

# COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENTS' MEETING

DARWIN

2 JULY 2009

## COMMUNIQUÉ

### PREAMBLE

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) held its 27th meeting in Darwin today. The Prime Minister, Premiers, Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association were again joined by a number of Treasurers for the meeting.

Australia faces ongoing economic and social challenges which Australian Governments are determined to address. COAG had a broad ranging discussion on further measures to overcome Indigenous disadvantage and the importance against the background of the global economic and financial crises of bolstering education, training and re-training efforts and securing further microeconomic and regulatory reform to enhance the economy's future productive potential.

In the former regard, COAG agreed on a compact for retrenched workers and endorsed a wide-ranging package of reforms for early childhood. In the latter regard, it committed, in particular, to an ambitious agenda of transport regulatory reform in addition to a range of other deregulatory measures.

COAG also adopted a comprehensive 10-year strategy to accelerate energy efficiency improvements as a key component of the overall approach to combat climate change. It also received briefings from the Deputy National Security Adviser on the swine influenza pandemic and the Coordinator-General regarding the implementation of the Nation Building and Jobs Plan. As well, COAG asked for an international student strategy to be developed for its consideration before the end of 2009.

### 1. CLOSING THE GAP IN INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE

As agreed at its meeting in Perth last October, COAG focused today on its Closing the Gap commitments in relation to Indigenous disadvantage.

The Chair of the Productivity Commission, Mr Gary Banks AO, gave a presentation to COAG on the findings of the report *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2009*. The report shows that while there has been some progress against the Closing the Gap targets, such as infant mortality, employment and home ownership, overall the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians remains unacceptable. This presentation coincided with the joint launch of the report by the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin MP, and Mr Banks.

Given this context, COAG agreed that effective implementation of the existing National Agreements and National Partnership Agreements was vital to close the gap in Indigenous

outcomes. As part of COAG's increasing focus on implementation issues, particular effort will be needed on Indigenous outcomes.

This work will be supported by the Coordinator-General for Remote Indigenous Services, Mr Brian Gleeson, who has recently been appointed and will report to Minister Macklin and COAG. The Coordinator-General's role is to cut through bureaucratic blockages and red tape, and to make sure services are delivered in remote communities.

While the Productivity Commission's Report has framed the significant work to be undertaken, each First Minister gave a presentation to COAG on programs that are working within each jurisdiction to demonstrate the critical success factors that underpin Closing the Gap.

In addition, COAG asked the Working Group on Indigenous Reform to prepare a national strategy to improve food security for Indigenous people living in remote Australia before the end of 2009, adopted a National Integrated Strategy for Closing the Gap, agreed to a Closing the Gap: National Indigenous Education Statement, and signed a Closing the Gap: National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Public Internet Access. COAG also agreed to a Closing the Gap; National Urban and Regional Service Delivery Strategy to address Indigenous disadvantage in urban and regional locations.

### **National Integrated Strategy for Closing the Gap in Indigenous Disadvantage**

COAG, since December 2007, has agreed to the investment of substantial additional funds in a number of areas to close the gap.

The *National Integrated Strategy for Closing the Gap in Indigenous Disadvantage*, which COAG endorsed, identifies how investment of additional funds under existing COAG agreements will make a real difference in addressing Indigenous disadvantage. The *National Integrated Strategy for Closing the Gap* includes:

- the specific outputs under each COAG agreement which contribute to meeting the six Closing the Gap targets for improving life expectancy, education and employment, and reducing child mortality rates;
- the commitment of governments to develop clear trajectories for each target and each jurisdiction, setting State and Territory-level benchmarks for monitoring performance against the targets agreed by COAG;
- areas identified for further COAG work including: food security in remote communities, overcoming data gaps, continued welfare reform, infrastructure in remote communities and Indigenous economic development; and
- case studies of best-practice programs and initiatives by governments, the private and community sectors which contribute to meeting the Closing the Gap targets.

As part of the Integrated Strategy, the Commonwealth is to provide an additional \$46.4 million over four years to fund work undertaken by national data agencies, such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, to improve the evidence base and address data gaps.

