LGAT News

September 2012

News and reviews

Conference Photography by Layne Hardcastle Photography
Treasuring the Past, Transforming the Future
Highlights of the 100th Local Government Conference

Over 200 delegates from councils across the State gathered at Wrest Point in Hobart, from 11-13 July, for LGAT’s 100th annual Local Government Conference. Themed Treasuring the Past, Transforming the Future, the conference explored some of the challenges which lay ahead for the Local Government sector, in particular the issue of Local Government reform, drawing upon the latest research, case studies and lessons learned from the past.

Following the General Meeting and Annual General Meeting on 11 July, delegates gathered for the ABS/ALGWA Networking Hour, where they heard from Glen Sward, Regional Director Tasmania with the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and enjoyed the opportunity to catch up with some familiar faces and to make new contacts.

The conference began the next day with a welcome address by His Excellency The Honourable Peter Underwood AC, Governor of Tasmania, who took the opportunity to share his views on the amalgamation debate. For the benefit of those who missed his opening address, we have included his speech on page 31.

Over the two days, delegates also heard from inspiring keynote speakers from around the country including: a leading specialist in demographic shifts, change management and future trends, Michael McQueen, who spoke on Winning the Battle for Relevance; the Director of the Centre for Local Government at the University of New England, Prof Brian Dollery, who presented his research findings on the subject of council amalgamations; and Rob Redenbach who left a lasting impression with his unorthodox presentation where he revealed the 7 Secrets for Dealing with People.

During meal breaks, delegates discovered the latest in technology and Local Government services at the extensive trade exhibition in the Tasman Room, where exhibitors joined in on the 100th birthday festivities by decorating their booths and offering great giveaways.

On 13 July, delegates were joined by the Hon Bryan Green, Minister for Local Government, who gave a 30-minute address, followed by the announcement of the winners of the 2012 Local Government Awards for Excellence (see full details on page 34).

MAV Insurance Conference Dinner
Almost three hundred delegates and partners enjoyed an evening of fine food, wine and entertainment at the MAV Insurance Conference Dinner, held onsite in the Boardwalk Gallery. Talented string quartet, Strings on Fire, presented the best of classical music as guests arrived. Following dinner and the award presentations, guests danced the night away to The Tin Men, led by charismatic front man, Jason Patmore.
Life Members Award for Meritorious Service

At the Conference Dinner, Brighton Mayor, Clr Tony Foster was presented the second Life Members Award for Meritorious Service by Sue Smith on behalf of the Life Members of the Association. An active participant in Local Government in Tasmania for 25 years, Clr Foster is now serving his 20th year as the Mayor of Brighton.

Clr Foster has worked hard to enhance and improve the lives of the 16,000 people who live in the Brighton municipality. Significant achievements which have come to fruition under his leadership include: leading the project which made Brighton the first Local Government in Australia to recycle 100% of its waste water, the development of the Brighton Bypass and Brighton Transport Hub, projects that are worth $243 million and have provided employment and much-needed flow-on effects for local business; Chairing a taskforce that saw the creation of the Jordan River Learning Federation following the destruction of the Bridgewater High School by fire in 2007; a $2.8 million Civic Centre and improvements to the Bridgewater shopping precinct, local streets and parks; and the development of strategic agreements for resource-sharing with six Tasmanian municipalities. Clr Foster was also active in accommodating 500 Kosovars fleeing a war in Europe in 1999 and 11 years later, embraced Canberra’s decision to house boat refugees at Pontville.

Life Membership Long Service Awards

The Life Membership Long Service Award recognises those who have served in Local Government for a period in excess of 40 years. This year, Long Service Awards were presented to John Stretton of Waratah Wynyard Council and Wayne Chellis of the Northern Midlands Council.

John Stretton has worked in Local Government for 48 years. He commenced his career at Wynyard Council as a Junior Clerk in 1964, where he undertook formal training in Local Government and gained his municipal clerk’s qualifications in 1969. He worked at Launceston City Council as Committee Clerk for two years before moving to Burnie Council in 1971, where he worked as an Administration Assistant before being promoted to Deputy Town Clerk and then in 1987, as Council Clerk. During John’s time at Burnie City Council, he oversaw the establishment of child care services, the development of the Burnie Civic Centre, the establishment of new council offices and the elevation of Burnie to “City” status in 1988. John went on to become Council Clerk at Waratah in 1990, guiding Council through discussions around amalgamation, then rejoined Wynyard Council in 1992 where he has occupied a number of roles. John continues to provide invaluable knowledge, interpretation and advice on legislative obligations and compliance, historical records and policy development.

