National Initiative set to Broaden Women’s Influence

2010 is the Year of Women in Local Government, an initiative to improve the level of participation of women in Local Government leadership and management across the country.

In launching the initiative, Minister Anthony Albanese, Minister for Infrastructure and Local Government, said local governments make an important contribution to the nation, delivering vital infrastructure and services... it is critical that councils and shires, as the level of government closest to the community, reflect the communities that they seek to represent,” he said.

Nationally, less than 30% of councillors are women; 20% of senior managers are women; and only 7% of Chief Executive Officers are women. To help improve the participation of women in Local Government, the Federal Government will provide $490,000 this year for a range of practical programs.

Members of the Tasmania Branch of the Australian Local Government Women’s Association (ALGWA) are keenly involved in recognising and celebrating the achievements of women working within the sector, raising awareness of their unique value and contribution, and providing opportunities for personal growth and professional development.

To kick off the Year of Women in Local Government in Tasmania, ALGWA members celebrated at the February Annual General Meeting with the launch of a specially created cocktail made from Tasmanian ingredients and befittingly named ‘Women’s Influence.’ The cocktail’s creator, Cllr Vaughan Pendlebury of Waratah-Wynyard Council, said, “This cocktail has a mixture that reflects women in Local Government very well - vibrancy, sparkle and colour!”

ALGWA State Secretary, Cllr Alwyn Friedersdorff, of Waratah-Wynyard Council said, “Because most women love comfort, style or colour in their choice of footwear, shoes have been chosen as the representative theme for the ALGWA’s participation in 2010.” The LGMA Conference will run with the theme Step Out with Confidence. In addition, the Local Government Conference Cocktail Hour will be themed Put Yourself in Our Shoes, and will feature a sculptural display of twenty-nine shoes to depict the essence of each of Tasmania’s 29 municipalities. A Field of Shoes will also form another thought provoking depiction of the gender imbalance that is current in Tasmanian Local Government.

As part of the ALGWA’s committed to increasing the numbers of women around council tables, the organisation will continue to work on extending the WomenCan Project in partnership with Women Tasmania and the Premier’s Department, and to refine their mentor program to provide more effective support.

For further information, visit www.algwatas.asn.au.
Sister Cities Unite

Tasmania’s Brighton Council has established a sister city relationship with the Suva City Council in Fiji. The mutual economic and cultural relationship was designed to benefit both Local Government bodies and the communities they represent.

Brighton Mayor Tony Foster said Brighton was already providing technology services to the Suva City Council through its MicroWise business, and Council officers had visited Fiji to assist in upgrading their business systems. This is expected to expand now that the sister city relationship has been formalised.

The sister city Memorandum of Understanding was signed by Mayor Foster and Suva City Council Administrator, Marica Hallacy. “This represents a framework for a modern sister city relationship that is intended to provide mutual benefits which will be measured, tracked and where possible, benchmarked against best practice,” Clr Foster said. “This is a very real and professional relationship where we are looking to help each other develop our council operations and services to our respective communities.”

Under the relationship, both councils will invite representatives of the other councils to major conferences and events, exchange staff to achieve demonstrated gains, exchange ideas and intelligence, and develop commercial and non-commercial processes and procedures to enhance productivity and efficiency.

“We are keen to further expand our service provision in the South Pacific region and our work and relationship with the Suva City Council provides a great platform for this,” Clr Foster said.

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Two significant joint reviews affecting Local Government have been announced by the State Government.

A review of valuation and rating processes was announced on 17 December 2009 by the Minister for Local Government, Jim Cox. The review will assess the effectiveness of the current land valuation model as well as consider other potential models, such as land value. It will also review the rating provisions of the Local Government Act 1993 to achieve contemporary rating practices.

The Measuring Council Performance in Tasmania (KPI) project is also being reviewed in light of national and statewide developments on improving the performance and sustainability of Local Government. The review will investigate the future of the project, data collection requirements on Local Government, and how the project can better contribute to continuous improvement in the sector. The review will be informed by work currently being undertaken on issues such as sustainability, financial and asset management, workforce development, women in Local Government, national planning reforms and water and sewerage reforms.