## **Development of a Closing the Gap Indigenous Education Action Plan**

On all measures, Indigenous Australians lag behind other Australians in their educational attainment. COAG adopted an Indigenous Education Statement: *Towards the Development of an Indigenous Education Action Plan*, including a commitment that States and Territories will implement specific strategies to meet the COAG Indigenous education targets in areas of concentrated Indigenous population.

COAG agreed that regional and local school level strategies:

- improve enrolment, attendance and retention rates and student engagement;
- improve literacy and numeracy attainment;
- enhance development of the Indigenous education workforce and up-skilling the teaching workforce to better support Indigenous students;
- improve parental and community engagement;
- improve ‘wrap around’ support, including through extended service school models;
- improve transition from school to further education through education and training; and
- create high expectations for Indigenous young people.

These strategies will be brought together in a National Indigenous Education Action Plan, currently being developed by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) in consultation with Indigenous education leaders.

## **Closing the Gap: National Remote Indigenous Food Security Strategy**

Improving the affordability and availability of healthy food in remote Indigenous communities is critical to addressing poor health outcomes and closing the gap in life expectancy.

COAG has requested the development, by the end of 2009, of a national strategy to address food security in remote Indigenous communities. The strategy is aimed at delivering improved health outcomes for Indigenous Australians in remote communities by:

- taking a nationally coordinated approach to ensuring food security in remote communities;
- agreement to a nationally-consistent licensing scheme for remote community stores to be developed as part of the strategy;
- improving the operation and financial management of remote community stores to address issues of poor governance and market failure;
- improving the accessibility and affordability of healthy and nutritious foods in remote Indigenous communities; and
- increasing the proportion of income in remote communities spent on consumption of nutritious food.

## **Closing the Gap: National Urban and Regional Service Delivery Strategy**

To close the gap, there will need to be a concerted effort by government among the 75 per cent of Indigenous Australians who live in urban and regional locations across Australia.

COAG therefore agreed to a *Closing the Gap: National Urban and Regional Service Delivery Strategy*, which commits governments to coordinate and target the substantial funding provided under mainstream and Indigenous-specific programs to address Indigenous disadvantage in urban and regional locations.

In addition, it provides for:

- targeting of existing and future investments in housing, homelessness, education, employment, health and early childhood services to address Indigenous disadvantage in urban and regional areas;
- improved access by Indigenous people to better coordinated and targeted services;
- local need/place-based approaches enabling initiatives to be delivered in a manner appropriate to needs in a particular location;
- strengthened Indigenous capacity, engagement and participation to promote a strong and positive view of Indigenous identity and culture and strengthening individual, family and community wellbeing and capacity as a necessary impetus to improved access to, and take-up of, services;
- more effective program accountability and sustainability, with governments required to enhance statistical collection services and other information sources to improve the detail and accuracy of reporting on outcomes; and
- COAG monitoring progress in utilising Indigenous-specific and mainstream National Partnerships (NPs) to improve outcomes in urban and regional locations (jurisdictions are required to report to COAG on progress by the end of 2009).

## **Closing the Gap: National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Public Internet Access**

Full participation in society requires access to important means of communication and information.

In recognition of this, today COAG signed the *Closing the Gap: National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Public Internet Access*. The agreement will deliver:

- public internet access facilities in remote Indigenous communities where there is limited or no public internet access;
- maintenance and support of public internet access in those communities, commencing in 2011-12; and
- training in basic computer and internet use in up to 60 remote communities a year.

The NP will result in increased access to online resources in remote communities, enhanced information and computer literacy and increased use of the internet to facilitate transactions and communication with government agencies, businesses, communities and families.

The Commonwealth will provide funding of almost \$7 million over four years from 2009-10 to support this initiative.

## **2. IMPROVING PRODUCTIVITY – BETTER SKILLING AND JOB CAPABILITY NOW AND IN THE FUTURE**

It is essential that young people and workers in Australia strengthen their skills and that people who lose their jobs have access to opportunities to improve their skills to enable an early return into the workforce. Moreover, our future productivity and social cohesion will be enhanced by giving all Australian children the best start in life.

