



# BRIEFING NOTE:

## Importance of the Local Government Workforce to Australia

### Background

As a direct provider of local services and with responsibility for administrative and governance functions, local governments play a hugely significant role within local communities and the broader government service delivery environment.

Local government employs 192,000 people nationally and is a major employment sector providing diverse employment opportunities, particularly in regional and rural areas. There is significant opportunity to enhance regional and rural development through advancement of the local government workforce.

### Local Government Workforce Projections

The Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) and Local Government Managers Australia (LGMA) have recently prepared a workforce projection for local government employees based on 2011 Census data. The aim of the projection is to provide an approximation of the national local government workforce, at the local government area (LGA) level that is not currently provided by existing datasets.

This has identified some of the following local government workforce characteristics across urban, regional and rural geographic scales:

- On average, there are 350 local government employees per LGA in Australia
- On average, local government employees comprise 5.8% of individual LGA workforces
- There are over 100 regional and rural LGAs (out of approximately 565 local government areas nationally) with an above average rate of local government employees
- The local government workforce is more evenly distributed between regional and rural areas when compared to other levels of government (Table 1)

- The local government workforce is more evenly distributed between urban, regional and rural areas when compared to larger government service delivery industries of health and education and more traditional regional and rural industries such as mining and agriculture (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Sector/industry workforce distribution by urban, regional and rural area.

Sector / Industry	Urban	Regional	Rural
Local Government	41%	41%	18%
State Government	71%	24%	5%
Federal Government	82%	16%	2%
Mining	26%	41%	33%
Agriculture	5%	38%	57%
Health Care and Social Assistance	53%	38%	9%
Education	54%	36%	10%
<b>Total Workforce Distribution</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>10%</b>

The workforce projection also identified:

- More than 60 regional and rural LGAs where local government employees make up over 10% of the total local workforce
- 25 regional and rural LGAs where local government employees make up over 20% of the total local workforce
- 7 regional and rural LGAs where local government employees make up over half the total local workforce, and
- 17 regional and rural LGAs where local government is the major employer within the community (Table 2).

The local government sector presents an opportunity to play a leading and active role in inter-governmental collaboration that can enhance regional and rural community outcomes. However without support to implement the *National Workforce Strategy*<sup>1</sup> and the necessary data to assess and enhance local government workforce skills and planning and development, identifying opportunities for capacity building and inter-governmental collaboration is challenged. Accurate and comprehensive local government workforce data is critical to ensuring that the sector has the workforce capacity and capability to continue to deliver a broad range of services in urban, regional, rural and remote locations.

<sup>1</sup> Local Government Practice Unit of Local Government Managers Australia 2013, *Future-Proofing Local Government: National Workforce Strategy 2013-2020*, Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government, University of Technology, Sydney.

**Table 2.** Local government areas where local government is the major employer

State	Local Government Area *	Projected local government employees	Local government employees as % of total workforce	Education employees as % of total workforce	Health employees as % of total workforce	Agricultural employees as % of total workforce	Mining employees as % of total workforce
QLD	Aurukun (S)	88	36.81%	13.75%	14.58%	0.00%	0.00%
QLD	Hope Vale (S)	187	58.62%	11.91%	10.34%	0.00%	15.36%
QLD	Kowanyama (S)	259	79.24%	10.40%	7.65%	3.36%	0.00%
QLD	Lockhart River (S)	74	48.43%	17.76%	11.84%	2.63%	0.00%
QLD	Mapoon (S)	60	77.39%	3.85%	17.95%	0.00%	0.00%
QLD	Mornington (S)	74	24.79%	14.48%	15.82%	3.03%	0.00%
QLD	Napranum (S)	63	50.25%	7.94%	24.60%	3.17%	3.97%
QLD	Northern Peninsula Area (R)	206	28.28%	13.17%	21.26%	0.55%	0.00%
QLD	Palm Island (S)	169	26.41%	15.13%	24.34%	0.00%	0.00%
QLD	Pormpuraaw (S)	125	47.95%	6.51%	18.39%	1.15%	0.00%
QLD	Torres Strait Island (R)	512	35.17%	15.72%	15.85%	0.55%	0.00%
QLD	Wujal Wujal (S)	77	62.75%	6.56%	13.11%	0.00%	0.00%
QLD	Yarrabah (S)	160	40.84%	21.12%	26.46%	0.00%	0.00%
WA	Murchison (S)	17	36.17%	21.28%	0.00%	31.91%	10.64%
WA	Ngaanyatjarraku (S)	301	62.87%	13.78%	11.06%	0.63%	2.71%
NT	MacDonnell (S)	233	11.71%	8.59%	7.79%	3.77%	3.21%
NT	Roper Gulf (S)	306	16.24%	10.93%	6.95%	9.71%	13.00%

\* (R) Indicates a *regional* council, (s) indicates a *shire* council.

## Local Government Workforce and Employment Survey

ACELG recently conducted a representative sample survey of 164 councils nationally which aimed to provide an indication of the current number of local government employees and the workforce characteristics. Whilst not all councils completed all questions and there was generally low representation from Queensland and Tasmanian councils (as there are other data sources for these states), the following results have been identified:

- The average local government training budget is only 1.1% of payroll
- Just on one quarter of councils directly employ apprentices
- Nationally, 13% of local government vacancies have been unfilled for more than 6 months, and one in six of those is for an engineer
- 56% of employees were in full-time employment according to the councils who participated in this survey. 77% of males were employed full time, compared with only 40% of females
- There are more than 4,000 customer service staff employed in LG nationally
- Fewer than 10% of councils can report on the education levels of their staff
- Across the country there are only 54 staff specifically employed as workforce planners.



## The National Local Government Workforce Strategy

The *National Local Government Workforce Strategy* ('the Strategy') prepared by LGMA on behalf of ACELG is designed to address the workforce challenges faced by local government and to develop workforce capacity and capability to meet those challenges to 2020 and beyond. It contains eight strategies to move the sector towards a more sustainable workforce through retention, attraction and development at a time when Australia is confronted by decreasing supply and an increasing demand for skilled workers.

The *Workforce Strategy* aims to assist governments, local government and peak associations across all jurisdictions assemble local government workforce planning and develop implementation plans that are context responsive and encourage innovation and productivity. In addition, the Strategy will provide a framework for monitoring the progress of workforce planning and development including programs that support improvement in the skills and capacities of the local government workforce.

The Strategy sets out eight strategies, outlined below, and actions from which state and territory governments, local government associations and councils can assemble an implementation plan suited to their particular circumstances and needs:

1. Improving Workforce Planning and Development
2. Promoting Local Government as a Place-Based Employer of Choice
3. Retaining and Attracting a Diverse Workforce
4. Creating a Contemporary Workplace
5. Investing in Skills
6. Improving Productivity and Leveraging Technology
7. Maximising Management and Leadership
8. Implementation and Collaboration.

The implementation of the *Workforce Strategy* will be largely dependent on the local context, input from state and territory jurisdictions and funding from the Federal Government.

Successful implementation of the Strategy through appropriate retention, attraction and development will see a sustainable local government workforce and will result in a workforce that has both the capacity and capability to meet the needs and aspirations of its communities.

### Further information

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