Mr Cox said in addition to representation from the Local Government Association of Tasmania on each review committee, the views of councils will be sought directly on both issues. “Both reviews go to the heart of the performance and sustainability of Local Government and form an important part of the ongoing reform and modernisation of the sector,” Mr Cox said.

Contact the Local Government Division within the Department of Premier and Cabinet for further information on (03) 6232 7022, or email lgd@dpac.tas.gov.au.
Message from the Minister

As most of you would be aware, I will not be contesting the 2010 State Election and this will be my last contribution to LGAT News.

I have had the pleasure of being the Local Government Minister for several extended periods over the last decade and have been constantly impressed by the performance of the Local Government sector.

The challenges faced by Local Government are great. In the last couple of years, the Government’s focus has been on ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Local Government sector. I believe we have laid the foundations for discussion and reform that will guarantee the strong future of Local Government in Tasmania, and I look forward to seeing the results of that work.

Presently, many Tasmanian councils are struggling. The Auditor-General’s report into Local Government authorities, released in mid-2009, showed that 12 councils had operated deficits for a minimum of three successive financial years. Many councils continue to budget for deficits.

We have made some good progress in recent years but further significant changes are inevitable. Local Government must lead the charge for significant structural reform if the necessary changes are to be accepted by communities around the state. Local Government itself recognises that sustainability is the number one challenge facing the sector and I am pleased at the level of cooperation and collaboration between our two spheres of government.

I applaud the Break O’Day and Glamorgan-Spring Bay Councils for seeking to address their own futures by requesting a review into a potential merger. These two councils are to be commended for their proactive approach to Local Government reform. While a merger was not recommended, the experience of the East Coast councils illustrates to all councils that the Local Government Board review process is fair and thorough, and that reviews are conducted independently with the best interests of communities in mind. I hope that other councils will follow this lead in seriously considering their options for their long-term viability.

I am proud of what the State Government has achieved in the last few years working alongside Local Government to strengthen and modernise the sector. The Premier’s Local Government Council is a key part of our partnership, providing an avenue for frank and open discussion between State and Local Government leaders. I am particularly proud of a number of achievements, including:

- The partnership agreements program and signing of the State’s 50th partnership agreement;
- Raising awareness of the need for diversity within councils and increasing the number of women through the WomenCan campaign;
- Introducing new dog control legislation to better protect Tasmanians from dangerous dogs;
- Increasing resource sharing and collaboration between councils, with significant funding provided under the Stronger Councils, Better Services initiative;
- Reform of the Local Government Board to give the board a more strategic role;
- Starting a debate on compulsory voting in Local Government elections; and
- Substantial progress on financial and asset management planning frameworks, which is crucial to the long-term sustainability of councils and a major part of the national Local Government agenda.

I would like to thank all those in Local Government for their support during my time as Minister, and I wish you all the best negotiating the challenges that lie ahead.

Jim Cox, Minister for Local Government

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March 2010
LGAT News
Launceston City Council Announced an ‘Employer of Choice’

The Launceston City Council is to be congratulated for being chosen as one of four new Tasmanian Employers of Choice announced by the Minister for Workplace Relations, Lisa Singh, late last year.

Launceston City Council was selected along with the other new Employers of Choice - Austal Ships, the O Group Incorporated and Sinclair Knight Merz Pty Ltd, and has undertaken significant work to support its workforce through a difficult economic period.

The Tasmanian Government established the Employer of Choice Awards to encourage businesses to adopt practices to help them attract and retain skilled workers. Clever Tasmanian businesses know what it is that attracts and keeps skilled workers; and they know the benefits of being an ‘Employer of Choice’.

The Launceston City Council has a flexible and ‘family-friendly’ approach to employment. It offers 14 weeks’ paid maternity/adoption leave and two weeks’ paid paternity leave. Employees returning to work after maternity leave can choose to work part-time for a further year before deciding whether to continue on a part-time or full-time basis. Of the 20 women who have taken maternity leave in recent years, 90% have subsequently returned to work with the Council.

