President's Report 3
Call for Constitutional Recognition

Chief Executive Officer's Report 4
Love 'em or Lose 'em

Faces of Local Government 6
Five Minutes with Mayor Mike Gaffney
New Leadership for Local Government Division
Star Performers

News and Reviews 10
Message from the Minister for Local Government
Hobart Opens Outstanding Mountain Bike Track
Brighton Oval Under the Spotlight
Council Business and Art Form
Motorcycle Warning Signs Launched
Hobart’s Subterranean Heritage Exposed
Landmark Agreement: Another Milestone
‘Consulting Kids’ Workshops
New Process for Registration of Owner Builders
Report Highlights the Value of Parks
Hobart to Host Ministers’ Conference
Tassie Towns Get Main Street Makeover
Living Library Launched in Launceston
Community Strength in Reserve
Knowing What’s Where
Here’s Cheers
New Partnership Agreement with Latrobe Council
Highlights of the 96th Tasmanian Local Government Conference
2008 Local Government Awards for Excellence

Policy 40
Variety is the Spice of Life
Working Together to Manage Emergencies

People and Performance 44
Auditing your Council’s Communications
Optimising Council Performance

Health and Wellbeing 48
Beating the Blues
Heart Foundation Walking Comes to Tasmania
National Ride to Work Day

Environment 52
Collaboration and Cooperation Vital in Response to Climate Change
Raising the Profile of Tasmania’s Threatened Flora
Hobart City Council - Building a Sustainable Community
New Design Prize Celebrates Art from Industrial Waste
Environment Protection Authority Board Announced
Major Grant Puts Hobart Water Innovation Front and Centre
New Mulcher to Drastically Reduce Landfill
Hobart Revamps Popular Water Conservation Rebate Scheme
King Island Businesses Embrace Sustainable Future
Tasmanian Action to Target Government Emissions
Trial Smashes Glass Recycling Ceiling

Tourism and Events 61
Improving the Marketing of Tasmanian Tourism
Tourism Infrastructure and Investment Project
New Flinders Island Development
Huon Trail Tourism Initiative
Youth Week Hailed a Success
Tasmania Performs

ICT 65
National Approach to Broadband Development
Online Certificates Without Delay
Information Resource Provides Online Benchmark Reports

Business and Finance 69
Should You Outsource Your Document Scanning?
Oversight and Accountability in the Public Sector
Insurance Gap Widens for Australians

Roads and Engineering 74
$10 Million Esk Main Road Upgrade Completed
Legislation Toughens Up 40km/hour Limit
Tasmanian Motorcycle Handbook Launched

Around the Nation 78

Diary Dates 80

COVER PHOTO: Tasdance perform Five for Silver at Launceston’s Albert Hall as part of the official Local Government Conference dinner.
Left to right - Amelia McQueen, Malcolm McMillan and James Shannon. Photography by Roger Lovell.
editor’s note

It was a pleasure to see delegates, speakers, sponsors and trade exhibitors relishing the opportunity to come together to share ideas and experiences at Tasmania’s 96th Local Government Conference, held at the Country Club from 18-20 June. This edition of LGAT News features some highlights of the conference, including details of the winners and finalists of the 2008 Local Government Awards for Excellence. Turn to page 29 for details. LGAT would like to thank all those who supported this year’s conference - as committee members, planning partners, sponsors, trade exhibitors, delegates, speakers, workshop presenters, entertainers, contractors and volunteers, for contributing to its success. The 2009 Local Government Conference will be held from 17-19 June in Hobart. Be sure to note the dates in your diary.

With unswerving commitment, endless drive and enthusiasm, and a trademark spring in his step, Mayor Mike Gaffney is “a man on a mission”. As Mayor of Latrobe and as President of the Local Government Association of Tasmania, Mike has worked tirelessly in his pursuit to make a positive and meaningful contribution to his community and to Tasmania’s Local Government sector at a time of unprecedented reforms and challenges. And his efforts have not gone unnoticed. Mike has not only gained the respect of his community, his peers, Council and LGAT staff but, if Premier David Bartlett had his way, it would be a case of “Mike for MP”! Join us for Five Minutes with Mayor Mike Gaffney on page 6.

With one in five Australians experiencing depression at some time in their lives, most of us will have been affected by it, either directly or indirectly. In an era when it has finally become acceptable to talk openly about conditions such as cancer or diabetes, why is it that we still struggle to talk about depression? Whether you’re a manager or mayor, planner or politician, no-one is immune from the condition which has been dubbed “the common cold of mental disorders”, and it’s an issue we cannot continue to ignore. Beating the Blues, on page 48, sheds some light on this otherwise darkened subject.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the Hobart City Council on the establishment of the Leonard Wall Valley Street Reserve in my home suburb of West Hobart. The initiative, featured on page 23, is a wonderful example of a council actively listening to and communicating with local residents, to ensure the best possible outcomes for all concerned. The project also highlights how everyday council decisions are making a positive difference to the lives of Tasmanians.

STEPHANIE WATSON
Editor

LGAT News – Celebrating Life in Local Government
Call for Constitutional Recognition

MICHAEL GAFFNEY, PRESIDENT
Local Government Association of Tasmania

The ALGA battle cry and lobby platform for the Federal Election was “Fair Treatment, Fair Funding, Formal Recognition and Meeting Future Challenges”. There have been significant results over the past few years; such as the Inter Governmental Agreement on Cost Shifting, Roads to Recovery funding and Local Government representation at COAG, and now the willingness of both the Federal Labor and Liberal parties to hold a serious discussion regarding Constitutional funding is gathering momentum.

