



*Advocating for the people of Western Sydney*

# **ISSUES FOR WESTERN SYDNEY FEDERAL CABINET MEETING**

## **APRIL 2012**

Prepared by the

**WESTERN SYDNEY REGIONAL ORGANISATION OF COUNCILS LTD**

Level 1, Suite 2, 49 Campbell Street, Blacktown NSW 2148

(P.O. Box 63, Blacktown NSW 2148)

Tel: (02) 9671 4333; Fax: (02) 9621 7741

Web: [www.wsroc.com.au](http://www.wsroc.com.au); [www.westernsydney2030.com.au](http://www.westernsydney2030.com.au)

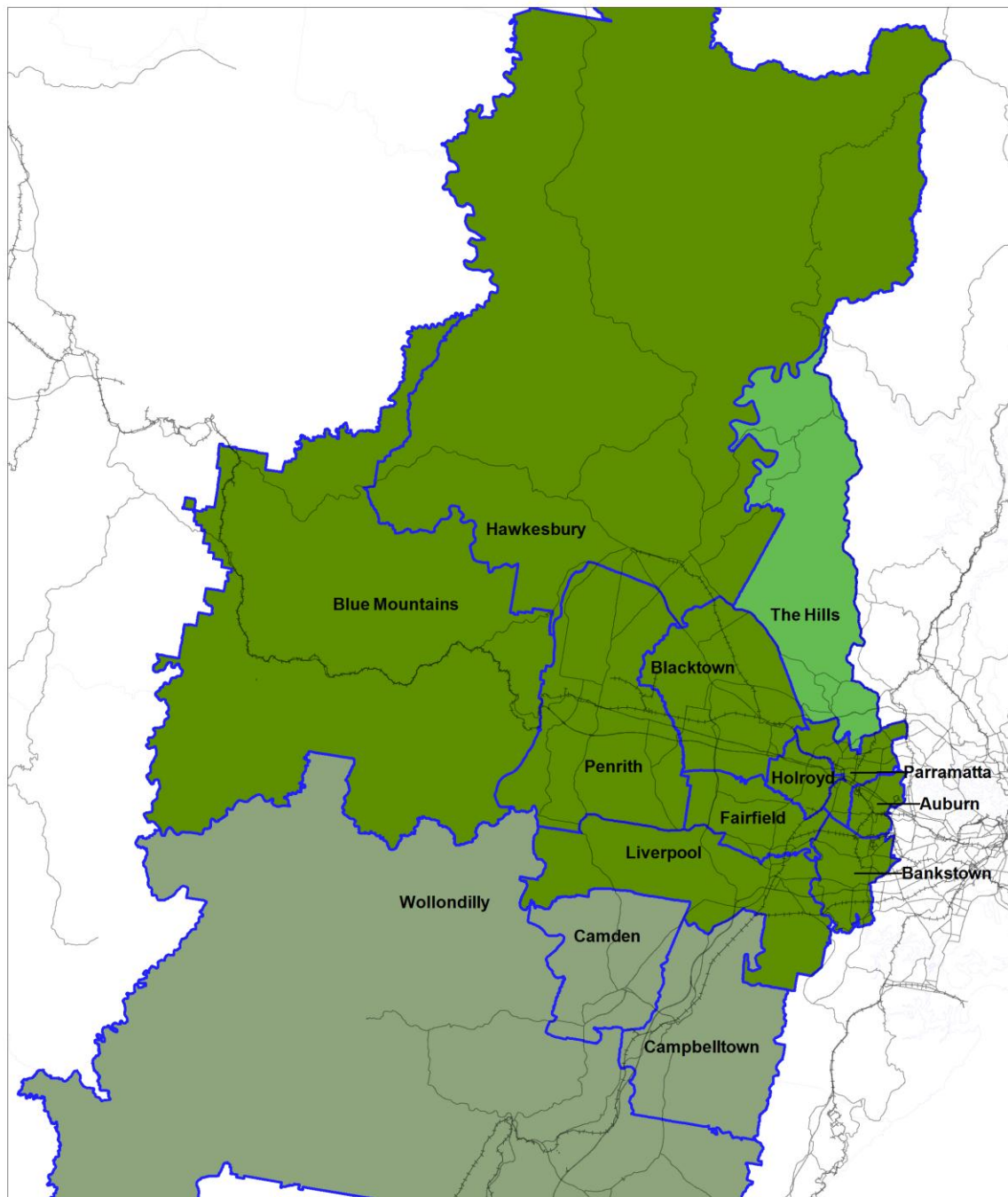


## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

MAP OF GREATER WESTERN SYDNEY	4
ABOUT THE WESTERN SYDNEY REGIONAL ORGANISATION OF COUNCILS	5
THE REGION'S ECONOMY	6
EMPLOYMENT	7
TRANSPORT	8
PLANNING	9
EDUCATION	10
HEALTH	11
HEALTH – ACCESS TO SERVICES	12
ENVIRONMENT	13
HOUSING	14
THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT	15

## GREATER WESTERN SYDNEY



Based on 2006 Local Government Areas  
Source: ABS 2006  
Produced by WESTIR Ltd.

©Commonwealth of Australia, 2012

Major roads and highways

Railway lines

GWS	WSROC	MACROC	The Hills Shire

## ABOUT THE WESTERN SYDNEY REGIONAL ORGANISATION OF COUNCILS LTD

---

Formed in 1973, the Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils Ltd (WSROC) represents ten of the fourteen local councils in Greater Western Sydney: Auburn, Bankstown, Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Holroyd, Liverpool, Parramatta and Penrith. This area is home to around 1.6 million of Greater Western Sydney's 1.9 million people.

WSROC provides a strong voice for the residents of Western Sydney. With a reputation for considered policy analysis and advocacy, WSROC's focus is on transport, employment and regional planning.

WSROC is actively engaged with its member councils in developing an integrated approach to regional planning and infrastructure issues.

WSROC arranges and manages a range of procurement and other joint activities for WSROC members, also open to non-member councils, securing significant savings for participating councils.

WSROC also acts as a "one-stop shop" for organisations, businesses and agencies seeking to engage with Western Sydney councils and residents.

WSROC's Water in the Landscape project - funded by the NSW Environmental Trust – provides innovative education and information programs to help our community preserve and enhance the region's waterways and environments.

