

Councillor Giles - Report from the National General Assembly of the Australian Local Government Association

Tuesday, 22 July 2025

Council

Public

Council Member:

Councillor Giles

REPORT

Report from the National General Assembly of the Australian Local Government Association

Canberra, June 25-27 2025

I attended the National General Assembly representing the City of Adelaide and as proxy for Councillor Noon who was unable to attend due to the calling of the supplementary election in the Central Ward.

Communique adopted at the end of the National Assembly

More than 1,300 local government leaders from across Australia gathered in Canberra from 24-27 June for the 31st National General Assembly of Local Government (NGA).

We were welcomed to country for the National General Assembly by Ngunnawal woman and Co-Chair of ACT Reconciliation Council, Selina Walker. The Assembly recognised the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples as traditional custodians of the ACT and recognised any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. The Assembly paid its respects to their elders past, present and emerging, and acknowledged the vital and ongoing contributions First Nations peoples continue to make to our nation.

Her Excellency the Honourable Ms Sam Mostyn AC, Governor-General of Australia, formally opened the Assembly and spoke about the role of community leadership and local engagement in building national resilience and unity, including the importance of teaching our younger generation the importance of civic governance.

We heard from a range of Federal Ministers across the Assembly including: The Honourable Kristy McBain MP, Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher, The Honourable Julian Hill MP, The Honourable Josh Wilson MP, The Honourable Darren Chester MP, Dr Anne Webster MP and the Honourable Kevin Hogan MP.

There was broad acknowledgement from Ministers that councils play a critical role in supporting their communities and that the role has expanded significantly, as has the financial pressure councils face. That is why local government is calling for urgent action to ensure the financial sustainability of councils.

Delegates heard from Mark Bouris AM and Dr Merriden Varrall who unpacked global economic forces shaping Australia's local economies, including trends in trade, security, and investment.

Jason Clarke, world leading consultant on issues of leadership and innovation, closed Day 1 of the NGA with an energising and practical presentation on how councils can take bold ideas and translate them into tangible, community-focused change.

Day 2 of the NGA featured the launch of ALGA's exciting new research "Adapting Together: Local Government Leadership in a Changing Climate". The report finds that Australia's councils are expected to spend more than \$2 billion over the next five years to future-proof their communities from the changing climate, resulting in up to \$4.7 billion in avoided costs to communities.

ALGA President Mayor Matt Burnett noted "Climate-resilient infrastructure is expensive and takes time to build, so we need sustainable funding from the Federal Government to implement long-term planning and adaptation now and into the future". That is why "We are asking the Government for a new \$400 million climate adaptation fund, distributed to all Australia's councils each year, to deliver ongoing and sustainable place-based climate solutions" Mayor Burnett said.

Councils considered the way AI is shaping the future with presentations from Stephen Scheeler, founder of The Digital CEO and co-founder and CEO of Omniscient, and Tim Golsby-Smith, co-founder and CEO of myLot.

The 2025 NGA saw the return of concurrent listening sessions providing an interactive platform for delegates to engage directly with federal agencies and sector experts on key policy issues. The listening sessions included:

- Housing and community infrastructure – where the discussion covered a range of challenges from housing affordability, the prohibitive cost of housing infrastructure, ideas around housing and homelessness.
- Emergency management capacity and capability – where attendees shared examples of what has worked in their communities and highlighted remaining challenges. This included the need for long-term funding certainty and better integration of local knowledge in disaster preparedness and recovery frameworks.
- Local government jobs and skills – where attendees highlighted key issues attracting workers to the regions, promoting council careers to young values-led workers, better access to local training, cost-shifting concerns, migrant workforce support, and housing shortages as a major staffing barrier.
- Safer roads - discussed infrastructure funding and general maintenance, speed management, driver behaviour, and the broader questions of regional vs urban specific problems.

City of Adelaide Motions

Motion 61 – Active Transport toolkit for Local Government

- This motion was passed with no objection

Motion 62 – Federal Government to work with LGA to commit to 30% of journeys to school by active transport by 2030 (30 by 30)

- This was debated and passed with an amendment also include providing infrastructure for school crossings and other safety measures. I spoke to this motion and accepted the amendment.

