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**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON CLIMATE CHANGE, WATER,
ENVIRONMENT AND THE ARTS

Reference: Climate change and environmental impacts on coastal communities

THURSDAY, 16 OCTOBER 2008

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE
ON CLIMATE CHANGE, WATER, ENVIRONMENT AND THE ARTS**

Thursday, 16 October 2008

Members: Ms George (*Chair*), Dr Washer (*Deputy Chair*), Mr John Cobb, Mrs D’Ath, Mr Dreyfus, Mrs Irwin, Ms Livermore, Mr Scott, Mr Wood and Mr Zappia

Members in attendance: Mr Dreyfus, Ms George, Ms Livermore, Dr Washer and Mr Zappia

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Climate change and environmental impacts on coastal communities. The committee will inquire into and report on issues related to climate change and environmental pressures experienced by Australian coastal areas, particularly in the context of coastal population growth. The inquiry will have particular regard to:

- existing policies and programs related to coastal zone management, taking in the catchment-coast-ocean continuum
- the environmental impacts of coastal population growth and mechanisms to promote sustainable use of coastal resources
- the impact of climate change on coastal areas and strategies to deal with climate change adaptation, particularly in response to projected sea level rise
- mechanisms to promote sustainable coastal communities
- governance and institutional arrangements for the coastal zone.

WITNESSES

BERESFORD-WYLIE, Mr Adrian, Chief Executive, Australian Local Government Association 1

Committee met at 10.51 am**BERESFORD-WYLIE, Mr Adrian, Chief Executive, Australian Local Government Association**

CHAIR (Ms George)—I welcome Mr Beresford-Wylie and I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts. The committee is inquiring into climate change and environmental impacts on coastal communities. The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts and the Minister for Climate Change and Water have asked the committee to examine the environmental impacts of coastal population growth as well the impact of climate change on coastal areas and also strategies to deal with climate change adaptation, particularly in response to projected sea level rise. The committee will also look at existing policies and programs related to coastal zone management, mechanisms to promote sustainable coastal communities and governance arrangements for the coastal zone.

Mr Beresford-Wylie, although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that these hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as the proceedings of the House of Representatives itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. The committee has received your submission and appreciates your keen interest in the brief of this committee. Your submission has been authorised for publication. I invite you to now make a brief opening statement, if you so wish, before we proceed to questions and discussion.

Mr Beresford-Wylie—I must apologise in advance for one thing. I am not a planner. I do have planning staff—two of them—but one of them has pneumonia and the other has been called away due to a family illness. If I may, I will be happy to take any detailed questions on notice. That might help the committee.

In our submission I note that the Australian Local Government Association is a body that represents the state and territory local government associations, which themselves represent councils. So I represent the state and territory associations and I do not purport to represent individual councils. I hope that if the committee has some specific issues which relate to the challenges and experiences faced by individual councils it will feel free to raise them. I think you have already held a couple of hearings, with a few in Darwin, and have spent some time on the central coast, so you would have had a chance to speak to some of the individual councils there about their experiences—and that is most appropriate. I do not purport to speak on behalf of those councils.

Our submission provides an overview of how the Australian Local Government Association interacts with the Australian government on broad national policy issues. We have attempted to address the particular concerns that the committee is looking at under its terms of reference. The most significant issues that probably relate to local government, if we are talking about climate change, are those relating to uncertainty about data, uncertainty about sea level rises and uncertainty about the nature of our coast. There is actually not a consistent coastal mapping regime that has been undertaken in this country and therefore there are some uncertainties about the nature of the coast in terms of its geomorphology, its hardness and a variety of other things. We have pressed in the past for and welcomed the likely development of a digital elevation

model which will give councils greater certainty as to data when it comes to planning. There have been a couple of recent instances, including a relatively high-profile case in Victoria, which have really thrown light on the need for more certain data when it comes to planning and the implications for councils in terms of the need for them to take account of climate change and the likely impacts on coastal land of inundation. As I have said, I have foreshadowed some of those issues in our submission.

