

Proposed Motions for Australian Local Government Association National General Assembly 2021

Motion 1 – Funding to support the establishment of Community Hubs (Max 150 words)

This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to work closely with state and local government to develop appropriate funding mechanisms to enable local governments to establish community hubs for the co-location of key services such as education, youth services, counselling and community health, in order to deliver comprehensive, integrated support to local communities, as they recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

National Objective (Max 200 words)

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a severe toll on local communities, leaving no aspect of people's daily lives untouched. Councils, in their capacity as deliverers of services directly to the community, have seen the effects first-hand.

The experiences of the past 12-14 months have impacted health – both physical and mental - employment, education as well as family and social relationships. While the advent of the COVID-19 vaccine is a critical primary health intervention, the psychological, social and economic effects will require comprehensive, long-term solutions, involving all levels of government.

Councils have a central role, through their intimate local knowledge and their extensive local networks. While the issues with which communities are dealing in the aftermath of the pandemic are similar, on a broad scale, a comprehensive solution, although national in scope, must take into account local needs and characteristics.

Councils, as the providers of key services, deliverers of social and other infrastructure and the level of government with most direct community interaction, are uniquely-placed to ensure that this occurs.

Summary of Key Arguments (Max 300 words)

Prior to the onset of the pandemic, Nillumbik Shire Council had identified the establishment of a community hub in one of its Major Activity Centres as one of the priority projects on which to advocate for Federal Government funding.

The aim of this purpose-built hub would be to serve to increase community connection and ease of access to a range of Council services. Among its features would include:

- Adult learning and registered training facilities;
- a dedicated youth space;
- a library;
- a theatre and performance function space; and
- a community lounge and meeting space.

In 2020, in order to ensure a coordinated response, Council formed its own internal Pandemic Recovery Taskforce, drawing on officers from a range of operational areas across the organisation.

At the same time, Council conducted an extensive survey *Together in Nillumbik* to better understand how the pandemic was affecting its community.

The information gleaned in this survey has been invaluable in helping to inform the work of the taskforce. Its results revealed four clear themes or areas in which people had been most affected:

- Inclusion;
- healthy environments;
- healthy behaviours; and
- employment and education.

These results and the overarching themes will guide Council's in its current response and in future pandemic planning.

Notions of collaboration, increased community connectedness and resilience, with Council playing a key role in providing the underpinning support recur throughout.

While again, they align broadly with information gleaned on a state and national level, they also contain elements unique to Nillumbik's demographic profile.

Motion 2 – Funding and support to improve bushfire preparedness and climate resilience (Max 150 words)

This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to work closely with state and local government to develop appropriate implementation frameworks and make available greater funding – either through the extension of its Smart Cities and Suburbs program or a new initiative, to enable local governments and their communities to implement the latest networking and monitoring technology in their efforts to improve bushfire preparedness and climate resilience.

National Objective (Max 200 words)

The fires which burned through large swathes of Australia’s southeast over the summer of 2019-2020, further highlighted the increasing threat posed by climate-driven weather events to life and property.

Local governments, working closely with the various emergency agencies and the community, must be at the forefront of the response to these increasing threats.

Bushfires can have devastating and far-reaching impacts on communities, impacts that can be exacerbated through a lack of mitigation measures and resilience. The evidence is clear that the physical, social and economic effects of such disasters are far greater where communities have been unprepared.

Also beyond doubt is that the effects of climate change will increase the frequency and intensity of bushfires as well as that of other extreme weather events.

Councils have a key role in the response to these challenges. Nillumbik, as do other Councils, already works in close collaboration with its community, the various emergency service agencies and state government to address these issues collectively. This is particularly the case in bushfire mitigation.

To do so effectively however – especially for this approach to be replicated nationally – will require not just the will, but also the resources to boost capability. Technology becomes increasingly important in this context and can assist councils build community resilience in this space.

Summary of Key Arguments (Max 300 words)

Nillumbik Shire has over the years been subject to significant weather events - fire (including the Black Saturday Bushfires of 2009), floods and severe windstorms.

It comprises both urban and rural areas and therefore, Council and the community are acutely aware of the very real threats and challenges posed by such events in a range of settings.

The challenges Council faces in this regard include Nillumbik's extensive bushland and its close proximity to the urban fringe, its river frontage and its high proportion of privately –owned land.

Council's Bushfire Mitigation Strategy emphasizes that bushfire mitigation is a shared responsibility between Council and a range of other stakeholders, including community, agencies and other levels of government.

It also places a strong emphasis on information-sharing.

Council is also in the process of developing its new Climate Action Plan. This undertaking will, in both, development and implementation emphasize a community-centred approach.

For this approach to work, information-sharing as well as ready access to accurate, real-time information is critical.

There are a number of products on the market with highly sensitive sensor detection capabilities that include fire detection, air quality and flood monitoring. They can also be used to closely monitor biodiversity in a given area.

The technology has been effectively implemented elsewhere – including in Victoria's Latrobe Valley – but implementation to date has been piecemeal.

What is needed is a coordinated approach on a national scale but which recognizes the importance of a local-led response.