



Department of  
Communications  
Information Technology  
and the Arts

our reference

Secretary

**Helen Williams AO**

Mr Trevor Rowe  
Secretary  
House of Representatives Standing Committee  
on Economics, Finance, and Public Administration  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Rowe

You wrote to me on 17 June 2002 inviting a submission to your Committee's inquiry into *Local Government and Cost Shifting*.

The Department has examined the terms of reference for that inquiry and we consider there is little of direct relevance to this portfolio. However, we have drafted a background paper (attached) that provides details of the activities we have undertaken in relation to local government in the hope that this will be of value to the Committee.

The Local Government Fund administered by the Department aims both to encourage local governments to use telecommunications networks and services to improve their capacity to work together, and to deliver better quality services to their ratepayers.

If you require further clarification on the Local Government Fund, please contact Mr James Barr, General Manager Networking the Nation Branch, on 6271 1055.

Yours sincerely

Helen Williams

1 August 2002

House of representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration	
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# **Programs Administered by the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts targeted at Local Government**

## **Introduction**

The Local Government Fund will provide \$45 million over the five years 1999-2000 to 2003-2004 to support regional and rural local government authorities in using telecommunications to deliver improved services and benefits to their communities. The aim of this expenditure is to ensure local governments have the opportunity to use advanced telecommunications technologies and networks to provide state of the art services to their communities. Each State will receive funding of up to \$6 million, \$6 million will be provided for the Territories and the remaining \$3 million will be maintained in a national pool.

Projects can be located within any regional, rural or remote area addressed by the Networking the Nation program, i.e. locations outside the capital city of each State and Territory. Contributions from other sources are expected towards the capital city component of projects with broad State/Territory or regional coverage.

Local government bodies, as defined under the Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act 1995, local government associations and equivalent local government bodies of external territories are eligible for funding under the Local Government Fund.

Funding under the Local Government Fund has now largely been allocated.

## **Project Priorities**

The Local Government Fund supports projects that assist local government authorities in regional Australia to use advanced telecommunications to improve, or make more affordable, service delivery to the communities they serve. The types of projects supported include:

- telephone based access to local government information and services;
- online access to local government information and services;
- service delivery utilising video conferencing facilities;
- the development of best practice design and delivery models that could be broadly replicated and could position Australia as a world leader in this area; and
- the facilitation of collaboration between local government authorities to develop and implement best practice models.

The provision of public access points to advanced communications services, such as the Internet, was also considered, especially where this supports the above priorities.

Aggregated, whole of region (or whole of state) approaches were given priority, subject to support from individual local government authorities involved and local government associations.

Priority was given to projects which contributed to integrated service delivery across the tiers of government, i.e. projects which:

- supported integration of service delivery across agencies and/or jurisdictions;
- allowed people undergoing a particular life or business event to go to one point, on line, to conduct the transactions with Government which are required as a result of that event; or
- built infrastructure that was based on common standards, such as the Australian Government Locator Service standard for metadata and 'Gatekeeper' to support authentication and identification in online transactions.

Where appropriate, it was a condition of grants to local government agencies that any electronic publications or services funded under the program had to be supported by metadata and adopt relevant Australian Government electronic publishing and/or electronic authentication standards, as agreed with the States.

## **Projects Supported**

### **Queensland**

In Queensland, funding is enabling the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) to implement technology solutions into rural and remote councils to allow them to improve their services to their communities and to change fundamentally how they do business. The LGAQ has received funding for two major projects.

- The "Connecting Communities Phase 1" project (\$1m) includes development of a telecommunications strategy for QLD local government, a videoconferencing pilot in 14 communities, the introduction of telephone Bill Pay for those councils without this facility, and an e-commerce pilot.
- The "Connecting Communities Phase 2" project (\$4.7m) is aimed at delivering an On-Line System for Queensland Local Governments that complements and extends existing service delivery channels. The focus is on getting a majority of Councils online, so that by the end of the two-year project 108 of the 120 mainstream regional, rural and remote Councils in Queensland will have:
  - highly interactive websites that offer access to a broad cross-section of Councils and community information;
  - the ability to conduct a wide range of financial applications; and
  - the ability to access geographic information system databases on-line.