There are welcome signs as to the way the federal government is engaged in this area; there are welcome developments. We welcomed the program that was announced by the previous government, which will be carried on by this government, of grants to individual councils to enable them to undertake assessments of the likely impacts of climate change, to do some risk assessments and then potentially develop some management plans to address those risks. Some announcements were made in June by the Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Wong, as to funding in the order of \$1½ million for councils. They were welcomed.

We have also welcomed the likely re-examination with perhaps a little bit of rescoping of the Natural Disaster Mitigation Program, which forms part of the responsibilities of the Attorney-General, a program introduced by the previous government in response to a Council of Australian Governments report into natural disasters. I note that the Labor Party, while in opposition and as part of its coastal care policy, identified the need to revisit that program in light of climate change. There have been some instances where councils, who provide a third of the funding under that program, have been keen to look at the implications of climate change and at perhaps some disaster mitigation measures which would respond to climate change. In particular, I think there have been some Torres Strait Islands councils which have wanted to look at likely inundation and therefore the possibility of seawall development. However, that was not eligible under that program under the previous definitions of the program. It is a welcome decision by the government to revisit that program and look at whether or not the definitions might be amended to allow councils to tackle some of the climate change issues that are emerging and will emerge in terms of natural disasters through inundation and flooding. That is my opening statement, Madam Chair. I will tackle whatever questions I can. But, as I said, I will take some questions on notice if they relate to specific councils, if they relate to detail that I can get from state associations or if they expose my ignorance.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for coming along. We are lucky that we have as a member of our committee a former mayor of the City of Salisbury. We do appreciate the important role that local government authorities will have in adaptation to the likely impacts of climate change. The people that you represent at the state and territory level are the people that are going to be critical to progressing the agenda. I am pleased that the range of programs that we have begun to put in place have your support.

This question is for clarification purposes. On page 5 of your submission—this is towards the end of it—you talk about governance and institutional arrangements, which is one of the areas that we have been asked to report on and make recommendations about. On my reading, the second and third paragraphs—and I may not have it clear—seem to be a little inconsistent. You say in the first paragraph:

... ALGA does not consider that specific coastal zone governance and institutional arrangements are warranted at this time. Existing ... legislation, policies and programs provide sufficient mechanisms to ensure effective responses ...

In the next paragraph, the submission goes on:

However, it is anticipated that climate change impacts will increase significantly over time, requiring altered governance and institutional arrangements.

Would you mind expanding on that issue, if possible?

Mr Beresford-Wylie—Sure. There had been a suggestion a year or two back—I think the press coverage described it as a federal grab for power over coastal zones—and I think the previous minister, Ian Campbell, had thought about looking at the Australian government becoming more closely involved in coastal management through a national approach. From our perspective, local councils are very well placed to deal with the issue. Elevating it to a national level when there is a national entity involved in determining coastal development and management is probably not the direction to go in. We would seek greater clarity and a greater degree of collaboration between the three tiers of government in terms of the planning processes and the interaction between the EPBC and state legislation. Putting in place a national institution to look at coastal management is not something we think is necessary.

CHAIR—I recall there was some media speculation about the former federal government taking over the coastal zone. Dr Washer is nodding.

Dr WASHER—Damn straight. We were very ambitious!

CHAIR—So that paragraph relates specifically to that. But in many submissions from local government authorities we are finding the argument that we need greater national consistency. Do you have a comment about what that might mean for greater national consistency from the perspective of ALGA?

Mr Beresford-Wylie—Consistency in terms of?

CHAIR—That is the terminology that is used—

Mr Beresford-Wylie—Greater national consistency?

CHAIR—Yes. This committee is looking to recommend greater national consistency about the coastal zone.

