

## The 35<sup>th</sup> Meeting of COAG

April 2013

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) held its 35<sup>th</sup> meeting in Canberra on 19 April 2013. COAG consists of the Prime Minister, State Premiers, Territory Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA).

For more background information on COAG, see Hawker Britton's overview published 17 April 2013, available [here](#).

There were 12 key issues on the agenda for the 35<sup>th</sup> COAG meeting:

- National Schools' Reform
- National Disability Insurance Scheme
- Australia in the Asian Century White Paper
- Early childhood Education
- National Response to Gang Violence, Organised Crime and Illegal Firearms
- Public Safety Mobile Broadband
- Royal Succession
- Presentation from the COAG Reform Council Chairman
- National Occupational Licensing Scheme
- Telecommunications 'Blackspots'
- Australian Government Fleet Vehicle Procurement Policy
- Record of Appreciation

The outcome of COAG meetings are published in communiqué, which is released following the close of the meeting. To access the five page communiqué of the 35<sup>th</sup> COAG meeting [click here](#).

Significant developments or agreements were made in the following areas:

### **National Schools' Reform**

COAG affirmed its commitment to ongoing negotiations on the Commonwealth's proposed reforms.

These include:

- reform directions under the new National Education Reform Agreement (NERA);
- the National Plan for School Improvement (NPSI);
- as part of the NPSI, States and Territories are also asked to commit to evidence-driven school improvement reforms; and
- reform directions under the NPSI will be nationally agreed and implemented in a manner that is flexible to the needs and priorities of schools in each jurisdiction. It will provide the national ambition needed to support student achievement, lift performance, and position Australia to achieve the 2025 targets.

The Commonwealth has offered to provide an estimated \$9.4 billion of the \$14.5 billion in additional funding expected to be required across all jurisdictions to reform funding for schools.



For the investment to be effective, the Commonwealth has asked that States commit to funding schools through transparent, needs-based funding models, consistent with the principles underpinning the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS).

Under the NERA, the Commonwealth would allocate funding to States and Territories on the basis of need as determined through a new SRS, which comprises:

- a per student funding amount for every student: \$9,271 in 2014 for primary school students and \$12,193 for secondary students; and
- a range of 'loadings' that provide additional funding to categories of educational need – namely, students with disability, low socio-economic status students, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with limited English language proficiency, and students in small or remote schools.

Under the NERA, States would be asked to allocate funding to schools through consistent needs-based funding arrangements.

COAG noted that States will need to sign the NERA and bilateral agreements by 30 June 2013 to ensure schools and students receive additional funding in time for the 2014 school year.

For more information on the School Funding Refmors, see Hawker Britton Occasional Paper available [here](#).

### **National Disability Insurance Scheme**

COAG welcomed the in-principle agreement between the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments to a launch of the NDIS in the Barkly Region of the Northern Territory, commencing in July 2014. This will provide a valuable opportunity to test the implementation of the NDIS in a remote location.

COAG agreed to a set of principles that will guide the NDIS interface with key mainstream service systems during launch – health; mental health; early childhood development; child protection and family support; school education; employment; housing and community infrastructure; transport; justice; higher education and vocational education and training; and aged care. These principles will provide clarity about which supports can be provided or funded under NDIS, and which are more appropriately the responsibility of other service systems.

For more information on the NDIS, see Hawker Britton's Occasional Paper available [here](#).

### **Australia in the Asian Century White Paper**

COAG agreed that the relevant Standing Councils will report back to COAG by October 2013 on engagement with Asia and on strategies to:

- boost studies of Asia and Asian languages in the short term, including through use of the National Broadband Network;
- build in-country partnerships and develop complementary skills and qualification assessment and recognition; and
- increase Australia's participation in Asia's markets to assist food and agricultural exporters.

COAG noted that the relevant Standing Councils will consider whether and how to progress the other 29 policy pathways in the White Paper that involve jurisdictional collaboration in delivery.

COAG also agreed to establish a senior officials working group to provide, amongst other things, a forum for ongoing dialogue between the Commonwealth and States on matters relating to the Asian century.