### **New South Wales**

The NSW Local Government & Shires Association (LGSA) has received funding for a *Local-e Online Action for NSW* project which identified priority services to be delivered online, backed by the development of principles, standards and processes to ensure that the prospective online delivery system would be effective and seamless. The second Phase of this project aims to provide councils with the capacity to deliver the 10 high priority and the 15 medium priority services they identified. It will also provide participating councils with e-procurement and geo-spatial applications and ongoing training and support will also be provided to participating councils.

### **Northern Territory**



The Local Government Association of the Northern Territory (LGANT) has received funding to undertake the provision of equipment and development of online systems to enable the Territory's 66 regional Municipal and Community Councils to improve service delivery.

This project emerged from a planning study funded by NTN examining the needs of regional Municipal and Community Councils.

The Municipal Councils will be assisted to better serve their communities through developing online services and transactions, upgrade their IT infrastructure, improve telecommunications links and investigate e-procurement.

Community Councils will be assisted to upgrade their equipment, networking and telecommunications links, develop online business systems to streamline interaction with other Government agencies, promote their community through web publishing, and access training and support for online functions.

LGANT will be assisted to develop a 'Local Government Network' and a common portal for municipal and community councils that will enable sharing of resources and expertise through a private 'extranet' for the councils and an open Local Government Entry Point for the public.

### **Tasmania**

The Local Government Association of Tasmania has received funding to undertake 17 discrete projects to provide Tasmania with online services through its local Government Online Services project (LOGONS). These projects include services identification, common usage, hosting and tools, interaction and transactions, electronic procurement, authentication, privacy and security, local government entry point, local laws online and performance measurement. LOGONS is undertaking extensive ongoing consultations with Tasmania's Councils, and has recently commenced consultations with industry.

### **South Australia**

The South Australian Local Government Electronic Services Program will provide regional councils with integrated websites, an electronic procurement capability, council documents online, public registers online, electronic tenders, and community information online. The project will deliver a 'one stop shop' approach for regional South Australia through a centralised database and single point of access to all local government services and information. The centralised database will allow users to access information from multiple local government authorities without having to go through each council's websites.

### **Western Australia**

West Australian Local Government Association has received funding to implement a strategy to enhance and enable delivery of online local government services to regional communities in Western Australia. Key elements include:

- Education programs and strategy development tools for Council decision makers;
- Training and support services for Council staff and users;
- Website development tools and publishing templates;
- Website hosting and maintenance;
- A Local Government extranet to facilitate information exchange amongst Councils;
- A Shared Services Model for resource sharing and common use services contracts;
- Online Bill presentation and payments system;

- eProcurement and online tendering;
- Common GIS system and spatial data aggregation;
- Online business processes such building permits and licensing; and
- Telecommunications common use contracts and infrastructure.

The online services and applications under consideration will be finalised subject to feedback and funding prioritisation by Councils.

## **Victoria**

The Victorian Local Government Online Services project aims to implement an online service delivery system for Victorian local government that:

- improves customer service;
- provides benefits to business;
- enables more efficient local government administration;
- displays and provides leadership to rural communities; and
- provides a single window to local government.

The project consists of nine subprojects that are being processed in parallel. The subprojects are not independent but overlap and interact at various points. A brief description of each subproject follows;

- Ejourney – create awareness of online service delivery among Councils by presentations, training etc;
- Web and Intranet Enablement – Develop and implement consistent web sites and Intranet systems for rural and regional Councils;
- Interconnected Local Government – a range of tasks associated with data collection and dissemination systems for local government for a range of common transactions with State and federal government;
- Payments Online – negotiation of a sector wide epayments gateway for all Victorian local government;
- Shared Services – investigation and pilot of Councils sharing networks and applications on a bureau basis;
- Eprocurement – negotiation and pilot of an eprocurement system for all Victorian local government;
- Planning Online – Development of automated process for lodging development applications online
- GIS – Purification of council data to allow introduction of web based GIS capabilities across the State; and
- Telecommunications – investigation of options for rural and remote Council to purchase access to improved telecommunications to underpin the online service delivery capability.