WSROC has been a leading voice on a number of key policy issues in recent years including:

- key transport infrastructure needs for Greater Western Sydney
- sustainable population issues from food security and urban agriculture to renewable energy and the challenges of urban renewal.  
Our National Population Summit on July 20, 2010, featured leading political and policy figures including the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard and then Opposition leader Malcolm Turnbull.
- changes to infrastructure levies on residential developments which resulted in a comprehensive policy review agreement, a decision to increase the cap and provide an additional \$50 million fund to assist with vital infrastructure.
- housing affordability issues, highlighted in our recent successful Housing Affordability Summit
- public health and preventative health issues through our partnership with the NSW Government's Centre for Health Innovation and Partnership.

## THE REGION'S ECONOMY: BASIC FACTS

---

### Demographics

- Greater Western Sydney is home to 1.9 million people, with approximately 1.6 million living in the WSROC area.
- The population of the region is expected to grow by another 1million over the next twenty five years.
- In 2006 35% of the population had been born overseas, with the highest concentrations in the Auburn (60%) and Fairfield (55%).
- A large percentage of new migrants to Australia settle in Western Sydney.
- The population is relatively young – 49% are under 35.

### Economy

The economy of Greater Western Sydney is the third largest in the country, adding \$85 billion a year to the nation's GDP.

### Employment

- 70% of the region's population is of working age (15-64)
- 65% of the labour force is employed full time
- 29% employed part time
- 6% unemployment
- some pockets have unemployment up to 11% (Fairfield)
- 30% of employed travel outside the region for work

### Occupations

The main industries as employers of our residents are:

- Manufacturing 13.4%
- Retail trade 11.1%
- Healthcare 9.3%
- Construction 8.1%
- Transport, postal, warehousing 6.5%
- Education and Training 6.4%
- Professional, Scientific and Technical services 5.4%
- Financial and Insurance services 4.8%
- Information, Media and Telecommunications 2.0%

### Socio-economic Disadvantage

- According to SEIFA rankings, four of Sydney's five most socio-economically disadvantaged LGAs are in Western Sydney.

