

The 32nd Meeting of COAG

April 2011

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) held its 32nd meeting in Canberra on 13 April 2012. The Prime Minister, Premiers, Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association attended the meeting. For more background information on COAG, see Hawker Britton's Occasional Paper from 10 April 2012, [available here](#).

There were 11 key issues on the agenda for the 32nd COAG meeting:

- Skills reform
- Business Advisory Forum
- Not-for-profit Reform
- National Disability Insurance Scheme
- Mental Health Reform
- The Seamless National Economy Reforms
- School Funding Reform
- Issues relevant to sustainability and Urban Livability
- Expiring National Partnership Agreements
- International Education
- GST Distribution Review

To access the meeting's nine page communiqué, which details the outcomes agreed to on each of these agenda items, [click here](#). Significant developments or agreements were made in the following areas:

Skills Reform

Skills reform was a particular focus of the meeting, and the outcomes achieved in this area were significant. The States and Territories signed up to the Government's \$1.75 billion "Skills for all Australians" vocational education and training reform package, which was announced by the Prime Minister on 19 March 2012. In doing so they agreed to a revised National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development and a new National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform. For more information on the reform package, see Hawker Britton's "Skills for all Australians" Occasional Paper, available [here](#).

The key elements of the \$1.75 billion Package are:

- The creation of a National Training Entitlement, giving working age Australians guaranteed access to government subsidized training place; and

- The expansion of income-contingent loans to subsidized higher level qualifications in the vocational education and training (VET) system.

To see the Prime Minister's announcement on the agreement by the States and Territories, [click here](#).

The COAG Business Advisory Forum

The inaugural meeting of the COAG Business Advisory Forum was held on 12 April 2012, the day before the 32nd COAG meeting. To see the Hawker Britton's Occasional Paper on the establishment of the COAG Business Advisory Forum, [click here](#).

Prioritising deregulation and removing 'red tape' was a priority at the 32nd COAG meeting following the inaugural meeting of the COAG Business Advisory Forum the previous day. States and Territories prioritised fasttracking the removal of red tape for businesses, by agreeing to use state environmental approval and assessment processes by March 2013. The aim is to protect the environment whilst ending the costly delays that result from double-handling and duplication.

There was also agreement to progress another five priority areas for major reform to lower costs for business and improve competition and productivity. The reform priorities are:

- streamlining the process for approvals of major projects;
- rationalising carbon reduction and energy efficiency schemes;
- delivering energy market reforms to reduce costs;
- improving assessment processes for low risk, low impact developments; and
- best practice approaches to regulation.

COAG established a cross-jurisdictional Taskforce to develop the policy and timetable for this new deregulation agenda. In particular, the Taskforce will provide urgent advice in advance of the next COAG meeting on how to fast track and rationalise carbon reduction and energy efficiency schemes. COAG also directed the Taskforce to prepare a comprehensive report on the red-tape challenge to identify examples of burdensome or unnecessary regulations that frustrate businesses on a day to day basis. The Taskforce is to be chaired by the Secretary of the Commonwealth Department of Finance and Deregulation.

To see media release from Prime Minister and Minister from Finance and Deregulation, [click here](#).

Not-for-profit Reform

COAG agreed to take the first steps towards developing an effective approach to the regulation of Australia's not-for-profit (NFP) sector. COAG tasked the NFP Reform Working Group with reviewing, developing and recommending NFP regulatory reform options to COAG including:

- considering the adoption or application of a Commonwealth statutory definition of charity;

- a nationally consistent approach to fundraising regulation;
- reviewing legal, governance and reporting regulation for the NFP sector; and
- considering approaches to harmonise the test for determining non-charitable activities of charities

COAG agreed that the NFP Reform Working Group be asked to report to COAG at or before its next meeting, and ahead of the Commonwealth introducing the Australian Charities and NFP Commission legislation, on the process to avoid or minimise any regulatory duplication between jurisdictions, particularly around statutory reporting and governance requirements.

National Disability Insurance Scheme

To develop a national scheme, it was recognised that the level and share of Commonwealth funding will need to increase. Approximately 70 per cent of disability care and support services are currently funded by State and Territory Governments.

COAG released high-level principles that will guide governments' consideration of the Productivity Commission's recommendations on an National Disability Insurance Scheme. To see the principles, [click here](#).

Mental Health Reform

COAG signed a new National Partnership Agreement Supporting National Mental Health Reform. This agreement provides \$200 million in Commonwealth funding, alongside investments by the States and Territories, to improve outcomes for people with severe and persistent mental illness.

Work on the draft Ten Year Roadmap for National Mental Health Reform is continuing and COAG will consider the Roadmap later in 2012.

Progress on Seamless National Economy Reforms

COAG noted progress on establishing a national occupational licensing system. The system aims to deliver considerable benefits to business, consumers and the wider community through enhanced mobility of licensed trades between jurisdictions.

Also, COAG agreed that the current occupational health and safety laws will be reviewed by the end of 2014.

International Education

In relation to the review of the student visa Assessment Level framework, COAG agreed to expedite the implementation of the revised framework for low immigration risk providers so that they are able to have access to streamlined student visa assessments in the second half of 2012.