Launceston City Council also invests in its staff’s skill and professional development including career counselling, cadetships and traineeships, and financial assistance with further study. Communication is recognised as an essential element of employee relations with regular feedback and performance reviews for staff, quarterly leadership and problem-solving forums and a biweekly employee newsletter, Hot Potato, keeping staff informed on employee achievements and upcoming opportunities for training, development and recruitment.

An employee survey, held in 2009, showed that a clear majority of Launceston City Council’s staff responded favourably to ‘liking the type of work’ they do and a decrease in staff turnover, one of the goals of being an Employer of Choice. 🍀
Tasmania’s First Heritage Skills School Underway

Dedication and an innovative response to heritage management by the Southern Midlands Council promises to deliver a heritage school at Oatlands in the Tasmanian Midlands.

The Centre for Colonial Heritage Conservation and Restoration is a well-planned and ambitious project, currently in its pilot year. The full plan includes three distinct streams of applied research, operations, and conservation and restoration (education and training). This first year is focusing on operations, and education and training.

Southern Midlands Council Manager for Heritage Projects, Brad Williams, said the idea for this school started because Council wanted to combine training opportunities and tradespeople with heritage skills, to conserve and restore local heritage buildings. “It’s really about Council facilitating existing local skills and developing training opportunities to meet the need for restoring and maintaining heritage buildings,” Mr Williams said. “To start with, this school will get teachers and students together and put them on site to teach and learn.”

It is envisaged that the apprentices will mainly work on heritage sites but, if there’s down time, they’ll work elsewhere on Council’s works program. One apprentice has already been employed and Council hopes to employ a total of four apprentices. Plans are also underway to run eight public heritage training events this year for property owners and managers, to help equip them with the necessary skills to restore and maintain heritage buildings.

In addition, the school will endeavour to harness the skills and creativity of students in the University system. “This could work by having a project and getting, for example, history students to research and assist with conservation planning, archaeology students to assist with digs, and students of museum studies to assist with curatorial work,” Mr Williams said. “We see this as another way of providing training and teaching opportunities, while also getting much needed work done to heritage buildings,” he added.

Heritage Tasmania’s Director, Pete Smith, said the centre will help fill a much needed gap in heritage skills in Tasmania. “It can be difficult finding workers in Tasmania with appropriate trade and professional skills because, although there are tradespeople and other professionals with the right skills, there are often not enough of them,” Mr Smith said. “Having a school means that specialist skills will be passed onto the next generation of workers, as well as providing a bigger pool of workers with the specific skills required for the management of heritage buildings now.”

“Oatlands is a fitting location to initiate this type of venture with its high density of intact nineteenth century sandstone dwellings, and the well known Callington Mill and Gaolers Residence are significant sites within Tasmania currently undergoing restoration works,” Mr Smith added.

Southern Midlands Council is keen to get in touch with people with a passion for heritage trade skills, teaching and researching, to harness their ideas. For further information, contact Brad Williams on (03) 6254 5047.
Agreement Marks Milestone 50th Partnership

On 29 January, Premier David Bartlett joined Glamorgan-Spring Bay Council Mayor Bertrand Cadart to sign the second partnership agreement between the Council and the State Government. The occasion marked the 50th agreement signed since the inception of the partnership agreements program over ten years ago.

“Partnership agreements have transformed the relationship between the State Government and Local Government,” Mr Bartlett said. “I am proud of the success of the partnership agreements, and I am proud of the relationship this Government has established with Local Government.”

The partnership agreement with Glamorgan-Spring Bay Council highlights a number of important issues that the State Government and the Council will focus on together over the coming years. A prime focus of the agreement is to establish a road safety program in the area and address road safety issues along the Tasman Highway.

The State Government and Council will also work together to manage the redevelopment of Raspins Beach as a day-use area, increase tourism in the Triabunna marina precinct by improving infrastructure and facilities, improve the coordination of tourism planning, and address disability access and recreation planning.

