

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENTS

ADELAIDE – 12 DECEMBER 2018

COMMUNIQUÉ

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) held its 46th meeting today in Adelaide. Leaders made progress on priority economic, social and national security issues to improve the lives and ensure the safety of all Australians.

Improving population planning and management

Population growth is an important economic driver and contributes to our dynamic and diverse society.

Australia's population has grown faster than most other advanced economies in recent years. Over two-thirds of our population increase in the past decade has occurred in Sydney, Melbourne and South East Queensland, driving demand for infrastructure, and services such as housing. At the same time, other jurisdictions and regional centres are calling for more people to support their economies and fill critical gaps to ensure regional communities thrive. Today, leaders committed to working together to improve population planning and management to ensure we strike the right balance for all Australians.

Managing population change is a shared responsibility involving all levels of government working across many fronts – from investment in infrastructure through to service delivery. To ensure we get the best outcomes managing population change over the coming decade and beyond, leaders requested that Commonwealth, state and territory Treasurers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association consider a framework for national population and planning to address population management in Australia, for consideration at a future COAG meeting.

The Treasurers' Forum will meet for the first time in February 2019 to start developing the Framework, including to consider jurisdictions' input to migration settings, opportunities for greater population planning and data sharing, and to identify future skills requirements at a regional level. The Treasurers' Forum will also consider how to encourage dispersal of international students beyond major capital cities and support infrastructure planning and priority setting. Given the importance of population planning and management, leaders also agreed that it be a standing item on the COAG agenda.

COAG recognised Australia's migration program has been an important driver of population change, contributing to our culturally rich society, and is increasingly important for sustaining our per capita economic growth as our population ages. The Commonwealth is committed to working with states and territories to ensure that the program is informed by the needs of local communities, as one element of strengthening coordination of population planning and management across all levels of government.

Increasing our resilience to drought

Drought is a recurring part of Australia's landscape. Australia is a dry continent with a highly variable climate and experts predict we will spend more time in extreme drought. The coming summer will likely see a continuation of drought conditions, extending pressure on farming families, businesses and communities.

Our farmers are adopting increasingly sophisticated and effective strategies to deal with drought. They are not alone — all governments are working together to support farming families, businesses and communities to better prepare and plan for the future.

COAG agreed and signed a new National Drought Agreement, which sets out a joint approach to drought preparedness, response and recovery with a focus on accountability and transparency. It recognises the need to support farming businesses and farming communities to manage and prepare for climate change and variability. The new agreement delivers on a commitment made by leaders at the National Drought Summit and focusses measures across all jurisdictions on bolstering risk management practices and enhancing our long-term preparedness and resilience.

Closing the Gap

COAG is listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and their peak and governing bodies. Leaders are committed to ensuring that the finalisation of targets and implementation of the Closing the Gap framework occurs through a genuine, formal partnership between the Commonwealth, state and territory governments and Indigenous Australians through their representatives.

This formal partnership must be based on mutual respect between parties and an acceptance that direct engagement and negotiation is the preferred pathway to productive and effective outcomes. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must play an integral part in the making of the decisions that affect their lives – this is critical to closing the gap.

Today, COAG issued a statement outlining a strengths based framework, which prioritises intergenerational change and the aspirations and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across all Australian communities. The finalisation of this framework and associated draft targets will be agreed through a formal partnership.

Governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives will share ownership of, and responsibility for, a jointly agreed framework and targets and ongoing monitoring of the Closing the Gap agenda. This will include an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led three yearly comprehensive evaluation of the framework and progress.

The arrangements of the formal partnership between COAG and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation will be settled by the end of February 2019, and will include a Ministerial Council on Closing the Gap, with Ministers nominated by jurisdictions and representation from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The framework and draft targets will be finalised through this Council by mid-2019, ahead of endorsement by COAG. A review of the National Indigenous Reform Agreement will be informed by the framework.

Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition

COAG acknowledged the release of the Report of the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition and endorsed the concept of co-design recommended by the Committee. COAG looks forward to discussing the work on co-design at its next meeting.

Reforming Australia's health system

A health system focussed on helping Australians to improve their health and receive safe, high quality care in the right place, at the right time, is a shared goal of all governments.

Leaders reaffirmed their commitment to health reform to improve health outcomes for Australians. They acknowledged progress on developing the next health and hospitals agreement, which will operate from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2025.

Health Ministers will continue to lead the development of this agreement for COAG approval before the end of 2019. The agreement will deliver long-term reforms to encourage joined up care for patients, emphasise prevention and provide information to help Australians make informed choices.

Recognising the importance of integrity and predictability in health funding, leaders agreed to incorporate improved processes in the next health and hospitals agreement to support clear consultation ahead of annual funding determinations and provide greater clarity and transparency for all governments, for COAG's consideration by June 2019.

Reducing violence against women and their children

Domestic, family and sexual violence affects women and children from all aspects of life, in communities all across Australia.

Delegates from the second National Summit on Reducing Violence against Women and their Children held in Adelaide in October 2018 delivered a compelling statement to COAG calling for urgent action. Leaders committed to strengthening efforts to eliminate this blight on Australian society. Leaders noted in particular the heightened risks faced by children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, women with disability, older women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and the LGBTI community. They also agreed the statement will inform the development of the Fourth Action Plan of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*.

