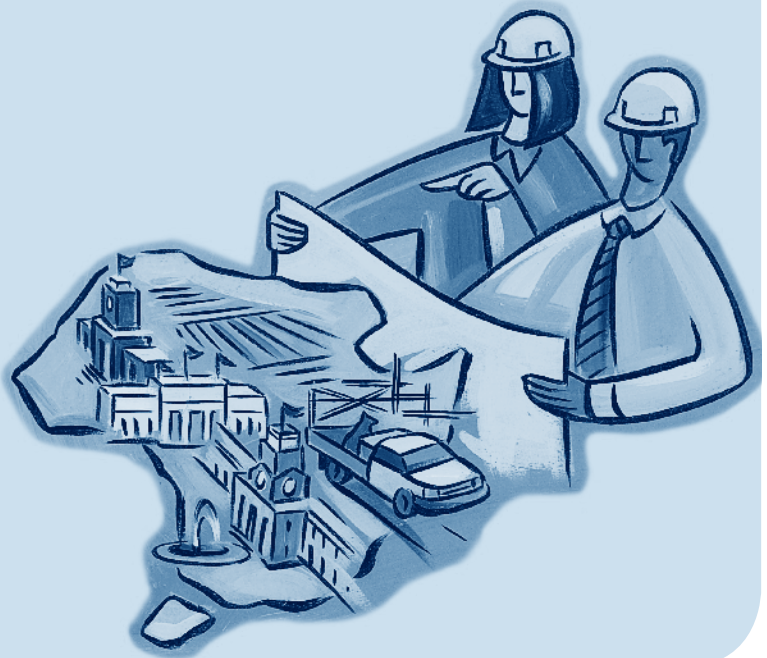


CHAPTER 5

Outcome 3—Regional Development and Local Government



REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

What this chapter covers

This chapter describes the Department’s regional development and local government outcome, Outcome 3, and its outputs and reports on performance for the individual outputs. Each report includes:

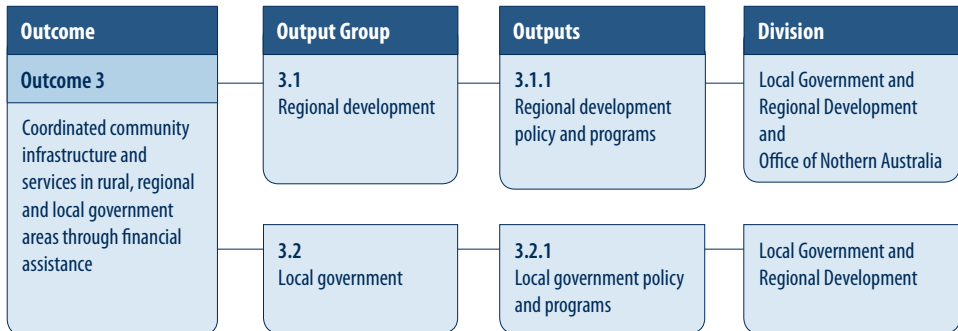
- an overview of the output’s functions and how it is delivered;
- a summary of the results for 2008–09 for the output and any associated administered programs against the key performance indicators and targets published in the 2008–09 Portfolio Budget Statements (PBS); and
- a detailed report on the performance of the output in 2008–09 against the applicable headings from the 2008–09 PBS.

Outcome and outputs

Figure 5.1 shows the relationships between Outcome 3 and its outputs, and identifies the business divisions responsible for delivering the outputs.

Outcome 3 was updated on 17 December 2008 from *Assisting regions and local government to develop and manage their futures* as appeared in the 2008–09 PBS.

Figure 5.1 Outcome 3 and outputs



OUTPUT 3.1.1 — REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY AND PROGRAMS

Highlights

In 2008–09, the Department supported the sustainable development of regional and rural communities by promoting a whole-of-government approach in regional policies and through major initiatives in community infrastructure.