Mayor Cadart said the new agreement focused on delivering achievable outcomes for the community. “These are important issues for the entire Glamorgan-Spring Bay community and our track record has proven that these are best tackled when we work together with the State Government,” he said.
Social Inclusion at the Coalface

SIMON DUFFEY, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICER - SOCIAL INCLUSION
Hobart City Council

Since 2007 the Australian Government has articulated a commitment to social inclusion as a foundation for policy development. The Tasmanian State Government has also instigated a focus on social inclusion with the formation and activities of the Social Inclusion Unit and the subsequent appointment of Professor David Adams as Tasmania’s first Social Inclusion Commissioner. At the same time, Hobart City Council was seeking to articulate its responses to a broad range of community issues and aspirations based in Hobart 2025: the community’s vision for Hobart. This policy environment provided the perfect context for Council to articulate its role in the Draft Social Inclusion Strategy 2010-2013.

Hobart City Council has defined social inclusion as the fundamental right of every individual to have the opportunity to participate equally - socially, culturally, economically, physically and politically in society; and that the exercise of this right benefits everyone and is the fundamental building block for healthy and whole communities. At its optimum, social inclusion should provide everyone with access to opportunities and choices in life and the personal capacity, self-confidence and individual resilience to make the most of them. For Local Government then, being socially inclusive is about the deliberate actions taken by a council to remove or reduce barriers to inclusion and to create opportunities that facilitate and encourage full participation by its community.

There is, however, no single organisation that can guarantee social inclusion in a community. It is a complex task and everyone has a role to play. This includes all levels of government, the community sector, business and the community itself. Local Government is, however, ideally placed to identify and respond to strengths and opportunities in the community, and to assist in addressing some of the issues.

Hobart City Council has defined its role in social inclusion as including: leadership in addressing social issues; advocacy on behalf of the community; management of land, infrastructure and facilities in order to benefit the community; connection of stakeholders as part of a wholistic response; informing the community; and facilitation of innovative community-based initiatives that respond to local need.

To ensure that Hobart becomes a more socially inclusive city, Hobart City Council is focusing its actions under seven outcome domains or areas of activity. These are: community participation; vibrant places; affordable living; effective transport; community safety; economic participation; and health and wellbeing. Council will develop a Social Inclusion Implementation Team to ensure that implementation of actions is occurring in accordance with the agreed time frames and will also meet biannually with a newly formed community sector think tank.

Constitutional Reform of Local Government

Local Government has a long-held desire to be included in the Australian Constitution as the third level of government. To date, there have been two previous unsuccessful attempts to reform the Constitution to include Local Government - in 1974 and 1988. However, inclusion of Local Government in the Constitution has remained an issue on the sector’s strategic agenda, to correct the historical oversight of not formally recognising Local Government’s important role as the closest level of government to the Australian people.

The early 1970’s marked the starting point of modern debate about the constitutional recognition of Local Government, with the issue identified for further investigation at the first session of the Australian Constitutional Convention in 1973. Following the unsuccessful 1974 referendum, the 1976 session of the Australian Constitutional Convention passed a resolution that all states should recognise Local Government in their constitutions. By 1990, the constitutions of all the Australian states recognised Local Government. However, while the State Constitutions guarantee the continued existence of a “system” of Local Government, there is otherwise little protection given to the sector.

At the end of 2008, a Local Government Constitutional Summit brought together panels of experts and engaging communications experts to develop a framework for achieving a referendum on constitutional recognition of Local Government. Delegates stressed the importance of retaining the three levels of government, particularly the importance Local Government remaining under the jurisdiction of State Government and state legislative and accountability frameworks.

Local Government has only one taxation power (property tax) and is not financially capable of funding the variety of local level infrastructure and services it is required to perform. As a result, the sector is reliant on external funding, including grants. Commonwealth Government funding to councils is provided through Specific Purpose Payments, which are made to state governments and then distributed to Local Government bodies. Other payments are made directly to local councils, either on the basis of an agreed allocation, or on the basis of successful applications.

Constitutional recognition of Local Government would formalise the structures and precedents that are already in place, and give security and certainty to Local Government to enable it to provide the required services.