Mr Beresford-Wylie—That does not necessarily mean the Australian government coming down with a model that is imposed. There are differences between the states' approaches and interactions with councils in managing the coastal zone. Greater national consistency could well be achieved by state governments achieving a more consistent approach in how they deal with local governments. That is something that we are aware of. We are aware of an inconsistency in the way states deal with their local governments. The states are aware of it, too. There is a ministerial council, the Local Government and Planning Ministers Council, which meets on a regular basis. It is supported by two groups of officials. The Australian Local Government Association president participates in that ministerial council. ALGA participates in the officials groups. One of them is called the Planning Officials Group—the unfortunately named POG—and the POG is now looking at consistency in its approach to coastal zone management and

climate change. Discussion started between the senior planning officials, who have agreed over the last couple of meetings that there is a need for them to share information about their approaches to achieve greater consistency. National consistency can be read not so much as saying that the Australian government should be engaged but as saying that there should be a greater degree of consistency between the jurisdictions in how they deal with the issues facing councils and the planning on the coastal zones.

CHAIR—I take your point. We have certainly found in our inquiry to date that there is a great deal of difference in how these matters are handled at both the state and local government levels. What role do you think the federal government could or should play in helping to make possible greater consistency in the treatment of the impact of climate change? What is it that the federal government can do to assist local government authorities?

Mr Beresford-Wylie—There are probably two issues. There is a degree of consistency required between the states; there is a group that, through the Planning Officials Group, is looking at exchanging information. I have to be blunt and say the Australian government has not played a great role in that group, simply because there has not been much of an engagement in planning per se in the relevant Australian government department. There has not been and was not an area that was devoted to planning and, therefore, it is not something that the Australian government has engaged in fully. But there is recognition by the states of the need for that greater consistency.

One of the things that we do find in local government—which is perhaps a little bit unfortunate—is that in the absence of consistent guidance from states about how to deal with coastal planning issues, particularly climate change, well-resourced councils will go off and do their own thing. They will try and fill the gap in and they will do the best they can by their communities and their environment. That does lead to criticism by those who have an interest—in, for instance, development on the coast—that there is no consistency between councils in the way these things are done. Sometimes that reflects the fact that we have councils who are making the best effort they can with the data they have in taking the approaches they think should be taken for their coastal region. They will look at the best available data in terms of the coast itself. If we are talking about the likely impacts of climate change, for instance, then they will look at their best estimates of sea level rises and their best estimates of how that will interact with the coast—it will depend entirely on the shape of the coast—and then they will make a judgement.

There have been criticisms—from developers, for instance—that that is creating inconsistency in how they approach planning developments. If I were looking at consistency between councils, for instance, one of the things that we know is that, in a sense, planning is an area where councils struggle to get the right level of information—but also professionals. It is a profession which is under some pressure. Support through, for instance—dare I say it—the Planning Institute of Australia, in terms of assisting them to develop the sort of tools and skills that will go out to planners to help them deal with the issues, is to be welcomed.

CHAIR—You made reference earlier to the digital elevation modelling—which we understand should be completed by early next year. I think there is a proposed meeting of local government people following the conclusion of that first part's assessment. What do you see is

the next step beyond that, once we have a more consistent mapping of the coastline? What do you see is the next task that the federal government could rightly think of?

Mr Beresford-Wylie—I would be loath to jump right ahead and pre-empt what, hopefully, will be a meeting of coastal councils and the Australian government. Councils in a forum will be able to articulate exactly what it is that they, as individual councils, will be looking for, and there will be a whole variety of different experiences they put on the table. I think it is a great idea that the Australian government is going to convene a meeting of, in particular, coastal councils—and there are several hundred coastal councils—to bring them together in a forum to see where we are up to in terms of coastal vulnerability, where the digital elevation model will take us in terms of data, what their priorities will be, and what they can identify. Then, in a sense, it will hopefully be up to the Australian government to identify what it might do, and what it might contribute, in terms of helping councils address the issues that come forward.