The programs administered by the Department achieved strong results, for example:

- As at 30 June 2009, 39 projects had been contracted under the \$176 million Better Regions program to implement projects identified by local communities as priority investments for their regions; and
- the Remote Air Services Subsidy funded the carriage of 3,186 passengers, 38,752 kilograms of freight and 180,936 kilograms of mail to 242 communities in remote Australia.

Significant progress was made towards implementing the Regional Development Australia initiative. Memorandums of understanding were signed between the Australian Government and nearly all the state and territory governments, and arrangements to establish Regional Development Australia committees are well underway.

The Regional Development Council agreed to closer alignment and integration of regional development activities and structures between all three levels of government. The first fruits of this new approach are the new integrated regional development organisations being established in many states through Regional Development Australia.

The Department participated in Territorial Policy Development Meetings of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to discuss international trends in regional policy, and contributed to OECD Rural Policy Reviews for Canada and China. The Department provided support to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government when he attended the OECD Ministerial Meeting in Paris in March 2009.

The Department also played a key role in supporting the Parliamentary Secretary for Western and Northern Australia, the Hon Gary Gray AO MP, to produce, with the Western Australian Government, a \$195 million East Kimberley Development Package, to promote the social and economic development of the East Kimberley region of Western Australia.

Overview

Output 3.1.1 is delivered through the work of the Local Government and Regional Development and Office of Northern Australia divisions which conduct activities with a regional focus, including stakeholder consultation and engagement, research, policy development and program delivery. The output included the following administered programs:

- Better Regions;
- East Kimberley Development Package¹;
- Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal;
- Regional and Rural Research and Development Grants;
- Regional Development Australia committees;
- Regional Partnerships;
- Remote Air Services Subsidy Scheme; and
- Sustainable Regions.

The budget and actual expenditure for each administered program is listed in Appendix A.

1 This administered program was introduced in the 2008–09 Supplementary Additional Estimates Statements No. 2.

Summary of performance

Table 5.1 summarises the Department's results in delivering Output 3.1.1, against the key performance indicators and targets published in the 2008–09 PBS.

Table 5.1 Summary of performance—Output 3.1.1

Key performance indicator	Target	Result
Outputs		
<i>New operational funding contracts between the Department and RDA developed and executed</i>	31 December 2008.	Operational funding contracts between the Department and RDA are being developed. These contracts will be executed by the Department and RDA committees as they are established.
<i>RDA established and operational</i>	1 January 2009.	Memorandums of understanding (MOUs) have been signed by the Australian Government and state and territory governments except in Western Australia. Expression of interest processes for committee membership were undertaken; committee chairs and deputy chairs were announced in some states. Committee formation documents were developed, including incorporation association constitutions.
<i>Priority issues affecting major projects and sustainable development in Northern Australia identified through consultation</i>	30 June 2009. ¹	Ongoing task—including through the East Kimberley Development Package, the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce and extensive consultation with Northern Australia.
<i>First taskforce progress report delivered to Government</i>	By 30 September 2008. ²	The taskforce is an independent body for which the Department provides a secretariat. The mid term report was published in February 2009.
<i>Taskforce report on the investigation of further land and water development in Northern Australia delivered to Government</i>	By 30 June 2009. ³	The taskforce is an independent body for which the Department provides a secretariat.

1 This date was incorrectly reported in the 2008–09 PBS as 30 June 2008.

2 The original target for the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce was 30 September 2008. The government announced an overhaul of the taskforce terms of reference and membership on 26 September 2008, with a revised midterm target date of end 2008.

3 The original target was 30 June 2009. Following the September 2008 overhaul of the taskforce, the target was changed to December 2009.

Table 5.2 provides a summary of the results achieved by each of the programs administered under Output 3.1.1 against the key performance and targets published in the 2008–09 PBS.