The Australian Constitution outlines that the Constitution can only be amended through a referendum. To be successful, a referendum requires a “double majority”, which is a majority of Australian voters in a majority of Australian states. This is a very high hurdle and history has shown that referendum votes are essentially conservative. Only 8 of the past 44 referenda have succeeded, with the last successful referendum held in 1977.

This means that most people under 50 have never voted in a successful referendum. Research, including recent research commissioned by the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), shows poor levels of understanding amongst the public about the Australian Constitution and referenda. ALGA believes there needs to be a broad campaign of civic education prior to any referendum, in order for the public to understand both the process and implications of the reform question being proposed.

A federal parliamentary committee is currently investigating the rules governing referenda. To view these, go to www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/laca/index.htm. The ALGA has made a submission to the inquiry which outlines its position in this area. For details, visit www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/laca/index.htm.
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More than Memory: An Intergenerational Story

A Kingborough Council project to bridge the gap between Generation Y and the elderly is the subject of an inspirational documentary, More than Memory, launched in December 2009.

The documentary traces nine Kingston High School students working with eight clients of the Manor Gardens Club respite service over a 14-week period, with activities ranging from drama workshops, social lunches, interviews and film-making.

Kingborough Mayor, Dr Graham Bury, said the aim was to break down stereotypes and build friendships between two groups of the local community that rarely socialise together and often have negative misconceptions about each other. "More than Memory is a moving film that dispels myths about ageing and dementia, as well as negative-preconceptions about young people," Mayor Bury said. "The students showed they were respectful, caring and patient, with a great need for and an appreciation of their elders; while the older people were open, friendly and ‘present.’"

As part of the project, the students and older people participated in drama workshops to break the ice, play and express themselves through improvisation and storytelling. The students also attended additional workshops where they learnt about dementia and how to engage with elderly people, as well as how to encourage them to tell their stories which could be subject matter for a documentary. The students were also taught formal interviewing and documentary-making skills.

After getting to know the clients and their stories, each student interviewed a client and produced a short film. More than Memory, produced by Move Media, documents the interactions of the participants over the weeks and the friendships and personal development that occurred during the process.

Mayor Bury said the project was challenging and enlightening for all involved. “The young people developed greater self-esteem, team building skills and self-confidence, as well as developing a greater understanding of people with dementia,” he said. “The Manor Gardens clients thoroughly enjoyed working with the students and had measurable health and wellbeing improvements.”

The project, funded by the Department of Health and Ageing, is an outstanding model for promoting intergenerational relations and highlights how different generations can enrich each others’ lives. The documentary will be used as an education tool to promote understanding and social inclusion in the broader community.

For further information, contact Michelle Allen at Kingborough Council on (03) 6211 8130, or email mallen@kingborough.tas.gov.au.
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Brighton – brighter futures

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Because Everyone Smiles in the Same Language...

Today’s young people (coined ‘Generation YouTube’) engage with media like never before... so when a group of young women from Glenorchy City Council’s Young Women’s Multicultural Group needed to tell their peers about what it was like coming to Tasmania, making a video was on the top of the list!

Creative Director, Sandi Doherty said video is the ultimate communication tool for young people these days; not only are they more comfortable in front of a camera than previous generations, they also expect to be talked to in video, I’m afraid a brochure just doesn’t cut the mustard anymore!

The girls from Afghanistan, Cambodia, Africa and Australia worked closely with a film crew from Solid Orange Media to develop a script, work out interview questions, even do group bonding exercises with the camera! The crew’s Cameraman, Fredrick Assenheimer, said the process validated what the girls had to say about coming to Tasmania and, over a number of filming sessions, we watched their confidence bloom.

The DVD has gone on to become a great communication tool for Glenorchy City Council who have used it at conferences, forums and workshops. Last year, the video was launched as focal point for an educational program taking discussion about multiculturalism into Tasmanian schools.

“Glenorchy City Council foresaw the potential to recognise and highlight the stories of newly arrived young women in their community, and their vision certainly paid great dividends... we now live in a more educated and aware community,” said Ms Doherty.

To see excerpts of the video, visit the Solid Orange website at www.solidorange.com.au.

