

## **President's Opening Address**

Acknowledgements :

Mayors and Shire Presidents, Councilors, Alderman and delegates

I acknowledged the Central Arrernte (pronounced ar-run-tey) people who are the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land we are meeting. I pay my respect to their elders past and present.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome delegates to Alice Springs for the fourteenth National Local Roads and Transport Congress. This is the second time the Congress has been held in Alice Springs, our first visit was in 2006. It is great to be here again..

I also want to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank Mayor Damien Ryan, President of the Northern Territory Local Government Association and Tony Tapsell, Chief Executive of the Association for hosting this Congress and all the support that Damien and his staff have given ALGA in the planning and preparation for this Congress. Can I also thank Alice Springs Town Council for their hospitality and support for this event.

Delegates, this year's Congress comes at a critical time. In September the Federal Coalition was elected to Government. With their election we see some new faces and some old familiar faces taking on Ministerial responsibilities. I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate all Ministers on their appointment and the Government on its recent success.

In particular, I look forward to working with the Prime Minister, Mr Abbot, the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Truss, and the other Ministers for the benefit of local government and the people we serve across the country.

I shouldn't let this opportunity go by without singling-out two people who over the years we have worked closely with and who have offered great support - Warren Truss and Barnaby Joyce. Warren has been a great supporter of ALGA and this Congress and we look forward to working with him again in Government.

Unfortunately, you will have heard that Warren will not be able to join us here in Alice, due to Parliamentary commitments. Indeed today is the first day of sitting for the new Parliament. This is just bad luck, because I know Warren was keen to talk to you as Deputy Prime Minister and your Minister, and to be able to tell you about the Government's plans directly.

When we knew about this clash I spoke to Warren and he was keen to send a special video message so we will run that during the morning. I want you also to note that I will be meeting with Warren immediately after this Congress at the COAG Standing Council for Transport and Infrastructure and I will provide him and all state and territory ministers with an up-date on the congress outcomes and I will take the chance to relay to him the views you express during the Congress.

The second person I wanted to single out was Barnaby Joyce who has become the Minister for Agriculture. I single him out because I would also like to acknowledge his work on our behalf while in opposition as Shadow Minister for Local Government, and congratulate him on his appointment.

Changes of Government bring not only changes in Ministers. They also bring changes in ideas, changes in policy and changes in priorities. Importantly, a change in Government brings opportunities.

Opportunities to advocate your policies to new a audience, explain your needs and propose sensible solutions to the problems we all face. This change also provides opportunities to review what we have been doing, and think about better ways of doing things and working together.

The theme for our Congress is: Sustaining our roads - Good Business, Good Governance, Good Bottom line.

We chose this theme for good reason. First it reflects one of our, and I know it's one of your, major priorities - Roads. Second is that roads are our business - some would say core business. And finally, as core business we together should do everything we can to manage these community assets to the best of our ability and advocate for the necessary support to do the job.

Over the past 14 years this Congress has talked about the importance of local roads and the role they play in our nation's transport system. Our narrative has changed, but in short, our objective remains the unchanged - we need more help - better funding and more support to manage these assets.

These are valid claims and we will, over the next 2 days, talk more about that.

But, ask yourself the question, can we just continue to do more of the same? Do the arguments we put stand up to scrutiny? Do they cut through? And are we being listened to by those that matter?

OR

Is now the time to do something different? Is now the time to review what we are doing and change?

Delegates, I said in my introduction that a change in Government provides opportunities. Opportunities to advocate to a new audience, opportunities to explain our needs, and opportunities to propose sensible solutions to the challenges we all face. I also said it provides an opportunity to review what we have been doing, and think about better ways of doing things and working together.

This is what this Congress is about. Over the next 2 days I want us to review our approach. I want to hear from you about the policies you think we should keep and the policies we should change. I want to hear about your issues and solutions so that your roads, local roads around the country, are fit for purpose.