That might be the assisting of individual councils through grants to improve their capability or to allow them to undertake the sort of things that they are doing now under that \$1.5 million program—which was, I think, originally envisaged as potentially the first start of a program. Basically it is 1½ million dollars made available, and 33 projects, I think, were successful in getting up—that is about 50 councils because there are some regional councils involved in that. Obviously that does not cover the field. Really I suspect the Australian government would like to see what comes out of that program before it makes any decision about whether it would like to engage other councils in the sorts of things that come out. I think that an extension of that program to other councils that were unsuccessful would be useful. Perhaps there might be an assessment of whether the regional approach—there are some regional councils who applied—has yielded benefits which were not attained by individual councils when they put their projects in. It would be useful to assess the differences.

The capacity for state and local government associations to play a role in terms of engaging their councils is an important thing. The Australian Local Government Association is a body that works out of Canberra. We are a little bit isolated from how individual councils tackle things, but state associations are much closer to councils—who are their members. They convene forums that deal with the environment, with climate change and with coastal planning. They are a useful mechanism by which to drive information out to councils and they can provide them with resources and toolkits. It would be useful to engage those state associations to see what could be done—going beyond the digital elevation model.

Of course, it remains to be seen what data that model will provide. Everybody is looking at in a sense as if, ‘Wow! The DM is going to provide just about everything we need.’ The reality is that it is going to give us some data, but whether that is sufficient will really need to be assessed on the ground when the results are available.

CHAIR—So you would see a continuation of programs that fund local council authorities to undertake their own adaptation and a revision of the National Disaster Management Program to more broadly encompass some of these issues as programs that have merit and should be continued?

Mr Beresford-Wylie—Yes, I do see that. I also see encouragement by the federal minister to his state colleagues to engage in a greater dialogue on achieving consistency in terms of the

planning regimes that they have and in terms of what they as state governments are doing. This is not really just the field of the Australian government and should not be left solely to the Australian government. Councils are trying to do the best they can. There are some state governments which are engaged more than others, I suspect, in dealing with the issues.

CHAIR—Absolutely, yes.

Mr Beresford-Wylie—They will need to pick up their responsibilities. But it really needs a coordinated approach. We are only talking here of course about climate change. There is a whole series of issues obviously which relate to the environment and environmental planning in terms of population growth and the stress on coastal councils because we all love the coast to such an extent that you have bodies like the Sea Change Taskforce springing up to try to focus, in particular in the case of the Australian government, on the coastal area and the need for infrastructure at local government levels. Their focus to some extent, causing a little bit of discomfort for ALGA, was saying: ‘There is a pot of money out there that is made available to local government from the Australian government through the financial assistance grants. There is \$1.9 billion. More of it should go to coastal councils because they face the challenge of infrastructure and therefore that is where it should be directed’.

From our perspective, we would say that it is really based on relative need. There are lots of councils out there which rely on those grants to a great extent to continue their operations as local government bodies. That is just one of the things that is taken account of in the need for funding for coastal areas. It is one of the things taken account of by those local government grants commissioners in the states, which apply very complex methodologies to determine how grants are distributed. I give the example, if you like, of the establishment and rise of the Seachange Taskforce to say that there are councils out there who feel the need to get together and try to articulate their particular concerns in terms of the pressures on coastal areas from development.

CHAIR—We have had some ongoing discussions with the National Seachange Taskforce. They will appear before us. There is no doubt that they have been quite instrumental in highlighting the pressures on infrastructure in places that arose as villages and are now coping with the phenomenon of sea change and the impacts that has environmentally on the sustainability of resources as well, which the committee will look at. I am pleased you made the point about the important role that state governments have to play in all this because we have seen already some wide variation among the states. Last week we visited South Australia, which to date seems to us to have embraced the impacts of climate change in a more coherent manner. I know, for example, from testimony that has been provided that New South Wales is still revising its policy, manuals and principles, but that has not stopped go-ahead councils in both jurisdictions doing their own modelling as best they can through grants that they have received.

Mr Beresford-Wylie—That is right.

CHAIR—There is that wide variation which no doubt we will comment on in our report and make some recommendations on. That is enough from me.

