

COAG COMMUNIQUÉ

The Council of Australian Governments held its 39th meeting today in Canberra. Leaders welcomed Premiers Andrews and Palaszczuk, Chief Minister Barr and Mayor Pickard to their first COAG meeting.

Today the strength of Australia's federal system of government was on show, with all governments agreeing to work together to tackle significant issues that are important to us as a society and nation.

There need not be another election for 16 months, so leaders agreed that it would be important to maximise the opportunity for long-term reform relatively free of partisan political pressures. The Federation and Tax Reform White Papers are an opportunity to rethink how the federation works and how services are funded and delivered. In particular, leaders agreed to a special COAG retreat in July where these issues could be considered with a view to optimising outcomes for patients and students in particular.

COAG agreed to a national, cooperative effort to reduce family violence and fight ice usage – two issues of major public concern which are impacting on communities across Australia.

Similarly, COAG agreed on new levels of collaboration to increase our efforts to counter violent extremism and terrorism in Australia.

Reducing Violence against Women

As of 13 April, the media had reported 31 women who have died in Australia in 2015 as a result of violence. The most recent verified annual data show that on average one woman a week is killed by her current or former partner.

COAG agreed to take urgent collective action in 2015 to address this unacceptable level of violence against women.

By the end of 2015:

- a national domestic violence order (DVO) scheme will be agreed, where DVOs will be automatically recognised and enforceable in any state or territory of Australia;
- progress will be reported on a national information system that will enable courts and police in different states and territories to share information on active DVOs – New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania will trial the system;
- COAG will consider national standards to ensure perpetrators of violence against women are held to account at the same standard across Australia, for implementation in 2016; and
- COAG will consider strategies to tackle the increased use of technology to facilitate abuse against women, and to ensure women have adequate legal protections against this form of abuse.

COAG agreed to jointly contribute \$30 million for a national campaign to reduce violence against women and their children and potentially for associated increased services to

support women seeking assistance. It noted the importance of ensuring frontline services in all jurisdictions continue to meet the needs of vulnerable women and children.

This campaign will build on efforts already underway by states and territories. It will be based on extensive research, with a focus on high-risk groups, including Indigenous women.

COAG will be assisted with this work by the COAG Advisory Panel on Reducing Violence against Women, chaired by the former Victorian Police Chief Commissioner, Mr Ken Lay APM, and with 2015 Australian of the Year, Ms Rosie Batty as a founding member.

National Ice Action Strategy

States and territories welcomed the Commonwealth's commitment last week to develop a National Ice Action Strategy. All governments are committed to working closely together to address ice usage, which is causing significant harm across Australia.

The National Ice Taskforce, led by Ken Lay APM, will work with all governments and the community to develop a comprehensive strategy.

The national strategy will address a range of interrelated issues; including prevention, education, health, community and family support, and law enforcement. It will also build on Commonwealth, state and territory efforts to date, including:

- the National Drug Strategy;
- NSW's commitment to tackle ice;
- Victoria's Ice Action Plan;
- Queensland's Drug and Alcohol Strategic Plan;
- WA's Drug and Alcohol Interagency Strategic Framework;
- SA's Alcohol and Other Drug Strategy;
- Tasmania's Drug Strategy;
- the Commonwealth and NT working together on a NT Joint Law Enforcement Ice Strike Force to prevent ice taking hold; and
- ACT's Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Strategy.

Counter-Terrorism Measures

Since COAG last met on 10 October 2014, Australia has suffered the tragic loss of two innocent Australian lives in the Martin Place Siege. The national terrorism alert level remains high and the threat of home-grown terrorism in Australia is real. There are close to 100 Australians fighting with and supporting terrorist groups in Iraq and Syria. At least 140 people in Australia are actively supporting terrorist groups; ASIO has over 400 high priority investigations, double the number 12 months ago; and there are many individuals in our community who are vulnerable to radicalisation.

In these circumstances, it is vital that we act collectively to do everything possible to keep Australians safe.

COAG agreed to further action to counter violent extremism and terrorism in Australia, informed by the recommendations of the recent reviews of the Commonwealth counter-terrorism machinery and the steps leading up to the Martin Place Siege. This will see a new national counter-terrorism strategy with a strong focus on countering violent extremism, and greater efforts to:

- work with communities to identify and manage individuals at risk of radicalisation;
- counter violent extremism;
- better share information;
- strengthen identity management and protect identity use; and
- better track firearms and further restrict the movement and use of illegal firearms.

COAG agreed to a further discussion of counter-terrorism following the special retreat in July.

White Papers on Federation and Tax Reform

COAG agreed the goal of federation reform is to improve the standard of living and wellbeing of Australians. The current fragmentation of services can create confusion and affect outcomes. Improved arrangements are key to improving the quality of the services Australians receive. The objective of change has to be better services for the people of Australia. COAG also agreed that federation reform cannot be achieved by one level of government alone and that any reallocation of responsibilities between governments should aim to:

- *deliver better services* – recognising diversity as a strength of federation, it should be easier for people to receive, choose and access high quality services;
- *drive economic growth* – encourage a productive and efficient economy supporting growth in the standard of living for all Australians;
- *be fair* – all Australians should be able to receive, choose and access high quality services, regardless of personal circumstances, location or socio-economic background;
- *provide clear responsibility* – people should be clear which level of government is responsible for services so they can hold them to account; and
- *be durable* – arrangements need to stand the test of time and be adaptable and flexible enough to accommodate changes required over time.

