Council of Australian Governments Meeting – Communiqué
Canberra, 19 April 2013

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) held its 35th meeting in Canberra today. The Prime Minister, Premiers, Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) participated in today's meeting. The Leaders welcomed the Victorian Premier, the Hon Dr Denis Napthine MLA and Northern Territory Chief Minister, the Hon Adam Giles MLA to their first COAG meeting.

National Schools' Reform

COAG affirmed its commitment to ongoing negotiations on the Commonwealth's proposed reforms that would provide Australian students and families with an education system that would place Australia in the top five countries in reading, numeracy and science by 2025, as well as making Australia a high quality and high equity schooling system by international standards by 2025.

The Commonwealth's proposed reforms are:

- 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 as a central part of the National Plan for School Improvement. In return for this significant extra funding, the Commonwealth is asking States and Territories to maintain current school spending and contribute the remaining estimated $5.1 billion in additional funding.

To ensure this investment is 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). These arrangements would help ensure that all schools and school systems have the funding they require to support the educational needs of their students.

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.

National Disability Insurance Scheme

COAG noted the major step forward in the establishment of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), DisabilityCare Australia, that was taken in March 2013 when the Commonwealth Parliament passed legislation for the scheme. It also noted the ongoing progress towards launches in the Hunter Region in New South Wales, Barwon area in Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania from 1 July 2013, and in the Australian Capital Territory from July 2014.

COAG also noted the agreement between the Commonwealth and South Australian Governments to establish a full NDIS with this being fully in place in South Australia by 2018-19 and between the Commonwealth and the Australian Capital Territory Governments to ongoing arrangements after the launch which will ensure eligible participants continue to receive NDIS support.

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 also noted that the Commonwealth is working bilaterally with other States to implement the NDIS in those jurisdictions.

These agreements add to the full scheme agreement with New South Wales in December 2012 and represent further strong progress towards a nationwide rollout of the NDIS. The Commonwealth will continue to work with all governments on this important reform.

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.

COAG also noted that the Commonwealth is working bilaterally with States and Territories to implement the National Injury Insurance Scheme (NIIS). COAG noted progress with launch jurisdictions on the development of a NIIS, which will complement the NDIS, to provide nationally consistent, no-fault lifetime care and support to people newly affected by catastrophic injury from an accident.

Minimum national benchmarks have been developed for the provision of no-fault lifetime care and support for people who are catastrophically injured in motor vehicle accidents.

New South Wales and Victoria already meet these motor vehicle accident benchmarks. The other NDIS launch jurisdictions – South Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory – have also agreed to the benchmarks. Queensland has also agreed in-principle with the minimum national benchmarks.

The Commonwealth and States are continuing to progress work to develop benchmarks to support elements of a NIIS for other major causes of catastrophic injury.

Australia in the Asian Century White Paper

Following on from the discussion at its December meeting, Premiers and Chief Ministers discussed the progress being made to position Australia to realise opportunities in the Asian century.

It 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.

It 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 noted its ongoing commitment to ensuring all Australian children have the opportunity to participate in quality early childhood education before they commence full-time school.

In an important step to provide funding certainty for families and providers of 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, including for vulnerable, disadvantaged and Indigenous children.

National Response to Gang Violence, Organised Crime and Illegal Firearms

In recognition of the concerns of all Governments and the community about gang violence, organised crime and firearms-related crimes, COAG agreed to continue to cooperate to ensure that law enforcement agencies have the powers they need to act effectively across Australia. 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.

Firearms laws
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 noted the joint submission from States and Territories regarding the need for an allocation of broadband spectrum that is sufficient to meet the needs of public safety agencies in all jurisdictions now and into the future.

COAG further noted that the Australian Communication and Media Authority (ACMA) is considering this further information which will inform a final decision on allocation of spectrum.

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 received a presentation from the Honourable John Brumby, Chairman of the COAG Reform Council (CRC) and former Premier of Victoria, on the need for ongoing reform to keep pace with the ever-emerging challenges of globalisation, and the importance of COAG as a powerful vehicle for national reform.

COAG reaffirmed its commitment to transparency and accountability in achieving its reform agenda and the role of the CRC in achieving this.

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.

Competition and Regulatory Reform: Update on progress

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.

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 noted the risks to public safety that arise in emergency situations as a result of inadequate mobile coverage, particularly in rural and remote communities. It 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

The automotive manufacturing industry remains important to Australia's economic future. 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 polices (including those of government departments, agencies and statutory authorities) to purchase Australian made passenger vehicles as often as possible.

Record of Appreciation

COAG acknowledged the significant contribution of Ms Helen Silver, Secretary of the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet, to the Federation and intergovernmental relations over a 30-year career spanning the Victorian and Commonwealth public services.

Canberra
19 April 2013