## PLANNING

---

The Department of Planning estimates that by 2036 there will be an additional 1 million people in Western Sydney, representing 60% of Sydney's population growth. This will mean close to an extra 400,000 additional dwellings in the GWS region – an increase of over 64 per cent on 2004 levels.

Under the NSW Government's Metropolitan Strategy 70% of Sydney's projected population growth is expected to be housed in existing suburbs and 30% to be in greenfield developments.

The projected population growth has profound implications for infrastructure needs, both social infrastructure and transport infrastructure.

To the extent that the population increase adds to urban sprawl, it also threatens Sydney's \$1 billion a year peri-urban agriculture industry.

It will also have significant environmental impacts including an increased carbon footprint and threats to the region's biodiversity by land clearing, habitat fragmentation and degradation.

Western Sydney's air quality is already under pressure from motor vehicle and industry pollution within the region as well as circulation of airborne pollution from elsewhere in Sydney.

There is a need for the Federal Government, perhaps through its Liveable Cities Program, to provide greater support for state and local governments in their efforts to cater for this rapidly expanding population.

### Key Policy Priorities

- A more integrated approach to land use planning which incorporates residential developments with commercial and industrial employment-generating developments
- Policies to protect prime agricultural land
- Government support to prevent unacceptable time lags between population growth and the provision of social and transport infrastructure
- Funding to assist with much-needed urban renewal projects to accommodate the rapid population growth
- Federal Government funding for renovating key employment and industrial centres close to sources of skilled labour
- Release of strategically placed Commonwealth land to support employment growth
- Programs to assist with protecting biodiversity threatened by urban sprawl
- Support for flood mitigation measures in the Hawkesbury Nepean Valley

## EMPLOYMENT

---

With unemployment in Western Sydney around 1.5% higher than the national average and in some areas up to 11%, creating new employment opportunities is one of the biggest challenges facing Western Sydney. Western Sydney will need an estimated 380,000 extra jobs in the next twenty five years in order to maintain current employment levels. Research by the University of Western Sydney for WSROC has shown that on current trends, the region's job shortage will be around 150,000 short within twenty years.

The region's economy is heavily reliant on manufacturing and other 20<sup>th</sup> century industries which are expected to continue to decline over the next 20 years. Most of Sydney's professional and tertiary level jobs are located outside the region, forcing a growing number of Western Sydney residents to face long commutes to work.

Unemployment is a particular problem for indigenous communities, for newer settlers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and for a growing number of disengaged young people.

### Key Policy Priorities

- Diversify Western Sydney's employment
- Fund the development of new environmental and high technology industry clusters, located close to where workers live, close to existing public transport infrastructure
- Urgently release fully serviced employment lands with essential transport linkages
- Provide incentives for financial services businesses and other high value service enterprises to establish or relocate their operations to Western Sydney's existing major commercial centres and business parks
- Improve public transport infrastructure, better connecting people to their places of work
- Co-locate tertiary educational facilities in or near the new industry clusters and give priority to the new clusters for the roll out of the National Broadband Network
- Provide greater support for school-based apprenticeships, school-industry partnerships and for first year apprenticeships to help secure entry level employment
- More support for disengaged young people, school-industry partnerships, entry level training
- More intensive on-going literacy support for CALD communities
- Continued support for LEC positions in Western Sydney
- Relocation of Government agencies to outer urban centres such as Penrith, Liverpool, Blacktown and Parramatta
- Funding for UWS/Penrith Council/ Penrith Business Alliance "Werrington Park" - Business and Innovation Campus - health and education precinct application (\$14million) under the Suburban Jobs Program
- Release of Badgerys Creek land for mixed residential/ technology park employment lands
- Reintroduction of the Greencorps Program for disengaged young people in priority areas

## TRANSPORT

---

Transport, employment and sustainable population growth are inextricably linked in Western Sydney yet decades of neglect have created a serious transport backlog.

Research by UWS shows that 58.2% of the people living in transport disadvantaged areas are located in Western Sydney. Older people, those on lower incomes and people with a disability are among the groups most at risk in Western Sydney.