### **Youth Attainment and Transitions**

COAG today agreed the *National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions* which will deliver the Youth Compact. The Youth Compact will support young people to gain skills through stronger engagement in education and training. It requires young people to complete Year 10 and then to be in full-time education, training or employment; offers a training entitlement to all 15 to 24 years olds; and provides improved support through career advice and better assistance with the transition through school to further training and work.

The NP will implement strategies for increased numbers of young people attaining Year 12 or higher qualifications; more young people engaged in education and training; and young people having the skills required to participate in the labour market as the economy recovers.

The NP is supported by \$100 million in reward funding for increased participation and Year 12 attainment rates and \$623 million over five years for youth careers and transitions programs.

Responsibility for youth careers and transitions programs will be progressively transferred to the States and Territories.

### **A Compact with Retrenched Workers**

The Compact with Retrenched Workers agreed by COAG today complements the Compact with Young Australians agreed by COAG on 30 April 2009, under which 15-19 years old are guaranteed an education or training place and 20-24 year olds are guaranteed a training place for up-skilling.

COAG recognised the significant investment made by all jurisdictions to support retrenched workers and agreed to provide retrenched workers with an entitlement to a training place.

From 1 July 2009, retrenched workers aged 25 years and over will be entitled to a training place for a government subsidised vocational education and training qualification, which would result in the individual achieving a higher qualification.

As part of the Compact:

- Job Services Australia providers will assist retrenched workers to identify their skills and training needs and will work with the States and Territories to implement the training entitlement; and
- States and Territories will prioritise training places to support the Compact.

Today's announcement builds on the Commonwealth's investment of \$300 million to provide retrenched workers with immediate access to employment support.

The training entitlement will be available to all workers retrenched since 1 January 2009 who hold a letter of redundancy from their employer and who are registered with a Job Services Australia provider. The entitlement will be offered from 1 July 2009 and until 31 December 2011.

### **Australian Apprentices Taskforce**

COAG agreed that when contracting for government stimulus and infrastructure projects, the States and Territories will aim to secure at least 10 per cent of the total contract labour hours to be undertaken by apprentices and trainees and those seeking to up-skill, where this does not result in unreasonable costs to business. COAG also agreed that all States and Territories will establish an out-of-trade register, and provide targeted job matching and mentoring services for apprentices and trainees. COAG requested that the Taskforce report back on implementation and further urgent actions to support apprentices during the downturn at its next meeting.

### **Vocational Education and Training Reform**

COAG agreed to a workplan for further reforms to the Vocational Education and Training system. The workplan will address a number of major reform areas including:

- developing models for a national regulatory body for vocational education and training;
- ensuring the Australian Apprenticeship system is responsive to the needs of individuals and enterprises, especially during the downturn and into recovery;
- increasing the level of investment in nationally-accredited training;
- providing timely, relevant and easy to navigate information to individuals and enterprises; and
- ensuring the training system, and the products of the training system, are responsive to the needs of individuals, businesses and industry.

### **Early Childhood Development**

COAG agreed to a wide-ranging package of reforms for early childhood, building on initial investment in universal access to early childhood education. The national strategy *Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy* will guide consideration of investment in future reforms to support around two million children aged under eight and their families.

As an immediate action under the national strategy, implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework will begin in July 2009 to provide guidance to parents and early childhood educators to support early learning.

COAG has also agreed to commence a formal consultation process on quality reforms to early childhood education and care, representing a major step towards a genuinely national system. COAG has agreed to a jointly governed unified national system to replace current licensing and quality assurance processes. Under the proposed approach, individual services will need to deal with only one organisation for quality assessment, reducing the regulatory burden on over 10,000 services.

A single set of improved national quality standards that integrate education and care will promote good developmental outcomes for more than one million children attending child care and preschool. The Regulation Impact Statement for Early Childhood Education and Care Quality Reforms, prepared for public consultation, proposes lower staff to child ratios and higher staff qualification requirements. The proposed new ratings will provide better information about service quality to help parents to choose a service and promote quality improvements amongst services. COAG will seek views through the consultation process on how quality reforms could be implemented in the most efficient and sustainable manner, having regard to other early childhood priorities and the current economic environment.