Dr WASHER—In respect of what you said about the sustainability, of course we cover that as part of it—not just climate change but the environmental aspects. One of the issues you

mentioned in your submission under the heading 'The environmental impacts of coastal population growth and mechanisms to promote sustainable use of coastal resources' is that local government requires from the federal government:

- accurate timely data on current coastal population growth and demographic change ...

et cetera. I think that one of the issues that, federally, we have never really tackled and that we should be looking at is reasonable populations in areas as acceptable levels of tolerance and the current technology that we could have before sustainability gets compromised. But I would have thought it best for local governments to advise us of what they can do rather than the other way around.

I think that one of the issues we have never really tackled federally is what we should be looking at as reasonable populations in areas. What acceptable levels of tolerance with current technology could we have before sustainability is compromised? I think it would have been best for local governments to advise us on what they can do, rather than the other way around. But you have said that we should be giving them this information. Maybe we should, but how would we source that if we did not get it from local government? Can you flesh that out for me? I think it is a very important issue. Can you clarify for me, from a federal point of view, how we are going to fathom what population local governments can contain within their boundaries in a very sustainable and good environmental way?

Mr Beresford-Wylie—If I am reading it right, on page three we said:

To ensure these essential functions are performed effectively and efficiently, local government requires:

- accurate timely data

I would point out that on population growth and demographic change estimates individual councils obviously have a role in providing data through to the Australian Bureau of Statistics on a variety of things. In turn, they get advice from ABS on various movements. Maintaining a well resourced Australian Bureau of Statistics is valuable. I have seen a whole variety of different areas where the ABS is under a lot of pressure in terms of gathering data. A lot of the data is gathered from other organisations and bodies; local government and grants commissions gather it from local governments. In some instances we have ABS making approaches to us, saying, 'We are having some difficulty; can you take over more of the responsibility and share some of the cost or bear more of the cost for collecting and keeping the data or maintaining the series?' and so on. But at a very broad level I would say that it is very useful to ensure the integrity of our data collection system, and that there is a very well resourced ABS.

I have pointed out we require that information. I am not suggesting that, in a sense, we are not getting it. It is something we require and something that needs to be maintained for accurate projections. Of course, the Australian government does a lot of work in terms of ageing population. We welcome the data that is provided to us with that information. Demographic change, settlement patterns, the introduction of people settling from overseas, refugees and a whole variety of things impinge on the way local government populations change.

CHAIR—The tourism influx?

Mr Beresford-Wylie—Absolutely, and just gathering and maintaining that data is an important part of how local councils are going to deal with the challenge. What may also be a useful addition to some of the information the committee has available to it is that we have done a little bit of work about the coastal area, and it is available through our website. We carried out a fairly significant survey of coastal councils to help them identify their development priorities, the environmental challenges that we are facing and natural resource management. It was funded through the Australian government and the survey was really coordinated through a natural resource management facilitator that we had at ALGA—again, funded by the Australian government. That is available on the website. It has got quite a lot of information about the challenges councils are facing, the difficulties that they have identified and some of the key facts that emerge from that.

CHAIR—Has some of that survey data been drawn on by the National Sea Change Taskforce?

Mr Beresford-Wylie—It may have, but for instance—

CHAIR—You will have another look at it?

Mr Beresford-Wylie—That is right: at the sorts of facts that were identified. There was the obvious fact that councils identified the pressures they were facing for water quality and water supply—these were significant issues. They identified the sorts of things that were being undertaken in coastal zone management activities, but noted their need for greater capacity in the area. The training of staff in planning and environmental areas was really a critical issue for councils; they really were struggling to come to grips with that. Under the previous structure, the NRM groups, councils were active participants but sometimes felt that the groups did not really understand the coastal zone challenges that councils were going to be facing and, therefore, those issues were not coming to the top of NRM management agendas.

CHAIR—We will chase that up. Tony, do you have some comments from your vast experience at the local government level?

Mr ZAPPIA—In a sense I sympathise with Adrian having to be here trying to represent 600 councils because I am sure there are 600 different—

Mr Beresford-Wylie—I am not trying to represent 562 as the case may be.

Mr ZAPPIA—Is it? It has gone down since I have left local government.