An ABS Household Expenditure Survey, taken in 2004 found that transport costs are the third largest items in household budgets after housing and food; consuming on average 15% of the proportion of household income in Sydney.

In Western Sydney the high levels of car ownership, necessitated by poor public transport provision, coupled with the dispersion of employment opportunities and facilities and services contribute further to transport stress and cost of living. They also add to high levels of air pollution.

Inadequate transport infrastructure is a large drain on productivity. The Bureau of Transport Economics estimates that the cost of Sydney's traffic congestion will rise from \$4.6 billion a year to \$7.8 billion a year in over the next decade.

### Key Policy Priorities

The major critical infrastructure projects required are:

- the North-West Rail Link through Rouse Hill to the Richmond Line
- the South-West Rail Link
- the Epping – Parramatta rail link
- the Bus Transitway from Parklea to Castle Hill
- strategic bus corridors and cross-regional bus services
- strategic intermodals with rail links to port Botany to remove freight from the roads
- improved north-south, cross-regional transport – see Parramatta Council's application for feasibility funding under the Liveable Cities Program
- M5 duplication and M4 East
- key links to industrial areas and employment lands
- continued Federal Government support for the Roads to Recovery Program
- identification of rail and road corridors for long term growth.

## EDUCATION

---

Early childhood, primary and secondary education services face major challenges in Western Sydney.

There is a shortage of affordable and flexible long day care places to support the high number of dual working families in parts of Western Sydney.

The Federal Government has a central role to play in funding additional measures to support difficult-to-staff schools in disadvantaged areas and in supporting programs for disadvantaged and disengaged young people. More support is needed for programs facilitating the transition between school and the workforce.

Improving access to tertiary education opportunities for the people of Western Sydney should be a high priority for the Federal Government, particularly in the context of the anticipated population growth in the region over the next 25 years.

The University of Western Sydney caters specifically for the region's needs but Western Sydney students also need better access to universities and campuses in other parts of Sydney.

The current lack of public transport options to campuses creates a significant equity issue for students and potential students.

### Key policy priorities

- Increased teacher numbers in the more disadvantaged areas of Western Sydney
- Incentives to attract high quality graduates and highly experienced technical/professional employees into teaching
- Increased funding for primary and secondary schools especially for public schools in the disadvantaged areas of Western Sydney
- Support for programs to improve the quality of teaching
- Increased support for VET courses and school-based apprenticeships
- Support for increased affordable childcare places in Western Sydney.
- Funding support to increase salaries for appropriately qualified early childhood education workers.
- Increase support for programs that facilitate local transition between school and the workforce and between TAFES and universities.
- Increased funding support for the University of Western Sydney
- Provide additional funding for improved transport linking existing transport assets with University of Western Sydney Campuses and other universities across Sydney.

## HEALTH – PREVENTATIVE HEALTH

---

The socio-economically disadvantaged areas of Western Sydney currently have higher rates of chronic disease than the national average with higher levels of morbidity and premature mortality. Yet 70% of chronic disease is preventable.

Encouraging people to shift to healthy lifestyles (improved diet and increased physical activity) and addressing social health issues such as smoking and excessive alcohol consumption has to start at the local level. WSROC members already have a number of initiatives in place which could be supported and expanded with financial and other assistance from the Federal Government.

### Snapshot

- Risk factors of diet, obesity, lack of exercise and smoking are significantly higher in lower socio-economic demographics
- Children in Western Sydney have weights higher than published Australian averages. Recent surveys showed that 30% of 12-13 year olds are either overweight or obese.
- Children and young people are now experiencing high levels of insulin concentrations and other significant risk factors for heart disease and fatty liver disease due to diets with limited vegetables, too much juice and soft drink, and lots of energy dense foods .
- Only 40% of adults aged over 16 achieve adequate levels of physical activity, 25 per cent of children do less than one hour of exercise a day.
- Health issues associated with being overweight or obese are estimated to cost \$596 million a year in Western Sydney in direct and non direct costs. Direct treatment costs \$170 million a year.