### **3. MICROECONOMIC REFORM TO SUPPORT ECONOMIC GROWTH**

COAG acknowledged that the global economic crisis underscores the importance of further microeconomic reform, including in relation to regulatory reform. There are widespread concerns that the global economic and financial crises will lower trend economic growth in key developed countries around the world because of higher risk aversion, less access to finance and higher required returns on capital. Continued domestic microeconomic reform will enhance Australia's productivity and competitiveness, raising potential growth rates and living standards, and better enable Australia to deal with difficult international economic circumstances.

#### **Regulatory Reform**

COAG noted that good progress is being made on the Seamless National Economy agenda, with significant progress on a number of initiatives, including nationally-uniform occupational health and safety laws that reduce employers' costs; a national licensing system for specified occupations to improve flexibility and reduce licence costs; and, a single Commonwealth managed consumer credit system, reducing regulation and enhancing consumer protection.

COAG endorsed a series of reforms, recommended by the Business Regulation and Competition Working Group (BRCWG), for further progress on regulatory reform. To this end, COAG signed an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) to underpin the establishment of national Australian Consumer Law, based on existing consumer protection provisions and new product safety regulation and enforcement regime, and a further IGA covering national business names registration, which will result in lower costs of registering a business.

COAG also agreed to amendments in the Implementation Plan for the Seamless National Economy National Partnership as well as agreeing that the COAG Reform Council will in future report on the progress of three new items on the BRCWG agenda.

### **Development Assessment**

COAG agreed to develop national performance measures for Development Assessment (DA) by the end of 2009 that will contain information on the number, type and length of assessment of DAs. The first national performance report will be publicly released by June 2010 and cover the 2008-09 financial year. These performance measures will be important for improving transparency and accountability for planning systems and will be used as a basis for future reforms.

COAG agreed to work towards harmonising code-based development assessment standards between jurisdictions, increasing the proportion of code-assessed DAs, and developing stand-alone assessment codes for houses, units and commercial developments. Code-based DA systems mean that simple development proposals can be assessed more quickly and free-up planning resources to assess more complex proposals.

These reforms are important in promoting private sector activity in the context of the global recession. A target range for code-based assessments will therefore be developed for COAG's consideration at the final COAG meeting this year (or the first COAG meeting in 2010).

The Local Government and Planning Ministers' Council will report to COAG by the end of 2009 on proposals to expedite DA reform on the basis of work it is currently undertaking, which is outlined at Attachment A.

COAG also agreed that Coordinator-General mechanisms would take responsibility for ensuring the timely delivery of the Nation Building Programs and projects funded by the Commonwealth and delivered by the States under the Building Australia Fund, the Education Investment Fund and the Health and Hospitals Fund and work together to streamline assessment and approvals processes for these projects. Jurisdictions will also appoint Coordinators with specific project delivery responsibility for each of these major projects.

COAG also agreed that funding agreements between the Commonwealth and State Governments for major infrastructure projects will require an integrated assessment and approval process encompassing all statutory assessments and approvals by the three levels of government with target time periods for each stage of the process, and that the process would be subject to transparent regular reporting arrangements including formal reporting through the Commonwealth Coordinator-General.

### **Transport Regulation**

COAG agreed to implement national regulation for maritime safety, rail safety and heavy vehicles; this will mean improved safety and reduced costs and regulatory burden for Australian transport companies as well as reduced costs of exports and trade.

These reforms will mean that the Australian Maritime Safety Authority will become the national safety regulator for all commercial shipping in Australian waters.



A single national heavy vehicle regulator will also be established to regulate all vehicles over 4.5 gross tonnes, ending the separate and at times conflicting regulatory imposts on the heavy vehicle industry.

COAG agreed to develop a national rail safety regulatory system with further consideration of the scope and form of the regulator following receipt of advice at the end of 2009 from the Standing Committee on Transport on specific safety requirements within jurisdictions, especially in relation to urban systems and the interface with interstate and freight operations. The Australian Transport Council will report to COAG at its first meeting in 2010 on progress in developing a national rail safety regulatory system and investigator with a view to bringing the final NP to COAG for approval by mid-2011. This advice should consider all options, including how to strengthen the effectiveness of the Rail Safety Regulators Panel.