Table 5.2 Summary of performance—Output 3.1.1 administered programs

Key performance indicators and targets	
Applicable administered program	Key performance indicator Target
All programs	<i>Efficient and effective management of administered programs</i> Programs are administered in accordance with relevant legislation, published guidelines and ANAO guidance.
All programs	<i>Programs support regional development including through:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>funding for projects that partner with communities, government and business; and</i> • <i>continuation of air services to identified areas</i> Projects are completed. All identified partners have contributed as agreed. Projects are sustainable. Identified air services are maintained.
Results	
Administered program	Result
Better Regions	In 2008–09, the Department contracted 39 projects of which three were completed. At 30 June 2009, a total of 86 Better Regions projects had been approved for funding under the four-year program.
East Kimberley Development Package	National Partnership agreement was signed allocating funds to 27 social infrastructure projects.
Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal	The Department assisted the foundation to provide small grants to community organisations in regional and rural Australia, in accordance with its deed of agreement.
Regional and Rural Research and Development Grants	The Regional and Rural Research and Development Grants program guidelines address three strategic priorities: Australian Government regional priorities; small local government and community support; and regional development conference support. In 2008–09, the program funded seven projects.
Regional Development Australia committees	The Department provided funding to 54 Area Consultative Committees in accordance with their Operational Funding Agreements (which sets out the performance and financial obligations) and the published Area Consultative Committee Handbook.

Table 5.2 continued.

Results	
Administered program	Result
Regional Partnerships	<p>Contracts were negotiated for 56 projects approved but not contracted at the time of the 2008–09 Budget decision to close the program. Of the 1,553 contracted projects the Department had finalised 1,427 projects by 30 June 2009.</p> <p>The Department has commenced winding down the program, which ends on 30 June 2010.</p>
Remote Air Services Subsidy Scheme	The Scheme provided 242 remote and isolated communities across ten geographical regions with access to a regular air service for the carriage of passengers and goods including medicines, fresh food and educational materials. Air operator arrangements were renewed to 2011, through an open tender process.
Sustainable Regions	The Sustainable Regions program, which assisted 10 regional communities to address issues they had identified, has closed. All 266 projects were finalised by 30 June 2009.

Detailed report on performance

The following report is against the headings from the applicable output from the 2008–09 PBS. Please note that for this output, the section 'VI Other activities' has been added to address the provision of advice to government on regional issues and the introduction of the Jobs Fund.

I Supporting sustainable development

Through engagement with governments, industry and communities, the Department developed policy initiatives and implemented government programs tailored to support sustainable regional economic and social development.

Better Regions

The Department managed the Better Regions program to fund projects that had been identified by local communities across Regional Australia as priority investments for their region such as revitalised main streets, multipurpose community and resource centres and major sport and recreational venues.

At 30 June 2009, there were 86 Better Regions projects approved for release of funding by the government, of which the Department had contracted 38 projects and one project was complete.

Projects varied from providing a \$10 million contribution to the construction of temporary and permanent infrastructure, including pit facilities to support the establishment of the V8 supercar race in Townsville, to providing a \$125,000 contribution to the upgrade of the Grafton livestock saleyards.

In implementing the Better Regions program the Department developed processes and procedures consistent with the requirements of the *Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997* and the ANAO Better Practice Guide.

Successful applicants were required to enter into a legally enforceable funding agreement with the Australian Government. The funding agreement sets out the terms and conditions for the provision of funding and includes a negotiated schedule of payments dependent on the delivery of agreed milestones and reports.

Regional Partnerships

The Department continued to manage projects under the Regional Partnerships program. This included 1,497 projects that were contracted when the 2008–09 Budget announced that the program would close, and 56 projects that received funding through the government’s decision to support a number of projects, proposed by local government and not-for-profit organisations, that had been approved but not contracted when the program’s closure was announced. In 2008–09, the Department reviewed the remaining projects and developed a strategy to finalise the program by 30 June 2010.

Sustainable Regions

The Department successfully managed the finalisation of all remaining Sustainable Regions projects by 30 June 2009. The Sustainable Regions program, which commenced in August 2001 and was closed to new applications in May 2008, was designed to offer a planned and integrated approach to structural adjustment in identified regions. Over the life of the program, 280 projects were contracted at a total approved cost of \$111 million.

Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal

In accordance with its deed of agreement, the Department assisted the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal to provide small grants to community organisations in regional and rural Australia. These grants included Back to School vouchers redeemable for items such as school uniforms, clothing, school bags and stationery, MeChange grant funding to help tackle obesity and build a healthier future for communities and Helping Hands grants to assist small rural communities to implement projects that will ensure their economic sustainability.

Remote Air Services Subsidy Scheme

The Department managed the Remote Air Services Subsidy scheme, to make passenger transport, goods delivery and other services accessible to Australians who live in remote areas and would otherwise have no regular access to transport.

Subsidised weekly passenger and freight services were provided to 242 remote communities in Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory. In total, 3,186 passengers travelled and 38,752 kilograms of freight and 180,936 kilograms of mail were delivered. An open tender process to renew air operator arrangements under the scheme was finalised; contracts for eight of the 10 subsidised regions were put in place until 2011.

II Research to inform policy development

The Department administered Regional and Rural Research and Development Grants to support research into the social and economic conditions and other issues affecting Australia’s regions, to inform policy development. The seven projects that received funding in 2008–09 included two nationally and one internationally recognised conferences, and research addressing regional priorities, such as a regional ports project, regional child health strategies and support for the Regional Partnerships program.

III Regional engagement: Regional Development Australia

Through a range of regional development and local government initiatives, the Department worked side-by-side with communities, regions and local government to deliver sustainable economic development and social participation, improve access to services, and plan for sustainable futures.

In particular, the Department was responsible for implementing Regional Development Australia (RDA), a new national network of regional communities that brings together all levels of government to improve the coordination of initiatives to enhance the development of regional Australia, ensuring that there is effective engagement with local communities. In 2008–09, the Department signed MOUs to implement the initiative with all state and territory governments except the Government of Western Australia, in consultation with the local government sector.

Expression of interest processes for committee membership were undertaken, and committee chairs and deputy chairs were announced in some states. Committee formation documents were developed, including incorporation association constitutions.

In early 2009, the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, sought assistance from the Department to implement the Backing Indigenous Ability Telephones Program. Under the program, the Australian Government is funding the installation of publicly accessible community telephone services to nominated remote Indigenous communities with populations below 50. The Department employed the Area Consultative Committee network to seek nominations for telephone locations.

IV Office of Northern Australia

The Department's Office of Northern Australia (ONA) played a key role in supporting the Hon Gary Gray AO MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Western and Northern Australia, in developing the \$195 million East Kimberley Development Package announced by the Prime Minister in December 2008. The Department prepared a comprehensive report proposing the detail of the package, drawing on extensive liaison with other Australian Government and Western Australian Government agencies and East Kimberley stakeholders. The office also coordinated arrangements to deliver the first payment to the Western Australian Government in June 2009 to enable the package to proceed.

The Department supports and advises the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce, a high-level group of independent experts from relevant backgrounds such as Indigenous business, science, conservation, agriculture, and the minerals and energy resource industries. The taskforce has been charged with providing the government with a final report, by December 2009, that provides a better understanding of:

- opportunities for new sustainable economic development in the north, based on water resource availability; and
- the potential impact of possible development on the underlying water balance and water quality, and on the natural environment, existing water users and the broader community.

V Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program

The Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program (RLCIP) was reported in the 2008–09 PBS as component V of Output 3.1.1. The funding for the program was announced at the Australian Council of Local Government in November 2008 with the funding detailed in Output 3.2.1 of the 2008–09 Portfolio Additional Estimates Statements (PAES).

VI Other activities

In 2008–09, the Department consulted widely, across Australia and overseas, to provide informed advice to the Australian Government on issues affecting Australia's regions. The Department's role in program delivery expanded during the year, with the introduction of the Jobs Fund.

The Department continued to provide advice to Australian Government agencies about the requirements for Regional Australia Statements for cabinet submissions.