### Key Policy Priorities

- Support and maintain Equitable Communities Programs for major disadvantaged communities such as Katoomba and Mount Druitt where premature death rates, mental and behavioural disorders and preventable disease are all well above the state averages.
- Support and expand the development of smoking cessation strategies including pilot quit services / programs at Blacktown, Mt Druitt and Doonside.
- Develop and support education campaigns to reduce children's intake of soft drinks and promote healthy eating and nutrition understanding in schools and families.
- Increased funding for "Healthy Communities" and "Healthy Workers" initiatives for Western Sydney.
- On-going and increased support for early detection measures such as the bowel cancer screening program.
- Support for Sydney University's School of Public Health application to the NHMRC/ANPHA for a joint preventative health research project with WSROC.

## HEALTH – ACCESS TO SERVICES

---

Western Sydney health services and facilities are under constant pressure from the region's continued population growth, leaving the level of services in Western Sydney less than for the rest of Sydney.

In some parts of the region the problem is exacerbated by other factors such as low incomes, high car dependence, the ageing of the population, high cultural and linguistic diversity and lack of access to health services.

In Greater Western Sydney there are:

- an average of 1049 residents per GP: for the rest of Sydney it is 754
- 222.4 public hospital beds per 100,000 people: for the rest of Sydney 248.6
- 265.3 public and private hospital beds per 100,000: for the rest of Sydney 366.2
- 36 mental health beds per 100,000 : for the rest of Sydney 46.1.

### Key issues:

- Increasing population – currently 1.9 million people live in the Greater Western Sydney region and that number is expected to increase by an additional 1 million people by 2031.
- A 20% increase in inpatient health care activity in Sydney West is predicted by 2016.
- Large CALD population, with about 35% of residents born overseas, posing a number of cultural and linguistic challenges in the provision of appropriate medical care.
- High levels of socio-economic disadvantage in several Western Sydney LGAs.
- Increasing aging population - there will be a 35% increase in the number of people aged 70 years and above from 2001 to 2016 in Western Sydney.
- High levels of chronic disease - the prevalence of disease risk factors, such as smoking, obesity and stress which are more evident in Western Sydney than elsewhere in urban NSW.

### Key Policy Priorities:

- Expand and invest in health services to meet the needs of growing and aging population. – including aged care, mental health services, critical care, integrated primary health care services and cardiology.
- Prioritise education programmes and resources promoting healthy lifestyles – anti smoking and drinking programs, diet and nutrition education, community exercise programs for those at risk such as older or overweight and obese people.
- Provide incentives to attract more GPs to practice in Western Sydney
- Funding for more nurses, hospital beds to meet community needs and the increasing demand for high quality personal care.
- Bring dental treatment under the Medicare system to cover non-cosmetic dental and oral health services for low and middle-income families.

## ENVIRONMENT

---

Managing the region's environment and the potential impacts of climate change in Western Sydney is a critical responsibility to be shared by all levels of government. A range of Federal environmental policies will obviously have direct and indirect impacts on the region.

Recent research has found evidence of a strong urban heat island effect in the region, with localised warming due to the loss of vegetation, the increase in paved and dark coloured surfaces such as roads, roofs and car parks, and a consequent increase in runoff of water which previously cooled the environment by soaking into the soils and being transpired by vegetation.

As a result, there has been a rise in local annual temperatures over and above what would be expected through global warming. The number of extreme temperature events has increased dramatically. This is having an adverse effect on the region's public health, air quality and energy use, as well as increasing the frequency and intensity of ground level ozone and smog, putting children and the elderly at risk. Hotter temperatures also increase the demand for air conditioning, increasing energy use when demand is already high. This in turn contributes to power shortages and increasing carbon dioxide emissions.

The region's contribution to climate change is exacerbated by its heavy car dependence. While emissions of greenhouse gases and other pollutants are declining due to stricter emission standards and more efficient vehicles, these benefits are being eroded because the average total number of kilometres per vehicle is increasing yearly.

The shape of the Sydney basin and prevailing wind directions mean that air quality in Western Sydney is worse on almost all measures than in most other parts of Sydney.