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Branching Out: New Connections, New Directions

Branching Out: New Connections, New Directions is a two-year social enterprise project, developed by Tasmanian Regional Arts (TRA) and funded by the Westpac Foundation, to equip community arts organisations with skills and expertise to generate their own resources, thus placing less emphasis on grants and more on economic sustainability and capacity building.

TRA are working with two community groups in the first stage of the Branching Out project which has great potential to grow the capacity of Tasmanian artists, community arts organisations and art spaces as it is implemented.

A social enterprise is an enterprise or business that has social, community and financial outcomes and benefits. Most of the arts organisations that fall under the umbrella of TRA are small and volunteer-based. The 28 branches and affiliate organisations work closely with their communities to develop and coordinate events and projects that support visual arts, performance, literature and music. There is a high degree of commitment and passion behind these activities and a grass roots approach that supports a range of practitioners including hobbyists, published writers and accomplished artists, performers and musicians.

With access to limited funding, these organisations often rely on small grants and the in-kind support of local councils and businesses to support arts and cultural activities in the community. They generally all share the aim of ‘delivering accessible and relevant arts and cultural activities to their local community’ and these activities contribute greatly to the social, cultural and economic capacity of regional communities.

The benefit of these dynamic groups to their communities is immense. They support their local artists through exhibitions, provide regional audiences with access to live performance through programs such as TRA’s Touring Program, encourage visitors to local festivals and events, and encourage a sense of community, participation and inclusion. TRA are exploring the potential of incorporating social enterprise ventures within these small groups and organisations to encourage increased financial stability through income generation, improved governance and the development of key partnerships.

For further details on the Branching Out project visit www.tasregionalarts.org.au, or contact Kylie Eastley on 0439 262 344, or email kylie@tasregionalarts.org.au.
News in Brief

**Free Tiger Bus Service Launched**
Launceston City Council’s Free Tiger Bus, launched on 1 December 2009, has been an outstanding success, with more than 900 people utilizing the service each week. The Free Tiger Bus makes it easy and affordable for people commuting to use the Inveresk Car Park and catch the bus to and from the central business district. It also enables locals and visitors to hop on and off the free bus at several key sites including Launceston Aquatic and the Launceston General Hospital. The Free Tiger Bus is one of several initiatives Council is introducing as part of its Parking and Sustainable Transport Strategy, developed in response to wide community consultation.

**New Era for Industrial Relations**
A new national industrial relations system, which took effect from 1 January, has been introduced to place all businesses, councils and community sector organizations on an equal footing in terms of industrial relations, and to simplify operations for employers and employees. The *Forward with Fairness* package, introduced by the Federal Government, has reintroduced basic protections and fairness into Australian workplace law. The new system was formed to promote economic growth while ensuring vital rights and protections for workers. Employers or workers with queries about the new industrial relations system should contact Fair Work Australia on 1300 799 675.

**Brighton Set to Benefit from Second Partnership Agreement**
On 3 December, Premier David Bartlett and Brighton Mayor, Clr Tony Foster signed the second Partnership Agreement between the State Government and the Brighton Council. The agreement will guide collaboration in the areas of: economic development; community safety; community wellbeing; education; and communication. As part of the partnership agreement, an Urban Renewal Plan will be developed which is the first of its kind in Tasmania aimed at large scale urban renewal. Other priorities include: improving the visual appeal of streets and state roads in the Brighton area; the implementation of the Brighton Structure Plan; working to attract tenants to the Brighton industrial estate and transport hub; a range of social initiatives; and working to promote good health in the community.

**Protecting Your Possessions Against Bushfire**
The Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM) has released an information sheet, *Storing Collections in High Bushfire Risk Areas*, aimed at assisting individuals working with cultural collections to reduce the risks of fire when storing precious possessions. Since the Black Saturday fires, we all recognise that fires of a catastrophic degree can cause extreme damage on a scale previously unimagined. However, stories that have emerged from the experience reveal that some treasures did survive. With careful storage and by using heat-resistant materials, the risks can be reduced. The *Storing Collections in High Bushfire Risk Area* information sheet can be found on AICCM’s website at www.aiccm.org.au.