COAG acknowledges that an important context for the Federation discussion is the budgetary pressure for all states and territories and the Commonwealth due to the expected growth rates in health and education expenditure and the underlying revenue base over time.

Any federation reform will need the states, territories and Commonwealth to work together to meaningfully address these long-term funding pressures and also look at structural reforms to ensure services can be delivered in the most efficient way.

COAG reiterated that governments need to be certain they would have appropriate revenue to meet their responsibilities. This will be a key consideration of both the Tax and Federation White Papers, which are being progressed together.

Improving Outcomes for Indigenous Australians

All governments agreed that sustained long-term action is still required to address Indigenous disadvantage. The Prime Minister's 2015 Closing the Gap Report showed that governments are only on track to meet two of the Closing the Gap targets. The Commonwealth, states and territories will work in partnership with local communities to develop 'local solutions for local circumstances', noting this is a focus of the recent Empowered Communities Report developed by Indigenous leaders.

The Commonwealth, states and territories will cooperate bilaterally on priority areas, building on and supporting existing initiatives. This includes:

- plans to improve school attendance and educational outcomes of Indigenous students, focusing on low attendance schools including in urban and regional areas;
- identifying actions to improve Indigenous employment and economic participation and capacity building opportunities across the country, including immediate labour market opportunities; and
- improving community safety in areas such as:
 - action on alcohol and substance misuse,
 - steps to reduce contact by Indigenous people with the criminal justice system (both as offenders and victims), and
 - improving policing in remote communities.

COAG agreed that national effort is required in further priority areas including early childhood education, early years and maternal health, and will consider strategies to improve outcomes in these areas at its meeting later in the year.

COAG also agreed the report of the investigation into Indigenous land administration and use would be provided to the late 2015 COAG meeting.

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

COAG reaffirmed its commitment to ensure the NDIS is rolled out effectively and sustainably around Australia. At full scheme, it will improve the quality of life for over 400,000 Australians who have a significant and permanent disability.

COAG noted progress with NDIS trials and that this is informing full scheme rollout. Jurisdictions are endeavouring to finalise transition agreements by end August 2015 to support national rollout of the scheme, noting Western Australia's agreement will be made later to take account of its comparative trials of different approaches to implementing the NDIS.

The Commonwealth agreed to consider the states and territories' request for flexibility in accessing the DisabilityCare Australia Fund ahead of transition agreements being finalised.

Queensland and the Commonwealth agreed to discuss a trial site, and the Northern Territory and the Commonwealth agreed to discuss a potential second trial site in a remote Indigenous community.

GST Distribution

The merits of the current system of GST distribution will be considered in the White Paper on the Reform of the Federation. The Commonwealth indicated it was prepared to consider requests from COAG members for possible reforms to the Commonwealth Grants Commission (CGC) process.

The Commonwealth and Western Australia are having bilateral discussions about how best to address the immediate impact of the CGC assessment.

Safety for Workers in Roof Cavities

Following on from the Royal Commission into the Home Insulation Programme (HIP), COAG noted a Commonwealth report on ways to improve safety of workers in roof cavities so the tragic deaths under HIP are not repeated.

COAG agreed to develop a national safety message on the risks of working in roof cavities, which states and territories may consider using. This will draw on the successful Queensland campaign 'Stay safer up there, switch off down here'.

In addition, the Commonwealth will work with the relevant industry skills council on training standards for people who work in roof cavities. States and territories will consider how to minimise risks associated with the use of reflective foil laminate in roof cavities and ways to further improve electrical safety in existing homes if required.

Harper Competition Policy Review

COAG noted the release of the Harper Review of Competition Policy, the first comprehensive assessment of Australia's competition laws, policies and institutions in 20 years.

All governments agreed improving Australia's competition settings can encourage businesses to innovate, improve government service delivery and ease cost of living pressures to the benefit of all Australians. Over coming months, jurisdictions will work together on the review and how best to progress competition reform. COAG will discuss the review at its next regular meeting in late 2015.

Deregulation

COAG also agreed to continue its important work on deregulation, including improving the regulation of industrial chemicals and reducing the regulatory burden for small business.

Jobs

COAG noted a strong economy is the best thing for jobs growth. COAG also noted the contribution infrastructure programmes could make in this regard. The Commonwealth agreed to examine options that might provide greater flexibility for access to the asset recycling initiative to support a wider range of infrastructure investments, noting the very

constructive agreements already in place with the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales and Victoria.

COAG underlined the importance of obtaining the most effective capability for Australia's national defence, at a reasonable price, that continues to meet operational requirements to the highest standards. COAG acknowledged Australia's strengths in defence materiel and the substantial contribution that defence procurement makes to the Australian economy, including in regional areas. COAG noted the contribution a continuous naval build strategy could make in strengthening Australia's industrial capability, employment, and specialist industry skills and workforce capability. The critical role of improvement in productivity was noted for a sustainable industry.

States and territories noted uncertainty regarding the Renewable Energy Target and that speedy resolution was desirable.

17 April 2015