the same time, it is local government that is best placed to redeem that trust and build on it.

In fact, it is more than an opportunity that presents itself.

It is our responsibility.

I say this because your community places more trust in the job that you do than it does in the work of state or federal governments.

And I put it to you that this should come as no surprise, when we witness what happens at other levels of government on a far too frequent basis.

The Global Corruption Barometer produced by Transparency International and Griffith University this year actually recorded a better result for local government compared with two years ago.

It also found that, of the three levels of government in Australia, it was local government that was considered the most trustworthy.

If you accept that the integrity of local governments comes down to individuals, if we set the standards through our own behaviours, then we are in a pretty good place notwithstanding the headlines of the past 18 months.

The challenge however, is to stay there, and continually build on this result.

More than ever, our communities are looking to local government to generate new opportunities and encourage economic development.

While at the same time, preserving a sense of community and their areas livability.

Meeting those expectations - preserving that balance - means our job is becoming more and more complex.

And again, that is increasingly so, as other levels of government become too focused on themselves and lose sight of the people who put them there.

Over the last few weeks, our new Prime Minister has been reported on two occasions as saying that local governments would be best advised to stick to roads, rates and rubbish.

Well, I ask him, where would Queensland be if the people in this room did just that?

What would happen to our communities if we took our cue from this Prime Minister?

Who would fill the gap in health services in the bush?

Or step in to help pay for the teachers that keep country schools open in the face of declining populations?

Who would have secured an international broadband submarine cable for Queensland, which will provide Australia's fastest data and telecommunications connection to Asia?

Or provide the kick start to a barramundi breeding industry in the north-west of the State?

The willingness - no, the enthusiasm - of local governments to go the extra mile to ensure their communities thrive – on platforms as diverse as our economy, our environment and our social well-being - is the key to that “trust equation” I spoke about earlier.

And it is the evidence that the future prosperity and vitality of our communities is very much dependent on the efforts of our councils.

Our colleagues in Canberra and William Street would do well to recognise they have much to gain in pursuing a genuine partnership with local councils.

After all, the people who see councils go the extra mile for their communities are the same people who elect federal and state members.

Our communities value their lifestyle and their sense of place more than anything else.

It is local councils that understand this truth better than anyone else – certainly much more so than the other tiers of government.

It is councils that sense, understand and seek to resolve the threats to that sense of place.

Let me list a couple of those threats across our State as this will help to paint the picture.

## 1. Drought

According to the Bureau of Meteorology, last month was the driest September in Australia on record.

The nation has not seen a September with less rainfall since Federation.

It is a sobering statistic - behind which exists the real hardship and heartbreak this drought is causing.

You only need to look at how drought dominates the conference motions this year to see the anguish and economic dislocation it is causing in our communities.

Many of you have brought considerable first-hand knowledge of the impact of drought to Brisbane.

Use this conference as an opportunity to deliver that message to Federal and State Governments.

Of course, we acknowledge that there have been some very welcome recent announcements at both the federal and state level about increased funding for drought relief.

I especially acknowledge the Federal Government's expansion of the Drought Communities Program, with its focus on helping towns and rural centres cope with the ongoing drought.

And while the Drought Future Fund announced on Friday is also welcomed, I agree with the Premier that delaying the access to funding to 2020 does not help the people that need it now.

The Palaszczuk Government is currently holding drought policy forums across the State to see what needs to be done to improve community resilience to drought.

Well, one loud and clear message that councils are sending is that there needs to be better co-ordination and focus by Federal and State governments and within both levels of government about drought responses.

And a recognition of the long-term value of building proper infrastructure in regional areas to improve resilience.

Given that between them, the Federal and State governments receive 97% of all taxation revenue in this country, it is incumbent on them to work together for the

betterment of the people who provide this revenue and who are desperately in need of their nation's help.

I believe the policy debate on drought that we will have tomorrow will be a highlight of this conference and I look forward to your contribution.

Drought, of course, only serves to make more acute the vulnerability of many of your councils to financial instability.

## **2. Financial Assistance Grants**

While the funding on offer as a result of drought is welcome, long term financial sustainability of local governments will continue to be under threat unless the entire system of grants and subsidies to councils is reformed.

The system I'm talking about is the one that governs the Financial Assistance Grants.

To be blunt, it is about time governments of all colours stopped this system being manipulated by political whim.

The amount of funding going into Financial Assistance Grants to local government has dwindled dramatically at a time when its importance to local government - particularly smaller councils - has increased.