Mr Beresford-Wylie—Queensland took out 74.

Mr ZAPPIA—In a sense that is one of my key questions: who actually prepared this submission?

Mr Beresford-Wylie—It was prepared by an officer in our association who circulated a draft and sought input from the state associations.

Mr ZAPPIA—From the state associations?

Mr Beresford-Wylie—That is right, and we rely on them for an engagement with councils. We do not write something off the top of our head without trying to make sure that the state associations are the ones who feed us with their perspectives, and we try to draw attention to things that they want us to with the Australian government.

Mr ZAPPIA—Okay. My second question relates to something you said a moment ago about the survey. I am aware that local government has a whole range of different committees that tend to group together where there is a commonality of interest. Is there what you might call a loose association of some sort of all the coastal councils in Australia at the moment?

Mr Beresford-Wylie—Apart from the National Sea Change Taskforce, I do not think so.

Mr ZAPPIA—You do not think so?

Mr Beresford-Wylie—No. Just before the last election it became evident that competing in the local government space were the capital city lord mayors, the Australian Local Government Association, the state associations and the peri urban group, who had suddenly come to the fore with the National Sea Change Taskforce. I am not aware that there was actually a coastal grouping of councils.

To some extent, gathering them together in a forum—and they do come together in forums occasionally—

Mr ZAPPIA—I know they do.

Mr Beresford-Wylie—That is right, but I have not actually heard them establish themselves.

Mr ZAPPIA—Has the planning officers group, which I know does come together on a regular basis and, I understand, is well represented with some of the more experienced planners from around Australia, ever specifically focused on coastal planning issues? Are you aware whether they have said, ‘Okay, this is one of the issues that we need to try to give some priority to at some stage’?

Mr Beresford-Wylie—I think at their most recent meetings they have focused on coastal planning and recognised that they have a problem in that area. I can also say that in the other half of the group, which looks after local government officers, at least one particular jurisdiction—this was Tasmania—took the lead and said, ‘Look, there is a bit of a problem here with coastal mapping. We are trying to do something with coastal mapping in Tasmania. We need to understand what everyone else is doing. Can you give us information so we can coordinate an understanding of exactly what our councils are facing in the environment they have before them?’ So there is an active engagement there from those state government officials.

Mr ZAPPIA—The planning officers group?

Mr Beresford-Wylie—It is. The planning officials group I am talking about is—

Mr ZAPPIA—I am aware that there is an actual planning officers group that also meets.

Mr Beresford-Wylie—Okay. You are talking about planning officers from councils?

Mr ZAPPIA—Yes.

Mr Beresford-Wylie—I could not tell you whether they focused on this.

Mr ZAPPIA—I know they do meet.

Mr Beresford-Wylie—I was talking about the planning officials.

CHAIR—It is interesting at the state level. We do have a submission that we will be taking evidence on from the New South Wales coastal councils group. It does seem, at least at the state level, that commonality of interest and challenges are bringing people together. I think the National Sea Change Taskforce appears to represent a wide range of those coastal groups, at least. We spent some time at their recent conference.

Ms LIVERMORE—On page five of the submission you talk about the need for nationally consistent governance and institutional options, including

...indemnification for planning decisions influenced by climate change considerations.

Can you just expand a bit on that need for indemnification for planning decisions by councils?

Mr Beresford-Wylie—Certainly. That was one drawn to our attention by a state association which is focussing on legal issues. Some state associations are more active than others in focussing on legal issues, although I think they are all very active. In particular, the Victorian association thought there was a particular issue here. There was that recent case in Gippsland where issues came to the fore, and there are now quite a few little bits and pieces of legal commentary which you find from large law firms, saying, ‘Aha! There is a growing issue here,’ particularly for councils in how they are going to deal with this legal risk that is going to arise and the fact that traditionally councils have elements of government. They have got big pockets and people are going to start looking at decisions councils make. There will be a comeback on them for decisions where there is an inundation problem and the council is held to have not looked at something that might have been reasonably foreseeable in terms of inundation. Hindsight is a wonderful thing.