These national arrangements will remove inefficiencies arising from inconsistent jurisdictional requirements, streamline the regulatory arrangements and thus reduce the compliance burden for business, and reduce transport costs more generally. Importantly, the efficiencies to be gained in moving to national transport safety regimes will not compromise safety. In fact, the better assessment of risk and more efficient allocation of resources through a national scheme will improve the safety of these key transport sectors.

COAG also commissioned the next stage of the research needed to move towards more efficient heavy vehicle charging under the COAG Road Reform Plan.

### **Nation Building –Economic Stimulus Plan**

COAG noted the summary report of the Coordinators-General on the Nation Building and Jobs Plan which details that construction activity is now underway across all of the infrastructure elements of the Stimulus Plan, with a significant surge in new construction commencing in June-July in the schools, social housing and community infrastructure programs:

- essential repairs to around 47,000 social housing dwellings have commenced with work on over 9,000 homes completed and construction work already commenced on 593 new homes across Australia under the first stage of the social housing construction program. More than 7,000 new homes have been approved for construction already. Defence Housing Australia is well ahead of schedule on its building program with 351 of the planned 802 houses currently under construction;
- work on the National School Pride program is underway with 5,120 projects currently commenced and construction work started on 285 first round primary school construction projects for halls, libraries, and new classrooms;
- \$550 million in funding has been approved for 137 larger, strategic projects under the Commonwealth's Community Infrastructure Program, in addition to the \$250 million already provided to all 560 councils for over 3000 local projects;
- there has been significant work undertaken on key national rail and road projects; and
- in relation to energy efficiency, the ceiling insulation and solar hot water programs are already in operation with more than 60,000 applications for rebates received, with the longer-term arrangements for ceiling insulation, with installers being paid the rebate directly by the Commonwealth, applying from 1 July 2009.

## **National Broadband Network**

COAG agreed that the Commonwealth, State and local governments would cooperate in facilitating the speedy roll-out of the National Broadband Network, including in relation to greenfield developments.

### **4. DEALING WITH CLIMATE CHANGE THROUGH ENERGY EFFICIENCY**

For the first time, Australian Governments have agreed a comprehensive 10-year strategy to accelerate energy efficiency improvements for householders and businesses across all sectors of the economy. Accelerating energy efficiency is a key plank in the strategy to combat climate change, reduce the cost of emissions abatement and improve the productivity of the economy. The strategy will complement the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme by addressing the barriers that are preventing the efficient uptake of energy efficient opportunities, such as split incentives and information failures.

COAG today signed the National Partnership Agreement on Energy Efficiency, which will deliver a nationally-consistent and cooperative approach to energy efficiency, encompassing:

- assistance to households to reduce energy use by providing information and advice, financial assistance and demonstration programs;
- assistance to business and industry to obtain the knowledge, skills and capacity to pursue cost-effective energy efficiency opportunities and therefore meet the challenges of a low carbon economy;
- higher energy efficiency standards to deliver substantial growth in the number of highly energy efficient homes and buildings, and provide a clear road map to assist Australia's residential and commercial building sector to adapt;
- nationally-consistent energy efficiency standards for appliances and equipment and a process to enable industry to adjust to increasingly stringent standards over time;
- introducing in 2010 new standards for the energy performance of air conditioners and increasing the standard by a further 10 per cent from 1 October 2011;
- addressing potential regulatory impediments to the take up of innovative demand side initiatives and smart grid technologies;
- governments working in partnership to improve the energy efficiency of their own buildings and operations; and
- a detailed assessment of possible vehicle efficiency measures, such as CO<sub>2</sub> emission standards, which international studies have indicated have the capacity to reduce fuel consumption by 30 per cent over the medium term, and significantly contribute to emissions reductions.

All regulatory measures will be subject to normal regulatory impact assessment.

In addition to an \$88 million commitment for joint measures, the strategy builds on the substantial investments and commitments being made by all jurisdictions to driving energy efficiency in their own jurisdictions.

The vehicle efficiency measures result from the work of the Australian Transport Council and the Environment Protection and Heritage Council and are aimed at improving the fuel efficiency of the vehicle fleet.

