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Creative City: Diversity and City Vitality

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Thank you for the invitation to attend and speak.

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The Australian Local Government Association is the national voice of local government, representing 560 councils across Australia.

I am currently president of the Association and I am also Mayor of Marion City Council, a metropolitan council in the southern suburbs of Adelaide, South Australia.

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First some background about Local Government in Australia.
Local Government is one of three levels of government in Australia. It is not recognised in the national constitution, but exists under the legislative direction and responsibility of Australia's states and territories.

There are 563 local councils across Australia. Local government is dynamic and extremely diverse in size and shape, ranging from Brisbane City Council with a population of almost one million a budget of 1.7 billion dollars to small remote councils with populations in the hundreds, covering hundreds and thousands of square km and annual budgets of only a few million Australian dollars.

Local government's national significance is underlined by the fact that it employs more than 195,000 Australians – more than 10 per cent of the total public sector. Local government owns and manages non-financial assets worth more than $300 billion, including more than 80 per cent of Australia's road network, and has annual revenues of more than $32 billion. The local government sector provides around 2 percent of Gross Domestic Product.

Local government revenue totals around $21.4 billion each year, with some 85 per cent of this coming through its own revenue sources, principally rates and the levying of fees and charges.

State/territory and federal governments provide up to 15 per cent of local governments revenue, by way of grants or other special purpose payments.

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Scope of Responsibility
As the closest level of government to the people, the vast majority of local government work is focused on direct provision of local services, planning and the provision of local and regional infrastructure.

Local government services and infrastructure are used every day by every Australian. Whether it's using a footpath, driving to work on a local road, a visit to the local library, or having your rubbish collected, our lives are touched by local government in many different ways.

While infrastructure and services provided by councils varies significantly, they can be widespread including providing:

- local roads
- sporting facilities
- community halls
- community transport
- art galleries, museums, libraries
- parks and gardens
- drainage
- planning and development
- building assessment
- environmental health services
- environment management
- cultural development and heritage
- settlement services
- local economic development and tourism
- affordable housing support
- infant immunization
- aged care
- youth services
- child care
- emergency and recovery services
- water and waste management services

It is fair to say that Australian society would not enjoy the quality of life and community experiences is has today without this infrastructure and these services being provided by local government.

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Local Government and International engagement

Local government in Australia has a long history of establishing international links ranging from the traditional sister city arrangements, to highly structured strategic, economic, social, cultural, educational and capacity building alliances.

While most of the traditional sister city arrangements were established in the 1970s, with a focus on friendship and cultural exchanges, a number of Australian local governments have extended their international activities into more specialised activities in areas such as

commerce, trade, education exchanges, economic development and international assistance.

 Australian cities have also played an important role in bringing a local democratic perspective to international policy debates and contributing expertise and resources to international programs.

The interim findings of a soon to be published research undertaken by the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) reveals that more than 160 of Australia's 563 local governments (or over 29%) participate in nearly 400 international relationships involving a sister city, friendship city, co-operative arrangement or other form of international partnership. In Australia's two largest populated States -New South Wales and Victoria where these relationships are more common,41% and 53% of councils are involved, respectively.

By far the most popular activity appears to be education and student exchange, followed by cultural and art exchanges, then trade and business development and finally sporting and community development activities. There are also a number of Australian local governments involved in capacity building activities in the Asia-Pacific region (particularly Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste) via on-the-ground staff and councillor exchanges to develop governance systems, waste management systems, planning systems, IT and record keeping systems, and the like.

It is clear that local governments in Australia are making their mark internationally. They are already active in cultural, economic, educational and capacity building and the number of relationships is increasing. Many local governments are happy with the way they currently conduct their international activities, and the partnerships are serving the purpose for which they were established. But others have identified the potential to be more strategic players, and perhaps these councils should consider positioning themselves to take on an expanded role by offering to partner with the Commonwealth Government to put a local face on matters of international diplomacy, aid and trade.

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Diversity and Multiculturalism

Australia is one of the most multicultural countries in the world. 'Multicultural' is a term that describes the cultural and linguistic diversity of Australian society. Cultural and linguistic diversity was a feature of life for the first Australians with more than 500 Aboriginal languages and different cultures.

Since European settlement immigration has been a major factor that has contributed to Australia's diverse population.

Australian Governments throughout the years have used immigration policy to manage Australia's population number and composition. When the population needed to expand immigration increased. When Australia has experienced labour shortages, immigration for

skilled workers has increased. Australia's population today is 23 million most of whom have ancestors that came from other parts of the world. Around 25% of the population were born outside Australia.

Multiculturalism is therefore a feature of modern Australian life, and it continues to give us distinct social, cultural and business advantages.

All levels of government have policies that recognise, accept, respect and celebrate our cultural diversity. Local Government has a long history of building sustainable and inclusive communities, celebrating the numerous benefits arising from diversity and cultural development.

Australia's multicultural policy today gives particular emphasis to:

- the goal of community harmony and social cohesion;
- the government's access and equity strategy, which aims to ensure government services and programs respond to the realities of Australia's diversity; and
- promoting the benefits of our diversity for all Australians.