Recognition in the Australian Constitution of Local Government is one of the most important challenges facing the sector today. Councils deliver the country’s priorities at the grassroots community level and continue to meet the expectations of individuals and communities. Unfortunately, Local Government is only recognised and exists under state legislation and has no legal status or reference in our national Constitution. Given the increased and significant role our sector has in providing services, support and infrastructure to all Australians, it is appropriate for Local Government to be recognised in the most important political document in the Federation.

So important is this challenge, the Australian Local Government Association in conjunction with State Associations, is convening a December 2008 Local Government Constitutional Summit in Melbourne to bring together elected members and community representatives to discuss and reach agreement on a position to put to the Federal Government. Materials have been distributed to every council in the country requesting them to have conversations and provide feedback regarding the concept of Constitutional Recognition. The materials provided have outlined what is in the Constitution, Local Government status (or lack thereof), how changes to the Constitution are progressed, previous efforts at changing the Constitution and the different styles of recognition - symbolic, institutional and financial.

Each of these styles requires a different statement or approach to be included in the Constitution, and each raises concerns and questions. Local Government must carefully examine the issues so unintended consequences do not surface. We must aim to achieve consensus and agreement among ourselves in relation to what it is we’re seeking to achieve and then speak as one voice. To assist with this process, LGAT will be coordinating a Constitutional Forum on 1 August to seek views and inputs from Tasmanian Councils. We are not seeking solutions at this stage but will be using some of the main ideas and themes gleaned from our local forum to add value to the papers and the information sessions for discussion at the national experts’ forum, to be held in Canberra in late August. At the national forum, a maximum of 10 representatives from each state will provide input to the papers and background documents for the December summit - road testing concepts, evaluating broad formats and the overall inputs and expected outcomes arising from the summit.

For a future referendum to be successful, an understanding of the views and opinions of the Australian people is critical and a number of key issues and questions need to be addressed with the community before it is contemplated.

How important to the community is Local Government? Are people supportive of Local Government’s desire to be included in the Constitution? What benefits (if any) will result in Local Government’s inclusion in the Constitution?

Many individuals are not even aware of the constitution, let alone the role it plays, or indeed that Local Government is not recognised and, furthermore, the public may not necessarily be convinced there’s a clear case to have a referendum on constitutional recognition for Local Government. Local Government faces a major challenge going forward but it’s not insurmountable.

Constitutional Recognition has been the battle cry of councils for generations and now there’s an opportunity to work together.

There needs to be a clear message and the most critical issue of all will be having one voice with bi-partisan support. The message needs to be delivered at local and corporate level. It must have relevance to the local community and grassroots advocacy is essential. We must agree to a strategy. We must bring our community with us - we need our communities’ demanding Constitutional Recognition to preserve their local lifestyles so they can continue to enjoy the services and amenity provided by their councils. It’s likely to be a long and, at times, arduous journey but we, especially in Tasmania, have a large support base and our communities deserve our best efforts.

**MARSH**

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July 2008 LGAT News
At a time when the employment participation is as high as it has ever been and there is almost full employment, the opportunity to recruit who we want, when we want has suffered a major downturn. Apart from the fact that the skills being sought are simply not available, people are becoming fussier about where they work and are not simply moving to new positions and organisations just for the money.

At the recent LGMA National Congress, I was fortunate enough to wander into a presentation given by Jude Munro, CEO of the Brisbane City Council. I came away feeling enthusiastic and believing that there were ways of doing better on the employment front. Sure, Brisbane City Council is huge and has a budget comparable to that of the Tasmanian State Government however, as Jude pointed out, it’s not about the dog in the fight but the fight in the dog.

The challenges in the market place for employers are many and varied. They have difficulty in attracting young staff to replace losses; the labour market is hot with unfilled vacancies; many are suffering diminishing competitive advantage as an employer; strong competition exists in both the public and private sectors; and candidates for positions are far more demanding.

Brisbane has adopted a strategy of “recruiting young blood and retaining wise heads”. It recognises people as a valuable resource, promotes initiatives and flexibility, and builds organisational capacity.

In seeking to retain valued employees, Brisbane has adopted the concept of “stay conversations”. Research indicates that 20% of employees leave for reasons influenced by HR arrangements, while 50% of council employees leave for reasons influenced by their managers. Having conversations with staff about the things that need to change can work as an organisational improvement tool as well as a retention strategy and has been used with great success at Brisbane.

As well as establishing an employer of choice branding strategy, the Brisbane program includes a range of initiatives to attract employees. These include the establishment of an alumni providing regular information to former employees about what is happening at the council and welcoming them back to work at some time in the future, and encouraging referrals of friends and family that would be of value at the council.

Perhaps the most interesting initiative relates to their young blood and wise heads programs. The Council has embarked on a process of generational awareness among its workforce, encouraging communication and providing mentoring. It targets “hot skill” areas such as planning, engineering and accounting, and provides career management and mentoring. A Gen Y resource kit has also been developed for managers and team leaders to better understand their young bloods. A youth forum is also provided within the Council to encourage networking.

At the other end of the scale, Council has recognised its “wise heads” and has developed an age management strategy to assist with appropriate workforce planning. Career transition programs are in place and transition to retirement is encouraged through flexible work for those over 50 years of age. Individual and group sessions are held for older employers, and wise coaches are appointed to pass on skills to the younger employees.

Brisbane has recognised the need to be flexible as an employer to recruit and retain talented staff, reduce absenteeism, improve leadership capability and to reduce costs. It has embraced the need to value its people, provide initiatives and promote flexibility, and build workforce capability.

The Association will move shortly to appoint a careers officer who will be working with councils to not only improve recruitment and retention capability, but to have people embrace the Local Government sector as a preferred career option. Our employees are the lifeblood of our organisations and if we don’t love ‘em, we’ll lose ‘em.

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