Now, for those of you that have studied the Congress program, you will also notice we have added an additional stream of work. That is - regional airports.

Delegates, there is no better place in Australia that demonstrates why we have included this stream of work this year.

Coming here to Alice Springs in the heart of the Northern Territory in November reminds us that in this vast country, for many regional, rural and remote communities, airstrips and regional airports are a primary source of access to the outside world, and for remote communities particularly in the wet, they are often the only source of access to the outside world.

Regional airports matter. Like roads - they provide access to other communities, services and markets. Many of your councils own and manage them, and we know you need support to keep them going. ALGA would like to know more about your issues and we think that this Congress is a great place for you to share ideas, to network and to help us shape an agenda for regional airports. I look forward to those discussions.

Delegates, in coming to office the Prime Minister, Mr Abbott, has made it clear that he wants to be known as the Infrastructure Prime Minister. This is warmly welcomed by ALGA and I am sure by local governments across Australia because we know how important our infrastructure is to the future prosperity of our nation.

The Prime Minister also clearly made the link between infrastructure and a more productive economy. Indeed both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition have talked about productivity and acknowledged that Australia's GDP is growing too slowly.

When speaking on boosting productivity and securing greater prosperity the Prime Minister notes that: '... in a competitive economy, standing still is not an option'.

Over the weeks and coming months I am sure we will hear more about the Government's approach to productivity growth, infrastructure development and its plans for the future.

One thing is for sure, we will not be standing still. ALGA will be in there working for local government to improve our nation's competitiveness, increase productivity and growth throughout Australia.

For those of you who know me, and I said this at this year's National General Assembly of Local Government in Canberra earlier this year - I am a very strong supporter of evidence based policy.

If we are to be taken seriously and if our argument is to resonate with the Government, we have to have the evidence to support our case.

Delegates, in a short time I will be introducing Mr Jeff Roorda who has prepared the '2013 State of the Assets Report'. It provides evidence of the backlog in expenditure and evidence on the need for further work. Not only extra funding but further work on asset management.

We are also delighted to have Mr. Casey Vander Ploeg who can give us insight into how some of the challenges we are facing here in Australia are being dealt with in Canada. And tomorrow we will hear from Philip Combes who will talk about New Zealand's experience in local government funding infrastructure.

We have Rickard Hancock, from the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator's Office to update us on road reforms and the new access regime. Just as important, tomorrow Richard's team will be working with ARRB to run a workshop on a variety of heavy vehicle issues.

We will also hear from Meena Naidu about progress on the Heavy Vehicle Charging and Investment work. The outcomes of this reform work are vital for local government, with implications on road user charging and road funding.

We will hear from Katie Cooper, CEO of the Alice Springs Airport representing the Australian Airports Association who will share her insights into the challenges facing regional airports.

We have a workshop on regional airports and are very lucky to have Professor Doug Baker to work through a range of issues and share ideas about how this matter might be progressed.

We have a selection of excellent presentations from councils on their work, a message from the Minister who cannot be here today because it's the first week of Parliament and a similar message from the Opposition Spokesperson, Anthony Albanese, who also is not able to attend for the same reason.

As I mentioned earlier, I will be catching up with the Minister at the COAG Transport and Infrastructure Standing Council on Friday and I will be sure to provide him with details of our discussions and the Congress outcomes.

Finally, we have a wrap-up session - Roads at the Heart of the Community - where we want to hear from you and settle a Communiqué which will outline our approach from here.

Delegates, these events could not occur without the generous support of our partners. For this event can I now acknowledge them publicly: They are:

- Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development
- McArthur Management Services
- GHD

- Austroads
- UD Trucks
- Aus Spec
- National Heavy Vehicle Regulator
- Australian Rural Roads Group

Thank you and delegates please make yourself known to our speakers and talk business with them. I am sure there are ways that we can benefit each other.

Now - it's a busy agenda and a lot to cover - so let's move on.