Keeping our children safe is everyone's responsibility. All leaders expressed support for the newly formed Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation in its mission to drive a nation-wide response.

Ensuring the wellbeing of Australia's young people

High quality learning in the early years of life has an important influence on educational and whole-of-life outcomes. In recognition of this, leaders agreed to the Early Learning Reform Principles developed by the COAG Education Council and informed by the *Lifting Our Game* review.

In addition, bullying has a damaging effect on Australia's children and young people, and is increasingly occurring online. Leaders took the opportunity to acknowledge the valuable work done across the country to deal with this issue, including the recent Queensland anti-cyber bullying Taskforce report and noted a work program across governments and communities that combats bullying and cyberbullying.

Leaders also supported in-principle the 'right to be forgotten' for victims of cyberbullying and abuse and agreed the Commonwealth, in consultation with states and territories, would bring back to COAG a proposal to achieve this.

Supporting small business

With more than 3 million small and medium businesses in Australia employing around 7 million people, supporting small business is critical to keeping the economy strong. Leaders acknowledged that cash flow is crucial to any business and agreed their governments should lead the way by paying small business invoices on time. State and territory governments committed to moving towards the

Commonwealth government's commitment and to paying 80 to 100 per cent of invoices under \$1 million from small businesses within 20 calendar days, by a date to be nominated by each jurisdiction.

Increasing collaboration on national security

The risk of terrorism from individuals and groups in Australia is real and evolving. Building on the success of the Special Meeting of COAG on Counter-Terrorism in October 2017, leaders today committed to continue to work together to counter terrorism and to collaborate further on law enforcement and other national security issues.

Safeguarding our institutions and democracy

Acts of foreign interference can threaten our sovereignty, values and national interests.

Internationally, technological developments have created new opportunities for foreign interference. Australia is not immune to this threat.

It is up to all Australian governments to preserve the integrity of our democracy. That is why COAG agreed that Electoral Commissions, security and government agencies will work together to ensure that Australia's electoral systems are resilient to cyber threats. This is part of a broader effort to protect our elections from foreign interference.

Enhancing cyber capability and resilience

A secure cyberspace is essential for a modern, technology-driven economy. But cyber adversaries are expanding their reach, conducting more sophisticated and harmful attacks.

Close cooperation and interoperability between Commonwealth and state agencies is critical to Australia's ability to address these threats.

To better coordinate our responses to cyber-attacks and seek to reduce their scope and severity, leaders agreed to adopt new Cyber Incident Management Arrangements.

COAG has asked Senior Officials to report at the next meeting on the state of cyber skills development in Australia.

Better equipping our agencies to deal with the threat of terrorism and organised crime

The use of drones has increased dramatically in recent years, bringing with it both benefits and risks to the economy and community. Overseas, terrorist groups have used drones, including to carry explosives and conduct surveillance. At home, drones have been used to invade people's privacy, deliver contraband into detention facilities and endanger aircraft.

Leaders acknowledged the need to combat the unlawful use of drones and agreed to develop both short- and long-term measures to support law enforcement agencies in deploying counter-drone capabilities.

To renew and strengthen Australia's focus and the collaboration between all governments on surface transport security, leaders agreed to review and update the Intergovernmental Agreement on Surface Transport Security.

Australia's law enforcement and intelligence agencies are among the best in the world. To remain so, they need access to the right tools to deter, detect and disrupt complex criminal activities and

networks, while maintaining individual rights to privacy. To achieve this, leaders agreed to a new National Strategy to Fight Transnational, Serious and Organised Crime.

Crisis and Emergency Management

The Commonwealth has delivered on the commitment made at last year's Counter Terrorism COAG to make it easier for the Australian Defence Force to provide assistance in the event of a terrorist incident. Leaders agreed to run a national counter-terrorism exercise to practice these new arrangements so agencies can respond swiftly and decisively.

COAG also agreed to hold annual exercises, with the first to be hosted by New South Wales, to improve our ability to work together to respond effectively in times of crisis, such as pandemics and natural disasters.

Leaders also reflected on the successful security arrangements supporting the Commonwealth Games 2018 at the Gold Coast and the highly collaborative security arrangements that ensured a safe, secure and welcoming environment.

Our public safety agencies need to work with advanced technology so they can keep doing what they do best, reliably and without interruption, for decades to come.

Today, leaders took a significant step towards achieving a federated national Public Safety Mobile Broadband (PSMB) capability. All jurisdictions agreed a Strategic Roadmap that sets out a plan to design, implement and operate PSMB and to continue to work together to resolve the supporting spectrum arrangements in parallel with proof of concept trials.

Murray-Darling Basin

Murray-Darling Basin leaders endorsed the Murray-Darling Basin Compliance Compact, which ensures a consistent and transparent approach to ensuring compliance with Commonwealth and state laws for water use in the Basin. Leaders also considered the Progress Report to COAG on *Implementing the Basin Plan*, and welcomed the significant developments in implementing this Plan.