Wayne Chellis of the Northern Midlands Council commenced his career in Local Government in 1970 at the Penguin Council on Tasmania’s North West Coast, where he quickly worked himself up to management level. In 1991, Mr Chellis was appointed as Works Manager of the former Longford Council. Following council amalgamations in 1993, he was appointed to his current position of Works and Infrastructure Manager of Northern Midlands Council.

During his 42 years of continuous service in Local Government, Wayne has become highly regarded within the sector and local community for his understanding of Council and community needs. As a manager, Wayne is recognised for his ability to develop affordable solutions, his commitment, practical approach, willingness to assist others, and his honesty and integrity.

Outstanding Commitment and Service to Local Government

Paul Arnold devoted himself to Local Government for 18 years, serving as the General Manager of Circular Head Council and more recently, the Burnie City Council, as their longest serving General Manager. Burnie has transformed in the 11 years Paul has been General Manager, with the development of the waterfront, cinema, the Makers’ Workshop, The Point – West Park, various...
sporting ground upgrades and other social capital works including an upgrade of the CBD.

Paul has served on numerous boards including the North West Advisory Cradle Coast University Council, the Local Government Board, the water and sewerage committee, the Premier’s Local Government Officers Group, and as Convenor for the North West General Managers meetings for six years. Paul has also been the National President of the Local Government Managers Association and Chair for the Burnie Airport Corporation where his accountancy background has been invaluable.

Welcome Address by His Excellency The Honourable Peter Underwood AC, Governor of Tasmania

Last year when I was privileged to open your annual conference I was able to begin by wishing you all Happy Birthday for 2011 which marked the 100th Anniversary of the founding of the then called Municipal Association of Tasmania. Your conference theme was appropriately 100 Years Long; 100 years Strong. However, it appears that although last year marked the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Association, last year’s conference was only your 99th and it is this conference that is the 100th conference. So today is the centenary conference of the Local Government Association and your theme, again appropriate to the occasion, is Treasuring the Past, Transforming the Future.

The opening of the 1936 Local Government Conference by Governor Sir Ernest Clark, who was obviously anticipating your theme for this anniversary conference, was reported in these terms: “Councils as advisers of their own communities often had to make decisions affecting, not only the future, but the present, and their best guide often was what had happened in the past. He did not suggest that older methods should necessarily be followed and no changes made, but the principles and general methods of government did not change materially, and just as councils had received benefits and burdens from their predecessors, so they were bound to influence the conditions of persons who would be living in their municipalities in the future.”

I think that it is fair to say that these days amalgamation is the most frequently used word in discussions about Local Government in this State. I think that it is equally fair to say that there simply is no consensus about the way forward in this respect. I see from your programme that after morning tea you will have the benefit of hearing from respected Professor Brian Dollery on this issue, but with some trepidation, I thought I might take the liberty of dipping into this hot debate by taking a leaf out of Governor Clark’s book and see whether the past will provide you with the best guide as to the future.

In the beginning there were just two councils, Hobart and Launceston. They were formed in 1835 and 1857 respectively. Then between 1860 and 1863, 16 rural municipalities were proclaimed – so obviously amalgamation was unheard of in those times. Au contraire, the ‘P’ word – proliferation – must have been on everybody’s lips for in 1865 the 16 rural municipalities were replaced by 30 municipal districts – one more than we presently have. But that’s not all! After 1865, a number of Boards and Trusts began to provide various Local Government services, with the result that by 1906, Local Government services in Tasmania were provided through no less than 149 local authorities of some significance, as well as a number of other minor bodies.2

However, in 1906, the A-word gained traction and the Local Government Act that was passed in that year introduced sweeping changes. Councils, town committees and road committees were brought together and the Act provided a proper legislative context in which Local Government could function. All local authorities other than those for Hobart and Launceston were abolished and replaced by 47 municipalities. That may sound like a lot but remember all these decisions were taken in times when there was no telephone, no wireless, very few horseless vehicles, and primitive roads.