I will draw you a picture - and it's a picture I never get tired of because it speaks volumes about where the true responsibility for grant reform should lie.

As I mentioned a moment ago, of the total taxation revenue raised in Australia, the Commonwealth accounts for 84 percent, the states 13 percent and local government, just three percent.

At the same time, local councils across the country have had to bear more of the burden of managing and maintaining the public's infrastructure.

In fact, the figures go like this: 3 percent of the taxation revenue to manage 33 percent of the nation's public assets.

But while most taxation revenue finds its way to Canberra's door, our federal colleagues have been more and more reluctant to share that money with local communities.

In 1996, the funding provided under the FAGs was equal to around 1 percent of Commonwealth taxation revenue.

Today the figure has fallen to just under 0.55 percent.

Along with that erosion of support from Canberra, we've also had to endure a ramp up in cost shifting from the State.

Well Friends, I think we all share the view that enough is enough.

Our major political parties are in for a bit of a shock.

Because this issue has united local governments across the nation like no other in recent times.

And just in time for the next Federal election.

Australia is due to go to the polls within the next seven months.

I expect that the poor show that successive governments have displayed when it comes to grant funding to local communities will be front and centre of the election debate nationwide.

Especially in those marginal seats that are likely to decide who gets the keys to the Lodge.

The LGAQ, the Australian Local Government Association and our fellow councils in other states will not waste the opportunity of a federal election to seek big changes to the system of Financial Assistance Grants to local government.

In this, I want to acknowledge the leadership of David O'Loughlin, the President of the Australian Local Government Association, in giving a national focus to a matter of fundamental significance to councils and their communities nationwide.

We are – and will be - focused on lifting Financial Assistance Grants back up to the equivalent of at least one percent of Commonwealth taxation revenue.

Imagine what that could mean for your local communities.

More money for roads, parks, libraries and other community infrastructure.

Enabling all of us to better respond to what our communities need.

Which in itself, is at the heart of that trust objective I spoke of earlier.

If there is one thing we can do as a collective force, it is to get solidly behind this campaign for the benefit of all of our communities.

There will probably never be a better time in the political cycle over the next decade.

So I urge you to take every chance to speak out about why - and how - your local communities will be better off with a bigger share of the Federal funding pie.

### **The LGAQ**

Delegates, I probably don't need to remind you that the next major election after the federal poll will be our own council elections in March 2020.

I hope all of you have kept faith with the pledges that you made to your communities before the last poll.

Meeting each promise is one more reason for voters to feel that their trust in councils is not misplaced.

Your LGAQ has been working hard to ensure that our tier of government reinforces that trust premium in the community.

On policy, perhaps the biggest challenge for the LGAQ over the past 12 months has been the Government's response to the Crime and Corruption Commission's Belcarra reforms.

I won't dwell on this issue, other than to remind you of what I said at the start of this speech about how individual integrity is the key to building community trust.

We have persevered - despite a lack of clarity around the Government's changes, multiple opinions on what they mean, and no sense of partnership with local government emanating from William Street.

Despite all that, your Association agreed to all but a couple of the Government's new rules.

We also proposed a few of our own that went beyond what the Government and the CCC even considered.

And we will continue to ensure the Government understands that the key to making these reforms work is to recognise one simple premise.

That the great bulk of mayors and councillors only want one thing and that is to do the best for their communities.

But I urge you to remember that the standard or injustice that you walk past is the standard you accept.

So let's keep our standards high!

As I said, I won't dwell on this matter.

Let me list of few other wins your LGAQ has achieved for you this year.

Extra grants money from the state has been flowing into your communities over the past two years, be it in the shape of Works for Queensland or other grant programs.

The State has also taken some very welcome first steps towards comprehensive grant reform.

It is our hope that the philosophy behind the formula that drove Works for Queensland is replicated across the board.

The LGAQ worked with the State Government to sort out the issues arising from the Supreme Court's ruling on the Fraser Coast Regional Council's rating resolutions.

And there was also a win in the courts involving water charges.

We've also listened to what you say you need to do your jobs better.

We have appointed expertise and resources to help boost your capacity to attract trade and investment from overseas.

Our new Trade and Investment mentor, former Trade and Investment Queensland commissioner David Carmerlengo, is ready and available to give you the best advice on how to attract investors to your region.

Our data analytics tool, LG Sherlock, is a reality not just the promise it was last year.