Jobs Fund

The Department played a significant role in designing and establishing the Jobs Fund, a \$650 million initiative to create jobs and develop skills through projects that build infrastructure and social capital in local communities. The Department is responsible for two components of the Jobs Fund, the \$40 million National Bike Paths Projects and \$150 million Infrastructure Employment Projects, to be implemented in 2009–10 and 2010–11 respectively.

OUTPUT 3.2.1—LOCAL GOVERNMENT POLICY AND PROGRAMS

Highlights

In 2008–09, the Department established and began delivering funding under the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program. This included:

- establishing the \$250 million direct allocation and the \$550 million competitive grants components of the program;
- delivering payments to all eligible local government authorities for 3,220 projects under the direct allocation component; and
- finalising funding agreements and making first payments to 136 of the 137 successful local government authorities under the competitive grants component.

The Australian Council of Local Government was established to forge a new partnership between the Australian Government and local governments. The inaugural meeting was held in November 2008 and a second meeting in June 2009. In addition the council appointed a steering committee that held two meetings in 2009.

The National Awards for Local Government recognise, reward and promote the innovative work of local governments across Australia. The awards continue to be strongly supported. In 2008, 13 winners were selected for 10 categories; in 2009, 21 winners were selected for 11 categories.

The Department managed a competitive process to select a university to host the Centre of Excellence for Local Government. In June 2009, the Prime Minister announced that a consortium led by the University of Technology, Sydney, was the successful applicant, and funding of \$8 million was provided to establish the centre.

The Department provided ongoing:

- advice to Council of Australian Governments working groups on the issues of development assessment reform and land use planning; and
- policy development and secretariat support to the Local Government and Planning Ministers' Council and Development Assessment Forum.

To assist local government deal with the effects of the global financial crisis, the *Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act 1995* was amended to enable the Australian Government to bring forward \$480 million in financial assistance grants. The Department delivered the grants in June 2009.

Overview

Output 3.2.1 is delivered through the work of the Local Government and Regional Development division which advises the Australian Government on local government issues, and delivers funding and programs that assist local governments to serve their communities. In 2008–09 the output included the following administered programs:

- Establishment of a local government centre of excellence;¹
- Local Government Financial Assistance Grants;
- Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program;¹ and
- Supplementary funding to South Australian councils for local roads.

The budget and actual expenditure for each administered program is listed in Appendix A.

Summary of performance

Table 5.3 summarises the Department's results in delivering Output 3.2.1 against the key performance indicators and targets published in the 2008–09 PBS.

Table 5.3 Summary of performance—Output 3.2.1

Key performance indicator	Target	Result
Outputs		
<i>The Council of Australian Local Governments is established</i>	By January 2009.	The inaugural meeting of the Australian Council of Local Government (ACLG) was held in Canberra on 18 November 2008.
<i>First two meetings of COALG</i>	By 30 June 2009.	The council met in November 2008 and June 2009. The Council's steering committee met in February 2009 and June 2009.
<i>COALG considers consultation process for the Constitutional recognition of local government</i>	By 30 June 2009.	The council affirmed its commitment to advancing constitutional recognition of local government, and is consulting widely to identify options for the Australian Government to consider.
<i>2008 National Awards for Local Government announced</i>	By 31 December 2008.	The 2008 National Awards for Local Government were presented in November 2008 and the 2009 Awards were presented in June 2009.
<i>Support for Local Government and Planning Ministers' Council meetings</i>	Efficient and effective manner.	Meetings were held in August 2008 (Hobart) and May 2009 (Sydney). The Development Assessment Reform Ministerial Subgroup was established to fast-track critical reforms, and met in August, September and March.

1 This program was introduced in the 2008–09 Portfolio Additional Estimates Statements.

Table 5.4 provides a summary of the results achieved by each of the programs administered under Output 3.2.1 against the key performance indicators and targets published in the 2008–09 PBS.