The 1906 Local Government Act remained substantially unchanged for many decades and if he were here today, Governor Clark would tell you that there is nothing new about the Jude Munro panel report, for there were enquiries into Local Government structures in 1939, in 1960 and in 1974, and all of them recommended substantial reductions in the number of Tasmanian councils. Perhaps Governor Clark was right to say, as he did, that “The principles and general methods of government [do] not change materially.” Certainly, there was a majority of Tasmanians who thought that the principles and general methods of government should not change materially, for nothing came of the recommendations for amalgamation made in 1939, 1960 and 1974. This was so even though the nearly 40 years in which there were these three enquiries saw the development and widespread use of new and efficient machinery, motor vehicles, telephone, radio, television, and airplanes.

In fact, as I have no doubt you all know, no less than 87 years were to pass before the 1906 Local Government Act was substantially reviewed and the number of municipalities reduced from 46 to 29 by the 1993 Local Government Act. Well, what would Governor Clark say about that? It’s a legitimate question to ask, for I think that today there are many people who think just as he did in 1936, viz, that “The principles and general methods of government [do] not change materially”.

Continued Page 32
In one sense you may think that is right but in recent times things have changed even more dramatically than they did in the 40 years during which there were these three enquiries into Local Government. The population of the State has passed the half million mark and almost every aspect of modern life is governed by the silicon chip. For example, today it is possible for a number of people from all around the State to hold a meeting where each can be seen and heard clearly without any of them having to leave their homes. Have these kinds of changes impacted on the services traditionally delivered by Local Government?

I wonder if today, Governor Clark would adhere to his statement that “The principles and general methods of government [do] not change materially”. It might be said that Governor Clark’s statement holds true today, if the cornerstone of Local Government is that everyone should be able to have a say in their local affairs and wholesale amalgamations, which result in increased distances between the ratepayers and their elected representatives, will put this cornerstone at risk. But there are those who argue that a reduction in the number of municipalities will reduce the cost of delivering local services; but there are just as many that say that this is not so. There are councils who say that they have difficulty getting expert advice in planning, engineering and so on and that amalgamation will enable them to get that advice more easily.

Perhaps it is not a case of either amalgamate, or leave the status quo undisturbed. There may be other options and it occurs to me to respectfully suggest that perhaps it is time to go back to basics and ask the question, what do we, the ratepayers, want our local authorities to do? For instance, do we want each local government to develop a planning scheme, different from all the others, but all subject to scrutiny by another body? A major function of Local Government was the delivery of water and sewerage services, but these services are now delivered by three separate authorities, each of which is owned by a number of municipal authorities. You could say that was a sort of amalgamation, but of only one aspect of the services traditionally delivered by Local Government.

So before we ask whether we are for amalgamation or not, maybe we need to ask: What are the aspirations of our community so far as Local Government is concerned? What is the thing we value as the most important so far as Local Government is concerned? Is it good roads, is it lowest rates, is it good public amenities, or indeed is it Local Government at all? It seems to me, but of course I may be wrong, the only questions that are presently asked are should we amalgamate the existing structures and, if so, which ones? Maybe it is time to rethink the whole question of the role of Local Government and identify the communities’ needs that will be best satisfied through the medium of Local Government and those needs that will be best satisfied through other structures that are not necessarily constituted by amalgamation simpliciter. Answers to those issues may well greatly assist the task of defining the shape and size of Local Government for the next few decades. Or is all that unnecessary because, as Governor Clark said, “The principles and general methods of government [do] not change materially.” I am sure that Professor Dollery will have some interesting and insightful views on this important current issue in Tasmania.

For my part I will step back, declare this centenary Local Government Conference open and express the wish that you all find it stimulating, interesting and profitable.

Panel Discussion

The Road to Local Government Reform – Where is it headed?

There is no question that Local Government amalgamation (or structural reform) is a hot topic that generates significant debate and many different views. Some of those views were expressed during a panel discussion on council reform at the conference.

Prof Brian Dollery, the Director of the Centre for Local Government at the University of New England, told delegates that council amalgamations were expensive, angst ridden affairs that always failed to deliver on their promises. He said Queenslanders were “tremendously unhappy” at recent forced council mergers which he described as “disastrous”. “Local Government is valued by the public,” Prof Dollery said. “The public is anti-amalgamation because they value a local voice.”