COAG agreed to undertake a Regulatory Impact Statement to assess the costs and benefits of introducing CO<sub>2</sub> emission standards for light vehicles. The regulatory statement will assess the impact of both voluntary and mandatory standards on the automotive industry and the complementarity of measures with the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. COAG will make a final decision following thorough consultation with industry and the community.

COAG also agreed to improve the availability of fuel consumption data so that consumers are better equipped to make informed purchasing decisions. COAG further agreed to ask the Henry Tax Review to consider the merit of financial incentives for the purchase of fuel efficient cars and assess the merits of differential stamp duty and registration regimes linked to environmental performance.

## **5. INTERNATIONAL STUDENT STRATEGY**

International students are welcome in Australia. They provide diversity and richness to our education and training institutions and enrich the communities in which they live. Now and in the future, Australia grows as a nation as a result of students coming here and Australians studying abroad.

In recent years, Australia has confirmed its reputation as a destination of choice for international students seeking a high quality education. The rapid increase in international students' numbers is welcome and has been encouraged.

COAG noted that all jurisdictions have implemented a range of additional initiatives to improve student safety including a crackdown on crime around metropolitan transport hubs and heightened community engagement by police. COAG agreed such initiatives should be maintained.

COAG strongly supported high profile, visible police initiatives, where required, to respond to attacks on international students, targeting metropolitan transit hubs and other priority areas to ensure the general safety of students and the travelling public that frequent the areas, and will maintain this commitment for as long as it is required.

Today COAG agreed to develop a comprehensive national International Student Strategy. The strategy will improve the experience of international students in Australia and in turn benefit all of Australian society.

The development of a national International Student Strategy will promote a broader vision of international education to encompass the broader benefits to Australia and the home nation and place Australia's international education on a more sustainable basis. It will also:

- improve the international student experience through improved pre- and post-arrival information and engagement with the ethnic and broader Australian community;
- enhance general educational offerings that develop cultural understanding, tolerance and language skills;

- achieve a clearer articulation between international education and migration policies; and
- consider the quality of education providers.

Development of the strategy would proceed in parallel with the review of the *Education for Overseas Students Act 2000* to enable alignment of amended legislation and the new strategy by June 2010.

Today all governments also agreed on the importance of extending Australian hospitality to international students and agreed, as part of a national International Student Strategy, to support greater levels of interaction between international students and local communities.

The Prime Minister announced today \$50,000 for Darebin City Council, in the north of Melbourne, to engage international students with the community of Darebin through social and sporting events. The Commonwealth will use the Darebin initiative as a model for further initiatives and will also publish a guide, based on successful activities and programs run by education institutions, so that all institutions with international students can enhance social interaction between communities and international students.

The Prime Minister said it was important to extend Australian hospitality to international students and calls on all governments, education and training providers and student unions, as part of a national International Student Strategy, to support greater levels of interaction between international students and local communities.

COAG also noted its support for the Australian delegation to India that will meet with Indian Government Ministers and key officials in Delhi on 5 July 2009 and will travel to major Indian cities to meet with state governments and others to hear about their concerns and reassure them that Australia is a safe destination for Indian students. It will be led by a senior Commonwealth official and comprise officials from the Commonwealth, New South Wales, and Victorian Governments, Victorian Police, and representatives of the vocational and higher education sectors.

COAG also supported the Prime Minister's announcement of an International Student Roundtable to be held in Canberra on 14-15 September 2009. International students will be able to discuss directly issues affecting their study experience – such as accommodation, welfare and safety – and propose ideas for their resolution at the International Student Roundtable. These ideas will then be considered by Ministers at the inaugural Ministerial Council on Tertiary Education in November 2009.

## **6. OTHER MATTERS**

### **Swine Influenza Pandemic**

COAG noted the national response to the H1N1 Influenza 09 virus, and the new PROTECT phase, which is a measured, reasonable and proportionate health response to the risk that the infection poses to the Australian community. COAG acknowledged Australia's human influenza pandemic plans are effectively guiding the response to the virus and committed to continue to work together to protect Australia from a pandemic. COAG again recognised the importance of, and encouraged Australians to observe, good personal hygiene practices as a significant preventive measure against the spread of influenza, including the

H1N1 influenza 09 virus. COAG agreed to consider, as soon as possible after a vaccine for H1N1 influenza 09 has become widely available, an updated National Action Plan for Pandemic Influenza and associated documents.

