

COAG Communiqué

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) held its 44th meeting today, in Hobart. Leaders welcomed Premiers Berejiklian and McGowan to their first meeting.

Given recent events, leaders focussed on ensuring the safety of all Australians. Leaders agreed to further strengthen collaboration to prevent and respond to terrorism and other threats to public safety, underpinned by strong justice and national security systems.

With significant changes underway in Australia's energy market, leaders also focussed on working together to guarantee the security, reliability and affordability of energy.

Leaders agreed the importance of a strong education system for the future growth and prosperity of our nation and discussed the role of a needs-based funding model in maximising student outcomes and ensuring no student is left behind.

Leaders also made progress on other key elements of COAG's strategic forward agenda, furthering discussions on critical reforms to improve social and economic outcomes, including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Priority national responses to terror and security threats

COAG discussed current and emerging security risks, reaffirming their commitment to working collaboratively to strengthen Australia's defences and responses.

First ministers agreed that they will ensure there will be a presumption that neither bail nor parole will be granted to those persons who have demonstrated support for, or have links to, terrorist activity.

First ministers agreed that they will reconvene as soon as practicable at a special COAG to fully and more comprehensively review the nation's laws and practices directed at protecting Australians from violent extremism.

COAG agreed that there will be integration of security-cleared state and territory corrections staff with the state and territory police, AFP and ASIO Joint Counter-Terrorism Team in each jurisdiction to improve information sharing.

Leaders noted the Australia-New Zealand Counter-Terrorism Committee is developing a Strategy for the Protection of Crowded Places from Terrorism and agreed that close cooperation between all levels of government and with the private sector is critical to preserving our enjoyment of these places.

COAG discussed practical steps all governments can take to strengthen the cyber security of public and private IT systems in the context of the WanaCry ransomware campaign.

Leaders agreed to refer further consideration of a nationally consistent approach to organised crime legislation, including a nationally consistent set of principles to guide legislative responses, to Attorneys-General and Police Ministers for further examination and report back to COAG.

The Commonwealth, states and territories committed to continuing to work together, and with industry, to manage the shared national security risks arising from foreign involvement in Australia's critical infrastructure.

Improving economic and social outcomes

Leaders reaffirmed their commitment to raising the performance of Australia's school system underpinned by a quality reform plan. The Prime Minister outlined the Quality Schools reform package announced by the Commonwealth on 2 May 2017, which ensures that students with the same need within the same sector attract the same support from the Commonwealth. Leaders agreed that the new national agreement on schooling will be informed by the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools, chaired by Mr David Gonski AC, and the Independent review into regional, rural and remote education — both due to report in December 2017.

Leaders agreed on the importance of quality early childhood education and care in improving student outcomes. Consistent with COAG's strategic forward agenda, leaders agreed to discuss early childhood education and care at the next COAG meeting.

COAG acknowledged the fundamental transition underway in Australia's energy markets as the share of distributed and intermittent renewable energy grows, and as consumers play an increasing role in shaping the market. COAG reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring governments' maintain energy security and affordability.

Dr Alan Finkel AO, Australia's Chief Scientist, outlined the findings of his independent review to develop a blueprint to maintain energy security, reliability and affordability in the National Electricity Market and set out how Australia's policy and regulatory settings can evolve to keep pace with the transitions underway.

Leaders welcomed Dr Finkel's report and asked the COAG Energy Council to provide urgent advice out of session, and no later than August 2017, on which of the findings can be implemented and a timeline for doing so.

Governments agreed the importance to Australian households and businesses of secure gas supplies available at affordable prices, and noted the actions being taken by jurisdictions to increase supply for the domestic market. COAG agreed that supply can only be secure when it is affordable, and asked responsible Ministers to continue to expedite work to ensure an ongoing and affordable gas supply. Governments noted that industry and governments have a crucial role in building community acceptance and support for gas operations.

