Voluntary Merger Proposed by East Coast Councils

In a first for Tasmania, the Break O’Day and Glamorgan-Spring Bay Councils have requested the Local Government Board to investigate a voluntary merger. The review, which commenced on 3 July, will be a comprehensive independent process, conducted under the provisions of the *Local Government Act 1993*. The Board’s review will allow for extensive community consultation and will seek to ascertain whether a merger would be in the best interests of the East Coast community. The investigation will provide the opportunity for any council affected by the review to make submissions. The review will consider key issues raised by both councils, including the benefits and impacts of a merger, representation on a merged council, costs associated with merging and managing human resources. The Board will also consider guiding principles that may provide insight for future voluntary mergers of other councils. The Board will be reporting to the Minister by the end of the year and councils will then be given the opportunity to comment formally on the recommendations.

Councils Embrace Online Social Messaging Service

Victoria’s Knox City Council is the latest in a growing number of councils to use online social messaging and micro-blogging service ‘Twitter’ to communicate with residents. The Council is using Twitter as a cost-effective and simple means to provide news and promotional information to residents in a format that is easy to access and to update. Online tools such as Twitter may be particularly useful to convey information to residents during an emergency situation. Residents who follow the Council’s Twitter feeds are able to access updates on council activities and news, either on their computers or mobile phones. Other Victorian councils using Twitter include Boroondara, Casey, Port Phillip, Greater Shepparton and Latrobe. To view Knox City Council’s twitter updates, visit http://twitter.com/knoxcc.

Council Considers Affordable Housing Levy Proposal

An affordable housing levy is being considered by the City of Sydney as one option to increase the amount of housing in Sydney for low to moderate income earners. It is estimated that developers would be required to pay a contribution of $185 per square metre, or allocate 4% of all new development space for affordable housing, to achieve the city’s affordable housing targets. Council planners have gained approval for a report which looks into the potential impact of an affordable housing levy on development in Sydney. The report says such a levy has proved successful internationally, nationally and locally as a vehicle for providing affordable housing on a large scale. It also states that the inclusion of a provision for a levy in Sydney’s City Plan will ensure Council is able to maximise the amount of affordable housing that can be provided. A copy of the report is available online from www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au.

Councils Look to Offset Emissions through Carbon Sinks

A group of councils in south-east Queensland have moved to establish a large vegetation-based carbon sink for the first time in their region as part of the Rudd Government’s proposed national emissions trading scheme. Initially, the carbon sink will be established across four sites on council-owned land. The carbon sink will operate by sequestering carbon in vegetation planted at the sites. The sites will first be used to offset council emissions. Any excess carbon sequestered at the sites may then be used for carbon trading. The potential for the sites to be used for carbon trading is dependent on the final policy adopted by the Federal Government for voluntary offsets and forestry opt-in provisions under its emissions trading scheme.
NT Government’s Framework for Reform in Remote Areas

The Northern Territory Government has released a policy document on remote NT regions which is another important step forward in tackling Indigenous disadvantage through the effective delivery of services to people living in remote communities. The NT Government’s *A Working Future* will focus on the development of 20 growth towns as central hubs, with the capacity to deliver essential services across the Territory. *A Working Future* is consistent with the Remote Service Delivery Strategy endorsed by COAG last year. Under this new Remote Service Delivery Strategy, all governments have signed up to a concentrated, accelerated and coordinated approach to addressing the issue. The benchmark is to progressively deliver in remote communities and townships the same facilities and services you would expect in any Australian town of a similar size. *A Working Future* is a blueprint for the provision of better services and employment and economic development opportunities. Importantly, it also incorporates a remote transport strategy which is vital to the expansion of social and economic opportunities. The document can be viewed online at [www.workingfuture.nt.gov.au/download/working_future_overview](http://www.workingfuture.nt.gov.au/download/working_future_overview).

Resource to Assist Council Managers to Build Healthy Communities

A pilot project, coordinated by Western Australia’s South Metropolitan Public Health Unit, is underway to develop a new resource to assist senior Local Government managers and councillors to build health and wellbeing in their communities. The pilot project includes the development of a training package for councillors and senior managers to raise their awareness of the social, environmental and economic factors contributing to the health and well-being of communities. The training package will assist elected members and managers to be better informed when considering council policies and strategic priorities for the future development of the Local Government area. The training package is based on a similar resource developed in Victoria and would easily be transferable for use by councils in other states. The final training package is expected to be completed by about mid-2010.

New Data Service to Assist SA Councils

Local Government in South Australia now have access to a new and innovative online resource. EasyData consolidates publicly available data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and disseminates the information into State and Local Government regional areas. The data includes economic, environmental and social information which can be used by councils, employment and skills networks, regional development organisations, and people looking to invest in or move to South Australia. Every council in South Australia is represented on EasyData. Information on the site allows councils to compare services, facilities and demographics and data sets can be used by councils to benchmark themselves against other councils. The portal has been established by the Local Government Association of South Australia in partnership with the Australian Bureau of Statistics, SA’s Department of Trade and Economic Development and state agencies. To use the website, go to [www.southaustralia.biz/EasyData](http://www.southaustralia.biz/EasyData).