Councils are entities that look after substantial amounts of public funding, but they are set up as individual entities. If they are sued and found responsible, they will pay the money. But that backfires, and the responsibility for individual councils’ exposure is passed on to local communities. I suspect that there is a recognition, at least at the state level, that there is a need for a consistent approach in terms of indemnifying councils for the decisions that they make in the best interests of their communities with the best information that they have available to them and taking into account as much as they possibly can. If they are to be found liable at a later stage, a broader community fund or something similar might be established whereby the responsibility and liability for individual councils is not sheeted home to individual communities as a consequence of the decisions that are made by the council.

The debate in Gippsland revolved around a number of issues about the decision there, one of which was about the sea level change. The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal said, 'We know there's some uncertainty in this area and that it's very difficult for councils to take account of it, but you're going to have to take account of what's reasonably foreseeable and you can't rely on the previous information.' I think councils are thinking, 'We understand that we need to do something. We're not quite sure where the information's going to come from to enable us to support the decision. We'll do the best we can.' But there is obviously now a recognition of an exposure there.

CHAIR—Do you have data on what state governments do in terms of the indemnity issue? My understanding is that in New South Wales, providing a council acts in good faith consistent with state policy and guidelines, they are indemnified under a particular provision of an act.

Mr Beresford-Wylie—I do not have that data. If you want me to see what I can obtain, I am happy to go back to my state associations and ask them for an expansion of that issue.

CHAIR—Do you want to take that on notice?

Mr Beresford-Wylie—Yes, sure.

CHAIR—Thank you. That would be very useful. You mention in your submission that the Department of Climate Change will have a discussion paper that canvasses these important matters for the future. Have they consulted with ALGA for an input into that paper? Do you know much about it, or is it going to be strictly departmental?

Mr Beresford-Wylie—We have not been consulted specifically as far as I know, although we have had some dialogue with the Department of Climate Change. There are a whole series of forums and conferences that are run by various state associations and bodies. We run a national general assembly, usually at the end of each year. We have had some discussions with Department of Climate Change about getting them to discuss some of the broad issues, to talk about the direction they are going in and to lay the groundwork for engaging with councils at this get-together at the end of the first half of next year of coastal councils. It is a useful step in the process of engaging them and asking them what information they might require.

I am loath to see ALGA acting as some sort of bottleneck. The Australian government is a big organisation. It can adequately engage with individual councils to gain the sort of information it wants. We see our role as facilitating that engagement rather than constraining it through some sort of bottleneck. Where it is efficient, we act as a mechanism to distribute information and to gather information where we can. However, our information comes from state associations, so we do not go out there without the state associations' permission. Their constituents are the individual councils.

We can help the Australian government engage with councils. We can work with state associations to help them engage with the Australian government. We can act as a conduit for getting out information and for undertaking, where it is possible, things like that survey of coastal issues for councils. We do not want to be seen as the font of all wisdom because we are not. We are much smaller than some of the state associations. If we look at Brisbane City Council, with 10,000 people and a budget bigger than Tasmania, we know that we have some

real capacity at the individual council level. But I will undertake to go back to the state associations to get a firmer view on the indemnification environments which they face when it comes to their state governments.

CHAIR—Yes, as to whether they have developed some policy perspectives at the state level. That is an issue that we will need to give some consideration to. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Mr Beresford-Wylie—No, there is not. As I said, I will leave the front page of my print-off of that coastal survey report and also the front page of some work that was done to oversee roles and responsibilities of local government in coastal management, which is a paper that is on the website. Obviously I fiddled around with those, but they give you the website address, which can be drawn on to get that sort of information.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for attending our hearing today. The secretariat will send you a copy of the transcript for any corrections that need to be made. I would be grateful if you could send the secretariat any additional material that you have undertaken to provide as soon as is humanly possible. Thank you very much for sharing your perspectives with the committee.

Resolved (on motion by **Dr Washer**):

That this committee authorises publication of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 11.31 am