But Queensland’s former Local Government Commissioner, Greg Hoffman, told the conference that councils in Queensland that had merged don’t want to go back. “The community is (now) broadly embracing the fact,” Mr Hoffman said. “In 2008, Queensland went from 156 councils to 73, but in a large part of the State, there was no change.” Mr Hoffman said he had no support for the view that amalgamation would return reduced rates to ratepayers saying, “Amalgamation is a means to an end. It does not produce savings but it does create opportunities.”

Mr Hoffman told delegates that a merger between the Hobart City Council and neighbouring councils was a “no-brainer”. “Launceston ranks at 13th in a Queensland table when comparing size, and Clarence is 14th in size,” he said.

“But if you put a greater Hobart council together, it would rank sixth and would give the ability to present the new, larger council with a character that, separately, the councils do not have,” he said.
Prof Dollery responded that there was no reason for mergers in Tasmania, and having 29 councils to govern about 500,000 people was not unusual by international standards. “In Tasmania, rates are the lowest on average in Australia and councils operate reasonably effectively here,” he said. “Sharing resources across areas like IT, human resources, procurement and waste management could provide councils with modest savings.”

The Tasmanian Director of Local Government, Mathew Healey said structural reform was the answer, but the question was yet to be framed. “It is a complex question and there is no simple answer. I think it (structural reform) will play a role some time in the future, not sure when, but we need to start at least having a discussion within the next 18 months,” he said. “I see some issues with some councils that may be solved by structural reform but I am not sure it is true to say that big is worse, or smaller is better.”

Mr Green also announced a review of the role of Local Government to be conducted jointly by the State Government and LGAT. “This will give the community more clarity, a better understanding of the role of Local Government and help shape future policy,” he said. “Tasmanian councils serve their communities very well but that doesn’t mean we should not look at improving service delivery, planning for the future and long-term sustainability.”

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A big thanks also to the ALGWA, MC Jack Rheinberger and the many trade exhibitors who supported this year’s event.

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1. The Mercury newspaper, Thursday 28 May 1936

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**Wrest Point Competition Winner**

Congratulations to Roger Self of Tasman Council who registered to attend Conference before 20 June and was drawn as the winner of the Wrest Point Special Occasions Package for two people, valued at over $850. The package comprises two night’s Executive Suite Tower accommodation for two people, two full buffet breakfasts each morning, dinner for two at the Point Revolving Restaurant to the value of $150, a bottle of champagne on arrival, and late 2.00pm checkout. Enjoy!
The Burnie City, Central Highlands and Meander Valley Councils have emerged as the winners of the 2012 Local Government Awards for Excellence. The awards were presented by Local Government Minister, Hon Bryan Green, on 13 July at the 100th Local Government Conference, held in Hobart.

The awards, coordinated by the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) and sponsored by MAV Insurance, aim to promote outstanding achievement, to inspire leading management practice and continuous improvement in Local Government, and to recognise initiatives that have, or are delivering, a positive result for Tasmanian communities.

This year, 21 nominations were received from 15 councils throughout the State showcasing a diversity of significant council projects. LGAT would like to congratulate the winners and thank all the councils that participated in this year’s awards.

Delivering Excellence for our Communities Award

STUDIO BE
MEANDER VALLEY COUNCIL

Officially launched in 2009, STUDIO BE, which took out the Delivering Excellence for our Communities Award, is a community arts resource for sound, video, photographic and multimedia production. It is a ‘flagship’ arts project that has emerged through a development process facilitated by Meander Valley Council and is a creative response to community need that capitalises on opportunities provided by new technologies.

STUDIO BE is founded on community development principles of partnership, participation, empowerment and equality of opportunity. Its aim is to strengthen individual wellbeing through positive relationships and creative expression. It is run by voluntary trustees for all ages, abilities and interests, and is closely networked with schools, colleges and community organisations, offering tailored training and a gateway to employment. It runs regular rock sessions, school holiday programs and individual projects, as well as supporting a wide range of community events.

As the owner of the facility, Council has provided building maintenance and grant support, and has assisted with strategic planning, external funding applications and aspects of event management. An elected councillor also played a pivotal championing role.

An example of STUDIO BE’s work is the recent coordination of a council consultation exercise called ‘Sofa So Good’ that involved taking a brightly decorated sofa around the community and inviting residents to be filmed while sitting on it and chatting about what makes a good life in the municipality. The resulting footage has been saved to a DVD for Council and community viewing.