Table 5.4 Summary of performance—Output 3.2.1 administered programs

Key performance indicators and targets	
Applicable administered program	Key performance indicator Target
All programs	<i>Efficient and effective management of administered programs</i> Programs are administered in accordance with relevant legislation, published guidelines and ANAO guidance.
Results	
Administered program	Result
Establishment of a local government centre of excellence ^a	Following a competitive process, the successful body to establish the Centre of Excellence for Local Government was announced in June 2009.
Local Government Financial Assistance Grants	A total of \$2.4 billion in quarterly instalments was paid through the states and territories to 565 local government bodies and the ACT.
Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program ^a	All funds in the \$250 million direct allocation component of the program were allocated. The funded projects commenced and presented their first reports to the Department. The Department assessed 484 applications for funding under the \$550 million competitive grants component, and 136 of the approved 137 projects received initial payments.
Supplementary funding to South Australian councils for local roads	A total of \$14 million in grants was paid to 73 local government bodies in South Australia.

^a This program was introduced in the 2008–09 Portfolio Additional Estimates Statements.

Detailed report on performance

The following report is against the headings from the applicable output from the 2008–09 PBS.

I Assisting local governments to provide residents with an equitable level of services

The Department administers financial assistance grants that assist councils to provide municipal services and infrastructure. In 2008–09, the Australian Government provided local government with \$2.4 billion in untied financial assistance grants, allowing local government bodies to spend the grants according to local priorities. The grants were distributed to 565 local governments and the ACT.

The Department also administers supplementary funding to South Australian councils to offset the disadvantage to these councils under the distribution of financial assistance grants identified for local roads. In 2008–09, grants totalling \$14 million were distributed to 73 local government bodies in South Australia.

In May 2009 the *Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act 1995* was amended to enable the government to bring forward \$480 million in financial assistance grants. These payments were made to jurisdictions in June 2009.

II Strengthening the role of local government

In 2008–09, the Department helped to establish two institutions that will strengthen the role of local government:

- the ACLG, which provides opportunities for dialogue between the Australian Government and local governments; and
- the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government, which promotes excellence and innovation in the local government sector.

The Department also provided support for ongoing activities to strengthen and promote local government, such as the work of the Local Government and Planning Ministers' Council and the National Awards for Local Government.

Establishing the Australian Council of Local Government

The inaugural plenary meeting of the ACLG was held on 18 November 2008, with more than 400 mayors and shire presidents in attendance. The meeting provided the opportunity to forge a new partnership between the Australian Government and local governments. The second plenary meeting was held in June 2009, focusing on challenges facing local government through the theme 'Building resilience in local communities'. The council appointed a steering committee that met twice in 2009.

Consulting on constitutional recognition of local government

The Australian Government has stated that it supports a debate on the issue of constitutional recognition of local government and that it is willing to receive local government recommendations on the development of a process to achieve such recognition.

The question of constitutional recognition was addressed at the first meeting of the ACLG in November 2008. Subsequently, the Australian Local Government Association Constitutional Summit held in December 2008 achieved an agreed position for discussion. The summit produced a statement on local governments' efforts to build support for constitutional recognition.

Promoting best practice through the National Awards for Local Government

The National Awards for Local Government recognise, reward and promote the innovative work of local governments across Australia, showcasing unique local solutions to common problems. Independent panels judge entries for category and national winners. The 2008 awards were presented in November 2008 and consisted of 13 winners for the 10 categories, with 15 commendations; 71 councils took part, submitting 114 entries.

The 2009 awards were presented in June 2009. The theme 'Local Government—Building Australian Communities' attracted 233 entries for the 11 award categories. A total of 12 large (greater than 15,000 rateable properties) and nine small local governments were recognised in the awards (some awards were presented to partnerships). A large and small National Winner was selected from the category winners:

- Newcastle City Council, New South Wales (Large National Winner)
Project: ClimateCam – International Test laboratory
The council developed the world's first greenhouse gas speedometer to measure and report progress on its local greenhouse action plan.
- Carpentaria Shire Council, Queensland (Small National Winner)
Project: Domestic Violence – it's not our game
The council partnered with the Normanton Stingers Rugby League Club on a community campaign designed to create positive local role models, reduce the prevalence of domestic violence and create a safer community.