Motion 188 – Federal Government Policy Green building occupancy and the need to consider refurbishing as an option

- This motion was late on the agenda and so time ran out before it was debated and so it was referred to the executive of LALGA for consideration. City of Perth made contact with me as they are also involved in adaptive re-use and keen to share experiences.

Sending motions from City of Adelaide to the National Assembly was well received and raised some issues which had not been considered previously. Our leadership in the areas of active transport and climate change assists other smaller and regional councils. It also highlights the work we are doing on a national stage. For all these reasons, it is important we continue to consider sending motions to the National Assembly each year.

Australian Government Dialogue – Friday 27th June.

On Friday 27th, Federal Government Ministers had direct dialogue with Local Government mayors and councillors with the ability to ask direct questions.

The Ministers involved were:

- Katy Gallagher – Minister for Finance, Government Services and Women
- Julian Hill – Assistant Minister for citizenship and Multicultural Affairs
- Josh Wilson – Assistant Minister for Climate Change

Climate Change

The main message of the presentation prior to questions was the focus on productivity is the federal government national priority and adaptation in relation to climate change, including energy performance, efficiency, and electrification. A Federal report is soon to be released – National Climate Risk Assessment Adaptation Plan, which will give a risk analysis for the Nation.

Productivity

There will also be a Productivity Round table organised by the Treasurer and there was a call for Local Government to be at that table, however, no commitments were given. The Minister urged Local Government to make a comprehensive submission to that Round Table.

Migration and Citizenship

In relation to Migration and citizenship, there will be a round table in August which will look at housing, population policy and also mechanisms of becoming citizens such as shortening the time before someone can become a citizen, processing citizenship applications more quickly, updating the citizenship code and looking for civic and

other options for citizenship ceremonies. The Federal Government is also keen that States establish Migration and Population policy so we can tackle the problem of migrants moving to larger cities, particularly Sydney and Melbourne. This will involve providing social and cultural infrastructure, an area that local government is well placed to support. Things such as support for cultural events, engagement of women in the community, support for cultural community clubs and organisations and wrap around services that welcome people and connect them to the community from day one. This would create migrants who feel connected to their local community and more likely to stay than move elsewhere.

Women and Local Government

From the floor there was significant discussion and response from the Minister about the problem of Women's participation in Local Government. Some of the issues raised were the lack of maternity leave for Mayors, the salary of Mayors and provision of childcare. In addition, there was a shared national concern about the impact of behaviour and the inadequacy of behavioural standards, codes of conduct and complaints procedures to address behaviour which discourages women's participation.

Funding for Local Government

There was an overwhelming call for increased and untied funding for Local Government (to 1% of the federal budget) recognising the importance of Local Government as the third level of Government of our nation and vital in addressing national and global issues at the local level. The Minister for Local Government responded that it was unlikely that any increased funding following the local Government sustainability review would be untied as the Federal Government was keen to link funding directly to outcomes on the national agenda. She urged councils to make submissions to the Local Government Sustainability review.

The major priorities and pressures for Government in relation to finance are health, NDIS, defence and housing.

Housing

Once again, the issue of the need for all three levels of government to work together to meet the housing targets for the nation. Local Councils are engaged in a number of innovative and creative solutions, including the City of Adelaide which could be better supported by the Federal Government.

Summary

I was grateful to have the opportunity once again to attend the National General Assembly, albeit due to the inability of Councillor Noon to attend as our representative. The Assembly is a good opportunity to listen to speakers address the issues that impact directly on our work as councillors as well as being able to learn from the work of others and discuss common issues.

It is also important to be able to understand the Federal government national priorities and the challenges we are all facing so we can develop local solutions. The Federal Government is genuine in having a real dialogue with Local Government and not only participates as keynote speakers but also allocates a whole day for direct discussion to answer the questions of Mayors and Councillors from across the nation.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A – Letter to the Lord Mayor from Mayor Tanya Taylor – Schools Active Travel and Motion 62