Having received early establishment grant support, STUDIO BE now operates sustainably though an affordable fee structure. The facility was also recently announced as the winner of the Active Arts category of the 2012 National Awards for Local Government.

Achieving Excellence through Innovation Award

Economic Development Action Plan
CENTRAL HIGHLANDS COUNCIL

Central Highlands Council is unique in its geography, expanse, small population and low rate base, and needs to be innovative in the delivery of services by adding value to everything it does.

(L-R) At the Awards presentation, Hon Bryan Green, Meander Valley Council Mayor Craig Perkins, pictured with LGAT President Barry Easther
Through the development of an Economic Development Action Plan and in consultation with key stakeholders, Central Highlands Council has worked to: stabilise/increase population; promote/expand existing and new business opportunities; increase employment; increase community participation; address infrastructure deficiencies; and promote the municipality as an attractive place for residents and visitors. The plan identifies short, medium and long-term programs to fulfil these objectives within the constraints in which Council operates.

One innovative and highly successful means used to help achieve these objectives was to take the Central Highlands to the Tasmanian community by staging an exhibit during AGFEST, visited by more than 61,000 patrons each year. Central Highlands Council is the first council to have an onsite presence at the event. Twenty-three official volunteers representing the Council, community, business and tourism manned the site, with businesses furnishing the exhibition space and providing giveaways, displays and demonstrations.

The initiative was met with an overwhelming response from ratepayers, visitors and everyone involved. Local businesses donated in excess of $5,000 worth of prizes, providing added incentive for patrons to visit the stand. Central Highlands Council intends to expand its presence in 2013 and has already been approached by other local businesses and community groups that are keen to participate.

As the winner of the inaugural Achieving Excellence through Innovation Award, Central Highlands Council has demonstrated that councils of all sizes and rate bases can be proactive and energetic in promoting their aims and ambitions by developing innovative solutions to local problems.

Delivering Excellence in Natural and Built Environments Award

Burnie Waterfront Rejuvenation
BURNIE CITY COUNCIL

Burnie was once dubbed “the dirtiest town in Australia” due to its strong industrial economy. In 2004-05, following the closure of the paper mill, Burnie City Council developed a long-term concept plan to revitalise the City that has been implemented stage by stage, as resources have permitted.
News in Brief

Shedding Light on Pembroke Park
Sorell Council recently purchased and installed four new, 25-metre training floodlights at the Senior Oval at Pembroke Park. The lights, which are available for use by all patrons of Pembroke Park, are set up to meet minimum AFL night training standards. The $190,000 project was funded by Sorell Council with assistance from the Department of Sport and Recreation who provided $80,000 in grant funding. The new training lights will enable local sporting clubs to fully utilise the park of an evening.

Defining Innovation and Change in Local Government
The Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) has published a Better Practice Guide about innovation and change in Australian Local Government and how such concepts might be practically considered within the sector. The guide is called Innovation in Local Government: Defining the Challenge, Making the Change and is supplemented by a volume containing 12 case studies. The guide aims to be useful to councils embarking on processes of problem-solving in response to social change, and is intended as a reference document for elected members, chief executives, and senior managers with responsibility for managing and delivering strategic community priorities at the local level. The guide can be downloaded from www.acelg.org.au/upload/program2/1337747380_Innovation_in_Local_Government.pdf.

Federal Funding to Upgrade Hobart and Glenorchy Street Lighting
The Gillard Government will contribute $3.375 million in funding to the City of Hobart and Glenorchy City Council for the installation of energy efficient street lighting. The funding will allow the cities of Hobart and Glenorchy to replace more than 5,000 existing low-efficiency 80 watt mercury vapour street lights with energy efficient lighting, delivering significant economic, environmental and community safety benefits to the communities of Glenorchy and Hobart. The initiative is expected to result in a 47% reduction of energy consumption and green house gas emissions, and will also mean a boost for employment.

Launceston Aquatic Wins National Award
The Launceston City Council-owned Launceston Aquatic has been recognised nationally, with its Swim School being named the Best Centre in Australia by AUSTSWIM. AUSTSWIM is Australia’s peak advocate for the teaching of water safety and swimming, and provides industry standard accreditation for swimming and water safety teachers. The Launceston Aquatic Swim School took out the State award in May, along with a commendation for the teaching of infants. Launceston Aquatic employs 16 AUSTSWIM licensed staff, who teach infant and preschool aquatics, through to adults and people with disabilities.

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