Recognising the role of public infrastructure in supporting productivity and growth over the medium to long term, leaders acknowledged the report from Treasurers. Leaders further agreed that governments have an important role to play in ensuring our funded infrastructure projects use Australian steel and that Australian steel products are not discriminated against in procurement processes.

Leaders agreed to work together on a proposal to modernise federal financial relations for consideration at the next meeting of COAG. The proposal will consider consolidating existing agreements, creating a more streamlined and strategic negotiation process and consider options rewarding good performance with reduced reporting and fewer conditions.

In line with COAG's forward agenda leaders reaffirmed their commitment to improving health outcomes for Australians. Consideration of longer-term hospitals funding arrangements will begin in 2017 and will be agreed by COAG in 2018.

COAG acknowledged work already underway by jurisdictions to improve immunisation rates including through early education and care services. Leaders noted that these existing state-based systems provide a platform for establishing a consistent national approach to immunisation and agreed to work together to bring immunisation rates for children under five as close to 100 per cent as possible to ensure herd immunity and protect them from highly infectious diseases (noting some children are unable to have vaccinations due to medical reasons).

COAG agreed the Health and Education Councils will develop options to implement a consistent national approach to increase immunisation rates in early education and care services, and advise COAG at its next meeting. This work will consider the desirability of excluding unvaccinated children who do not have a medical exemption from child care centres and preschools. This work will also examine mitigation strategies to address potential adverse impacts for vulnerable children and families; providing information to parents about vaccination rates in early education and care services; and regulatory cost, data collection feasibility and privacy implications.

Leaders reiterated their commitment to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and delivering quality support for people living with disability and ensuring quality and safeguards. Leaders expressed their ongoing commitment to working collaboratively to ensure a smooth transition to full scheme, including strengthening their efforts to address national workforce issues.

Leaders agreed that the Disability Reform Council would consider issues of the treatment of people with disability in residential settings and report back to COAG at its next meeting.

Leaders agreed with Treasurers advice not to proceed with a medical treatment stream of the National Injury Insurance Scheme (NIIS) at this time. Leaders asked Treasurers to review the cost implications of this decision in the context of the Productivity Commission Review of NDIS Costs. Leaders also asked Treasurers, in consultation with the Disability Reform Council, for advice on a general accident stream of the NIIS for the first COAG of 2018.

COAG remains strongly committed to reducing violence against women and their children. COAG noted the report from the successful National Summit on Reducing Violence against Women and their Children held in October 2016 and agreed to make the report publicly available in order to share insights.

Leaders committed to holding another summit in 2018-19 to align with the development of the Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022.

Indigenous Affairs

COAG leaders welcomed the work to refresh the Closing the Gap agenda, focussing on a strength-based approach that supports Indigenous advancement, working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This work will inform efforts to develop a refreshed agenda and targets over the remainder of 2017, implementation principles, as

well as advice to COAG's second meeting of 2017 on an approach for the next phase of Closing the Gap.

Leaders noted jurisdictional Prison to Work Action Plans, which outline how each jurisdiction will respond to the 2016 Prison to Work Report to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people transition from prison to employment. Jurisdictions will update COAG on progress every two years.

Murray-Darling Basin

Murray Darling Basin First Ministers confirmed their commitment to the Murray Darling Basin Plan and welcomed the COAG plan for delivering the Basin Plan package developed by the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council. Leaders noted the plan provides a credible and balanced pathway to implement the Basin Plan package agreed in 2012 and stressed the importance of maintaining momentum to ensure the Basin Plan is implemented on time and in full.

Basin First Ministers requested the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council provide a written update on further progress implementing the Basin Plan, prior to the next Murray-Darling Basin COAG Side-Meeting.

Developing Northern Australia

First Ministers of the Northern Australia Strategic Partnership — together with the Deputy Prime Minister and the Commonwealth Minister for Resources and Northern Australia — also took the opportunity provided by the COAG meeting to discuss opportunities to encourage economic growth in Northern Australia.

9 June 2017