### Key Policy Priorities

- Environmental funding to assist the three major water catchments: the Hawkesbury-Nepean River, Georges River and Parramatta River which are coming under increasing pressure from the urban development associated with population growth.
- As part of the National Water Initiative, require and financially support state and local governments to implement urban and peri-urban water management strategies to reduce rates of runoff, retain water in the landscape and so promote natural cooling.
- Funding support for aquatic weed management programs
- Provide funding to support catchment action plans and restorative work on riparian zones, revegetation and protection of the endangered Cumberland Plain Woodland and habitats necessary for biodiversity
- Through the Liveable Cities program provide funding for projects to help build heat sinks and ameliorate the heat island effects in the urban built environment.
- Programs to assist with protecting biodiversity threatened by urban sprawl
- Support for flood mitigation measures in the Hawkesbury Nepean Valley
- Ensure firm controls to prevent environmental damage from coal seam gas exploration and mining.

## HOUSING

---

Issues of housing affordability, social disadvantage, cohesive communities and the environmental sensitivity and energy efficiency of our suburbs are essential to developing a sustainable urban environment in Western Sydney.

However, the single overriding priority for Western Sydney is the need to house more than one million additional people by 2031. Under the NSW Government's *Metropolitan Strategy* 70% of this growth will be housed in existing suburbs, with the remaining 30% accommodated in new suburbs on the urban fringe.

Sydney already has an estimated shortage of 45,000 homes and construction rates are short of extra demand by around another 8,000 a year.

NSW has 45,000 on the waiting list for private rental and 60,000 on the public housing waiting list.

The housing shortage impacts most heavily on the disadvantaged communities in much of Western Sydney.

### Key Policy Priorities

- Develop and implement national housing and settlement policies which recognise the interaction between migration, housing, income support, employment, health and transport policies
- Establish and fund a National Affordable Urban Renewal Plan for the renewal of existing suburbs to accommodate population growth in a financially and ecologically sustainable way
- Support councils in their provision of critical infrastructure and social amenities, through direct funding or by establishing a form of regional renewal trust to assist in the purchase and renovation of suitable development sites
- Develop taxation measures that favour low-cost housing construction, particularly in the investment property market, and direct funding towards schemes developed by the AHURI network for the leveraging of private investment in low-cost or affordable housing to prioritise the delivery of housing to low income private renters and first home buyers
- Provide increased funding for homelessness services and encourage innovation to ensure the diverse needs of homeless Australians are met
- Provide longer term housing for new arrivals
- Provide increased funding and greater funding security for community housing organisations
- Work with all spheres of government to identify the direct impacts of Federal Government policies on urban areas, particularly those with high levels of disadvantage most vulnerable to social polarisation
- Develop a comprehensive national policy framework in conjunction with State and Local Governments that addresses population growth, infrastructure development and sustainability for regions of national significance such as Western Sydney.

## THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

---

### Funding for Local Government

For too long Local Government has been caught in an inexorable squeeze between falling Commonwealth Financial Assistance Grants (only partially ameliorated by the Roads to Recovery Program), cost shifting from State Governments and rising community expectations of service delivery. This has put many councils in an unsustainable position.

A 2006 PWC Report commissioned by ALGA found that between 10% and 30% of councils would face sustainability problems without reform to their revenue or expenditure. Of particular interest to WSROC is the Productivity Commission's 2008 finding that urban fringe councils have on average the lowest fiscal capacities.

WSROC supports a review of the key elements of the Allen Inquiry with a view to removing rate pegging and giving Local Government more flexibility in rate setting, a view shared by the Henry Tax Review, which argued that local councils should have more autonomy in this area. Similarly, the process of exemptions to the cap on Section 94 contributions needs to be reinstated.

WSROC also urges the Federal Government to allocate a greater share of Commonwealth Financial Assistance Grants to local government, ideally so that these return to at least 1% of Commonwealth revenues (from the current low level of only 0.68%).

WSROC also urges a decision to ensure permanency of the Roads to Recovery program.

### Constitutional Recognition of Local Government

WSROC supports the formal recognition of Local Government in the Australian Constitution and welcomes the community consultation process which occurred throughout last year.

Constitutional recognition would provide an appropriate recognition of the vital role of Local Government as one of our key democratic institutions and as a key provider of community services. It is also necessary to remove uncertainties about direct Federal funding of Local Government following the High Court's decision in the Pape case.

WSROC suggest that the simplest way to achieve this would be a minor change to Section 96 of the Constitution, allowing the Commonwealth to directly fund local councils.