## **Early Childhood Education**

COAG agreed to a new National Partnership Agreement (NPA) on Early Childhood Education.

The new NPA will contribute \$655.6 million in Commonwealth funding over the next 18 months, with a review of the NP by 30 June 2014.

The new NPA will ensure service delivery is not interrupted or reduced in 2013 or 2014, consistent with all Governments' ongoing commitment to Universal Access to early childhood education

## **National Response to Gang Violence, Organised Crime and Illegal Firearms**

COAG agreed that the Standing Council on Law and Justice would further examine options to fight nationally gang violence and organised crime, in consultation with the Standing Council on Police and Emergency Management and recommend options for consideration at its next meeting.

COAG also agreed that Senior Officials would consider options for improving intelligence, data and information sharing between jurisdictions for the purpose of strengthening law enforcement action, for agreement out-of-session.

To ensure that no jurisdiction becomes a target for those wanting to acquire illicit firearms, COAG noted a number of jurisdiction's support for firearms measures and agreed that Senior Officials would consider out-of-session:

- implementation of an Australian Ballistics Identification Network to support efforts by police to link firearms to crimes through advanced ballistic analysis;
- continued cooperation on the establishment of a National Firearms Interface to increase the opportunity for jurisdictions to identify the movement of firearms to the illicit market;
- continued commitment to identifying and remedying gaps and inconsistencies in firearm laws; and
- implementation of additional firearm search powers to target repeat offenders

## **Public Safety Mobile Broadband**

COAG agreed the need to ensure public safety agencies have adequate capabilities to respond efficiently and effectively when disasters occur.

COAG agreed that it required further work, and advice, from senior officials on the establishment of an appropriate public safety mobile broadband (PSMB) capability. This would include advice on the new governance framework for the development of the PSMB, and on ACMA's spectrum reservation for a PSMB network. This advice will follow consultation with the Standing Council on Police and Emergency Management.

## **Royal Succession**

COAG agreed to a hybrid model to implement the previously agreed changes to the rules of Royal succession in Australia. Under the hybrid model, States may choose to enact State legislation dealing with the rules of Royal succession. States have agreed that they will request the Commonwealth under s.51(38) of the Constitution to enact legislation, and that any State legislation will be consistent with their requests to the Commonwealth under s.51(38).



## **Presentation from the COAG Reform Council Chairman**

COAG agreed that Senior Officials will consider the proposals raised by the CRC to review COAG agreements and reporting arrangements with a view to simplifying the indicators to focus them on outcomes.

### **Seamless National Economy**

COAG released a response to the CRC's 2011-12 report on the performance of governments under the National Partnership Agreement to Deliver a Seamless National Economy.

It noted that 18 of 27 deregulation and four of eight competition reform streams are now completed.

COAG also received a progress report on the reforms being undertaken through the Business Advisory Forum (BAF) agenda, and noted that continued competition and regulation reform is important for Australia's productivity and to meet the challenges of the Asian century. In this vein, it agreed to consider options for a future competition and regulatory reform agenda later in 2013.

The Report is available [here](#). More information about the Seamless National Economy reforms is available [here](#).

### **National Occupational Licensing Scheme**

COAG noted progress on the National Occupational Licensing Scheme reform and agreed to a request for additional State-based consultation on the final Decision Regulatory Impact Statements, approved by the Office of Best Practice Regulation, to better inform decision-makers of stakeholder views. All governments recommitted to work towards a final decision on the reform by the end of 2013, which will take into consideration the outcomes of the further State-based consultations, with national licensing to commence in 2014.

### **Telecommunications 'Blackspots'**

COAG agreed that the Commonwealth, States and Territories would work collaboratively with the telecommunications industry to reduce mobile phone and internet 'blackspots'.

### **Australian Government Fleet Vehicle Procurement Policy**

South Australia and Victoria commit to providing further information about the competitiveness of domestically produced vehicles so that the Commonwealth, States and Territories can investigate aligning their government fleet vehicle procurement policies (including those of government departments, agencies and statutory authorities) to purchase Australian made passenger vehicles as often as possible.

### **Next Meeting**

COAG did not set a date for their next meeting, which is due after the September 14 Federal Election.