### **Review of Ministerial Councils**

Ministerial Councils are an integral part of the framework of intergovernmental arrangements in Australia and, in some cases, across the Tasman. In order to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of these arrangements, COAG agreed that Dr Allan Hawke will lead a review of Ministerial Councils. Dr Hawke is to report to COAG in November 2009.

### **Australian Energy Market Agreement**

COAG today signed the revised Australian Energy Market Agreement, which has been amended to specify that, where retail prices are regulated, energy costs associated with the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme and the Renewable Energy Target shall be passed through to end-use consumers. These price increases, together with more cost-reflective retail prices, including the phase-out of retail price caps where competition is found to be effective, will help drive more efficient use of energy and assist in managing peak energy demand growth.

### **Newborn Hearing Screening**

All Australian Governments recognise the importance of ensuring that infants born with hearing problems are identified and treated as soon as possible. COAG has agreed to ensure that by the end of 2010 every child born in Australia has access to screening for congenital hearing impairments.

### **Increasing Focus on the Implementation of COAG Decisions**

COAG has made significant progress in tackling economic, social and environmental challenges facing Australia over the past 18 months. Given the number and importance of recent decisions, COAG agreed to review rigorously implementation progress every six months. The COAG Reform Council's current reporting on implementation and outcomes will play an important role in supporting these discussions.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PLANNING MINISTERS' COUNCIL  
SUB-GROUP ON DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT REFORM**

COAG agreed that in the context of the global economic recession, it is important to promote private sector activity. In particular, the Local Government and Planning Ministers' Council (LGPMC) will report to COAG by the end of 2009 through the Business Regulation and Competition Working Group on proposals to expedite Development Assessment (DA) reform. The proposals draw on five streams of work initiated by the LGPMC, which include national performance measures, work towards harmonising code-based development assessment standards, COAG consideration of a target range for code-based assessments to encourage private sector activity, and accelerated use of 'code assessment'.

The projects being undertaken by the LGPMC are:

1. **roll-out of electronic DA (eDA) processing nationally (led by Victoria):-** this work will develop costed options and a funding proposal to enable continued implementation and uptake of eDA across all jurisdictions. It will build upon the current Housing Affordability Fund (HAF) projects to enable all parties involved in the development assessment process to interchange information between differing systems in a "standard" manner. Project consultants have completed a survey, which included interviews with each jurisdiction and a workshop. A draft report is due in mid-2009;
2. **a system of national performance monitoring (led by South Australia):-** this work will develop a common set of national performance measures, used to assess the "health" of a DA system, which will then be nationally publicised. The report will have information about the number, type and length of assessment of DAs. The report will be released publicly by June 2010 and cover the 2008-09 financial year;
3. **accelerated use of 'code assessment' (led by New South Wales):-** this work will develop a national web-based template for the assessment of residential development (with common language and metrics). Use of the template would expedite the processing of DAs leading to faster approvals, increase the proportion of code-assessed DAs, and assist in developing stand-alone assessment codes for houses, units and commercial developments. Consultants have been appointed and the first stage, to undertake a review of the systems in each jurisdiction, is due to be completed shortly. Code-based DA systems mean that simple development proposals can be assessed more quickly and free up resources to assess more complex proposals. This work will not undermine existing approaches, such as deeming approvals, that are also designed to speed up DA processes;
4. **establish a set of supporting national planning system principles (led by Queensland):-** this work will review leading practice approaches in developing a set of national planning principles or similar to help guide a national approach. The work will be led by an expert panel with its findings widely disseminated to government, industry and other key stakeholders for consultation. A project manager has been appointed and an expert planner will be engaged shortly to establish and facilitate the panel; and
5. **assessment of benefits accruing from DA reforms (led by the ACT):-** this work involves preparing a model for measuring the benefits of each of the four reform streams

above. It will examine the cost savings and efficiency dividends accruing from each area of reform and provide the evidence to support continuing reforms. A report is expected to be finalised in late August 2009.