

## NATIONAL ROUNDTABLE ON RURAL-REMOTE AND INDIGENOUS LOCAL GOVERNMENT – 29 AND 30 JULY 2010

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### Communique – 16 August 2010

The Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) convened a national Roundtable on Rural-Remote and Indigenous Local Government in the nation's capital on 29 and 30 July 2010. Attending the Roundtable were representatives of Federal Government agencies, State Government departments, local government associations, professional associations, local government practitioners, academics, and ACELG consortium and program partners. All states and territories were represented at the Roundtable.

In opening the Roundtable, the Chairperson of ACELG, the Hon Margaret Reynolds, referred to the vital role local governments play in shaping and positively influencing rural, remote and Indigenous communities. One of the principal aims of the Roundtable was to further explore this role and contribute to the development of programs to better deal with the particular challenges facing rural-remote and Indigenous communities.

Not long after its establishment, the Centre initiated three **scoping studies** to fully identify the issues impacting on remote and Indigenous councils and to develop a range of initiatives that could better equip these councils to provide sustainable local governance for their communities. ACELG commissioned **Edith Cowan University** (ECU) in Western Australia and **Charles Darwin University** (CDU) in the Northern Territory to undertake scoping studies in those two jurisdictions. The **Local Government Association of Queensland** (LGAQ) had already completed a study into the capacity building needs of non-amalgamated councils and ACELG separately commissioned **Dr Michael Limerick** to undertake a scoping study into the capacity building needs of Indigenous councils in Queensland to complete the picture in that state.

The Roundtable commenced on the afternoon of Thursday 29 July 2010 with a challenging yet inspiring address by **Mr Stuart Duncan**, the Chief Executive Officer of the Northern Peninsular Area Regional Council (NPARC). Stuart led the NPARC through major organisation and cultural change and in the process, developed a corporate planning framework to better serve its residents and provide a robust, measurable and sustainable basis for financial and asset management. This initiative was recently recognised as a category winner at the 2010 National Awards for Local Government.

On the morning of Friday 30 July 2010, the authors of the four scoping studies presented their study findings. Participants spent some time discussing the priority needs identified in the four scoping studies. These were distilled into a series of themes, including:

- **Expectations and role** – the expectations of rural-remote and Indigenous local government, the unique role it plays the system of local government, and the concept of 'mainstreaming'

- **Remoteness** – the unique challenges facing this group of councils due to their remote location, size, scale and scope of services provided
- **Legislative compliance** – the burden of legislative compliance and the withdrawal of government services
- **Governance challenges** – including the need to build the capacity of councillors and staff and encourage more effective community engagement
- **Strategic issues** – the vital role councils play in economic development, community building and strategic long-term planning
- **Workforce development** – staff recruitment and retention; further examination of the leadership role of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) in remote Australia; and Indigenous recruitment
- **Councillor and staff development** – new approaches to training, peer support, mentoring, networking, education pathways
- **Council support services** – including sharing best practice resources, staff and councillor exchanges
- **Structure and relationships** – including structural reform, regional collaboration, shared services and inter-governmental relations
- **Organisation capacity** – financial sustainability and asset management
- **Appropriate systems** – for financial management, human resources and IT generally.

Roundtable participants suggested actions and strategies for ACELG to pursue in response to the priority needs. Options available to ACELG include to seed new initiatives, better integrate the needs and challenges of rural-remote and Indigenous local government into other program activities, dissemination of good practice resources and prompting other spheres of government to take action where appropriate. Roundtable participants considered a range of pathways to progress the strategies including via inter-governmental channels such as the Local Government Joint Officials Group of the Local Government Planning and Ministers' Council.

In closing the Roundtable, the Centre's Director, Professor Graham Sansom, commented on the goodwill evident to collectively and collaboratively address the capacity building needs of rural-remote and Indigenous local government. On behalf of ACELG, Professor Sansom gave an undertaking to formally respond to the strategies proposed by participants; to elevate the issues within its sphere of influence; and to ongoing collaboration with the local government sector, other spheres of government, state local government associations, professional bodies and ACELG consortium and program partners. In response, participants expressed an eagerness to continue engagement with ACELG and play their part to advance the interests of rural-remote and Indigenous local government.

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## About ACELG

The Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) is a collaboration of universities and professional bodies committed to the advancement of local government. The Centre was established in mid 2009 with funding support from the Commonwealth Government to showcase innovation and best practice across local government and encourage the adoption of innovative practices and solutions.

ACELG's activities are carried out through six program areas:

- Research and policy foresight
- Innovation and best practice
- Governance and strategic leadership
- Organisation capacity building
- Rural-remote and Indigenous local government
- Workforce development.

### **Further contact**

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