At the national level, local government believes it is critical that the Australian Government continues to provide strong leadership and funding to support diversity across the nation. However we accept it is up to local government to implement relevant multicultural policies at the local and regional level, with appropriate resourcing support from all levels of government.

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Challenges facing local government in planning and urban management

The role of local government continues to change as the communities that councils serve change and evolve. These changes arising from both global, national and regional/local variables.

Over the past 30 years the roles, responsibilities and range of services and infrastructure provided by local government have evolved in response to domestic demographic changes and changing urban and regional settlement patterns.

Some of the major trends have included:
- increased urbanisation to major capital cities such as Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth;
- growth in some major regional centres, particularly the so called "sea change" and "tree change" phenomena such as northern NSW and south eastern Queensland;
- the decline in rural populations;
- the continuing diversity of cultures; and
- an ageing of the general population.

Council services now generally include a range of social and human services, in addition to the more traditional physical infrastructure of roads and rubbish collection.
This has come about due to community expectations, state and Australian government inducements, and the withdrawal of services traditionally provided by other levels of government, particularly the state and Commonwealth.

As a result some smaller councils have been forced to scale back traditional services or seek to enter into regional arrangements or local government amalgamations.

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The Liveable Cities Programme, Australia

The Liveable Cities Programme was part of the previous Australian Government's commitment to National Urban Policy. This initiative sought to target more effective planning and design, and efficient use of new and existing infrastructure, in 18 of the country's capital and major regional cities.

The $20m programme from 2011–13 was developed to meet the challenges of supporting quality of life in these cities, with an emphasis on ensuring diversity and vitality was maximised. Approximately 21 projects were funded across the country and it was hoped that they will provide lessons in achieving good planning outcomes that can then be applied in other cities in the future.

A diverse range of projects were funded including completion of cycleways in metropolitan councils to looking at creating resilient outer suburbs, ensuring areas development on the edge of major cities were well-designed, vibrant and people friendly with public transport linked with new housing development and ensuring the areas are more walkable and less car dependent.

Urban Revitilisation Experiences

Local government plays a significant role in ensuring the future sustainability of Australian cities and towns through implementing and partnering a variety of revitalisation initiatives.

Whilst each project is unique, it is possible to summarise the key considerations that are needed to ensure our cities remain international competitive and deliver some of the world's highest levels of sustainability and livability for local residents, the business sector and visitors. These include:

 1. Identity and heritage - strong emphasis on local identity. Each city is different, but a successful revitalisation builds on the local cultural and historical roots.
 2. Access and connections - whether the focus is on pedestrians, cyclists and people with disabilities or on motorised connections, access and connections are a critical success factor in successfully revitalising a region.
 3. Safety, diversity and inclusion - ensuring that everyone feels safe and has connections to a locality is a fundamental requirement. Respecting cultural backgrounds in the planning of

public spaces and allowing appropriate responses to built form leads to community participation and engagement.

 4. Landscapes, parklands and art - The need to work with the natural environment will ensure quality responses in the development and appreciation of open spaces, be they parklands, waterways, landscaping, or complementary artworks and street furniture;

 5. Mixed use - It is now universally accepted that a common objective is the need to achieve an appropriate mix of residential and commercial/employment uses in key developments.

6. Tourism - While the main focus of much urban plans relates to the local community, there is an acceptance that visitor needs must be catered for and that globalisation generates innovation and excitement that generates a range of benefits, be they social, environment, cultural or economic.

Critical success factors for liveable cities
From an Australian local government perspective there are strong parallels between creativity, diversity, vitality and pursing a liveability and sustainable development agenda for our cities. Key lessons being that:

- The development of creative cities depends upon sound leadership, planning and investment on the part of local government in partnership with other levels of government and the private sector, which together has the ability to shape the conditions within which creative practices might flourish;

- The value of liveability as an overall theme, among others, in the development of a community's sustainability plan and strategic framework;

- The overarching role of public engagement in the articulation of what is meant by liveability – an acceptance that liveability may differ significantly from community to community;

- A recognition that liveability extends to economic dynamism and career opportunities as well as recreational, aesthetic, cross-generational and cultural activities;

- The ability to embed liveability concerns into the culture of the municipality rather than politically motivated short-term initiatives;

- The recognition that the provision of a diverse residential community with a full complement of services, means that a system approach to both the city region and the individual neighbourhood is required. This will ensure that individual neighbourhoods do not become 'liveability ghettos', but have a real and vibrant place within the whole city region context;

- The development of creative cities depends upon sound leadership, planning and investment on the part of local government, which has the ability to shape the conditions within which creative practices might flourish; and

- Commitment to a long-term effort, spread over several years involving many participants.

Conclusion
In conclusion, there are many factors that contribute to diversity and vitality in local government areas. Councils are at the forefront of providing local services, planning and the provision of local and regional infrastructure in their communities. We must plan and

invest in creating communities that reflect community diversity and that meet the needs of our residents.