It is currently assisting councils find efficiencies in two crucial areas of local government business - fleet management and energy use.



We are rolling out a new web services platform for councils called Jadu, which will make it easier for your council to deliver services to the community.

Peak Services, which combined the procurement, shared services, infrastructure services, as well as training and consultancy services that had been carried out by multiple businesses, has just completed its first 12 months as an integrated, streamlined operation.

I want to acknowledge the dedication and commitment of Theresa Handicott, Brent Reeman and their team at Peak Services for their management of the transition process.

And, of course, as we have done for the past few years, we continue to tell our communities the story of just how important is the work of their council.

We are doing this through our ongoing Better Councils Better Communities campaign.

And there is more than \$1 million worth of advertising and associated activities primed to begin within weeks.

Here's a preview of the new TV advertisement due to hit your screens soon: "Proud to be Your Council".

We are also gearing up for the public release of a range of council performance benchmarks which many of you know as Ready. Set. Go!

The data contained here goes right to the heart of generating that community trust I've mentioned today.

And the LGAQ is just about to launch two Requests for Proposal on a council-focussed Internet of Things network and a state-of-the-art community engagement tool.

The weeks leading up to this annual conference have seen the LGAQ's advocacy in action on the future of waste management in Queensland.

While ensuring that affected councils get the best possible outcome from the introduction of the waste levy, we have also pushed the State to expand its policy horizons.

Let me be clear, it is local government that is taking the lead in ensuring Queensland enjoys a zero waste to landfill future.

It is local government that has adopted a strategy to build a clean, sustainable energy-from-waste industry.

I was in Western Australia last August and saw local governments there, taking the lead on the future of waste management.

Eight local councils have signed up to what will be Australia's first energy from waste facility at Kwinana.

When it is built, this facility will divert up to half of the residential, post-recycling rubbish collection in the Perth metropolitan area from landfill sites.

The LGAQ is looking to facilitate similar ventures here - albeit using the more sustainable technology of anaerobic digestion rather than combustion.

As you know, connectivity is the key principle that I have driven as the President of your LGAQ.

A key part of this sentiment is the need to ensure our communities are making the most of advances in digital technology.

That includes one of the most important parts of our community: our own council staff.

We all can see how digital disruption affects the work we do and how we do that work.

But it's no good waiting for younger generations to grow up and overtake us.

We need our employees in our councils today to be ready to transition to a digital future – one that is already here.

We want our staff to be facilitators of change, not those who are left behind.

Future proofing - including the upskilling of our workforce - is a corporate responsibility and I put it to you, an ethical responsibility too.

And one that we ignore at our own peril as well as for our employees.

The Managing Director of Microsoft Australia, Steve Worrell, argues forcefully in his Building Australia's Future-Ready Workforce report that a key priority for our nation is ensuring that adults already in work can navigate the threats and opportunities presented by digital disruption.

That should be a priority of our councils, too.

The LGAQ has recently released its 2018 Local Government Workforce and Skills plan.

I commend that report and plan to all of you and urge you to take up the opportunities arising from it to ensure your workers remain your organisation's most valuable asset.

Our efforts at the LGAQ have been delivered to you for no net increase in membership subscriptions.

In fact, we handed back millions of dollars in insurance premiums, a regular occurrence these days and one that means councils should not need to be out of pocket for their membership of the LGAQ until at least 2030.

Personally, I have derived enormous pleasure from visiting more than 60 member councils so far this term.

And I'm determined to visit the remainder within the next year.

One of the communities I visited in August is the subject of a fantastic exhibition here in Brisbane at the moment.

While you are here, I encourage you to visit the Palm Island and Our People showcase at the State Library.

The showcase celebrates 100 years of Palm Island and has been a collaboration between the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council and the State Library.

Curated by Indigenous Knowledge Centre coordinator Regina James, it draws on the rich collections of the State Library to tell the story of this complex and remarkable community.

You can view Palm Island and Our People at kuril dhagun at the State Library any day this week between 9.00am and 8.00pm.

And I am sure Mayor Lacey would be pleased to tell you more!

Ladies and gentlemen, it's been an eventful year.

I am grateful for the tremendous support which I have had from LGAQ members and staff.

Your personal encouragement and commitment to support our agenda is greatly appreciated.

2019 promises to be an even more exciting year.

Enjoy the next few days. They are for and about you, our member Councils, Councillors, staff and suppliers.

Make the most of every opportunity that comes your way!

**ENDS**