Supporting the Local Government and Planning Ministers' Council

The Department provides policy development and secretariat support to the Local Government and Planning Ministers' Council. The Council is a forum for discussions between local government and planning ministers from across Australia and New Zealand, and the President of the ALGA.

The council held two meetings in 2008–09. It endorsed principles to improve local government's long-term financial sustainability, and took steps to lift the efficiency and effectiveness of development assessment systems.

In August 2008 the ministerial council agreed to establish a ministerial subgroup to expedite its development assessment reform agenda.

Creating the Centre of Excellence for Local Government

The Centre of Excellence for Local Government will enhance professionalism and showcase innovation and best practice in local government in Australia.

In 2008–09, the Department conducted a competitive process, within required timeframes and in accordance with legal and financial requirements, to select a university to house the centre. The opportunity generated strong interest within the university sector. A consortium led by the University of Technology, Sydney, was selected. A funding agreement was negotiated and a grant of \$8 million to establish the centre was paid to the university in June 2009.

Improving infrastructure through the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program

The Department administers the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program, which provides funding to local government authorities to fund construction and renewal of local infrastructure to stimulate growth and economic activity across Australia.

The program was announced in November 2008 and its funding was increased in February 2009 as part of the Nation Building—Economic Stimulus Plan. It consists of a \$250 million direct allocation component and a \$550 million national competitive grants component. On 25 June 2009 the Prime Minister announced an additional \$220 million for the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program, bringing the total value of this program to \$1 billion.

All of the direct allocation funding was paid to eligible local government authorities in 2008–09; projects are underway and the Department received the first progress reports from councils in May 2009. For the competitive grants component, 484 funding applications collectively seeking more than \$2.1 billion were received and assessed, and 137 projects were successful. At 30 June 2009, initial payments had been made to 136 of 137 projects.

On 25 June 2009, additional funding of \$220 million was announced, for expenditure in 2009–10.

The Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program was reported in the 2008–09 PBS as component V of Output 3.1.1. The funding for the program was announced at the ACLG in November 2008 with the funding detailed under Output 3.2.1 in the 2008–09 PAES.

Case Study – Australian Council of Local Government



Minister Albanese at the opening session of the ACLG, June 2009.

On 18 September 2008, the Prime Minister, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP, and the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, announced the establishment of the Australian Council of Local Government (ACLG) to forge a new cooperative engagement between the Australian and local governments giving a voice to local government on matters of national significance.

More than 400 mayors and shire presidents from across Australia attended the inaugural meeting of the ACLG on 18 November 2009, to begin a dialogue on issues of concern to both levels of government.

These included local, regional and national infrastructure; local government efficiency; the habitability of major cities; the need to strengthen regional economies; climate change; housing affordability; Indigenous disadvantage; and opportunities to improve community wellbeing.

The role of the council is to:

- provide a forum for the Australian Government and local government, including the Australian Local Government Association, to consider policies and initiatives in areas of mutual interest;
- provide advice to the Australian Government on matters relevant to local government and local communities;
- contribute to dialogue on issues of national significance that affect local government and local communities;
- promote collaboration between the Australian Government and local government, as well as between individual local governments to address emerging economic, social and environmental challenges;
- encourage innovation and best practice in local government; and
- improve the provision of information and data to support the long-term development of local government.

At the inaugural meeting, the council established a steering committee to continue engagement, policy coordination and close cooperation between annual plenary meetings. Two steering committee meetings were held during the reporting period, in February and June 2009. The topics discussed funding initiatives and financial reforms. The Hon Anthony Albanese MP, Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, chairs the steering committee meetings.

At this meeting, the Prime Minister announced initial funding of \$300 million to councils and shires to build and improve community infrastructure and boost local economies through the new Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program. On 25 June 2009, at the most recent ACLG plenary meeting, the Prime Minister announced additional funding of \$220 million for the 2009 Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program allocations. The department provides comprehensive secretariat support to the Minister in these roles.

