



If calling, ask for Anthea Sloan

29 January 2026

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Development, Infrastructure and Transport
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mrs Phillips

Submission: Inquiry into Local Government Funding and Fiscal Sustainability

We are pleased to make this submission to the Inquiry into Local Government Funding and Fiscal Sustainability. The Rural City of Wangaratta (**Council**) is in north-east Victoria and is home to more than 30,000 residents. We made a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Development, Infrastructure and Transport on its Inquiry into Local Government Sustainability.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands, on which the Rural City of Wangaratta Communities reside. We pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging, and celebrate and respect their continuing cultures. We are committed to walking beside all traditional owners as we move toward reconciliation.

We understand that our previous submission will be considered by this new Inquiry and therefore have not repeated recommendations previously made. There are a number of additional comments with respect to the Terms of Reference which we provide below.

Impact and Effectiveness – Explore opportunities to improve productivity and coordination of local government

The Federal Government should lead a national local government transformation agenda focusing on digital innovation and shared services. By doing so, The Australian Government can help councils deliver more with less, ensure long-term financial health, and ultimately foster stronger communities and local economies across the country.

Australia's more than 500 local governments are indispensable to delivering community services and infrastructure, yet they operate under severe financial and operational constraints. Productivity improvements and better coordination across councils are urgently needed to maintain services and meet future challenges.

Digital transformation

Residents increasingly expect seamless digital access to government services. Currently, the user experience can be inconsistent: federal services use MyGov, states have portals like Service NSW or Service Victoria, and local councils each have their own websites/forms. There is an opportunity for integrating local services into broader digital platforms.

In 2024 we made a submission to the Victorian Government's Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee Inquiry into Local Government funding and services. We referenced a number of examples where there were opportunities for collaboration between State and local government. These opportunities would similarly exist at the whole of Australia level:

- Local law permits such as food business registrations, beauty, body art or health business registrations, footpath activities permits etc;
- Planning and building permits; and
- Rates processing such as Land Information Certificates, Notice of Acquisition etc.

These opportunities could include:

- Working with state governments to extend one-stop portals to local transactions.
- Explore a federated single sign-on to access local services using MyGov or state credentials, simplifying user access.
- Federal funding to support councils in digitising high-volume services (planning applications, rate payments, pet registrations, etc.) and ensure these systems talk to state/federal systems (for example, automatic data sharing for rates and land title changes).

Shared service hubs

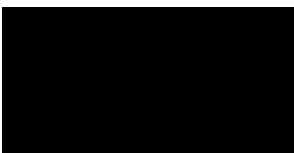
Like many States and Territories, the Victorian Government has invested funds to support the transformation of local government services with several programs funded since 2016-17. Most recently a report has been commissioned in Victoria which develops an IT shared services vision for rural and regional councils. The Deloitte report Rural and Regional Council IT Strategic Framework for Shared Services (November 2023) makes several short- and long-term recommendation. These opportunities are ubiquitous across all councils – urban and metro or rural and regional – and certainly apply across State and Territory boundaries.

We recommend the Australian Government be ambitious in its transformation program for local government and explore opportunities for shared service hubs. Whilst national or multi-state shared service hubs are unlikely to be easily implemented (at least not without material financial commitments), elements such as a national local government IT platform or joint procurement of software, equipment or insurance across councils could deliver substantial financial benefits.

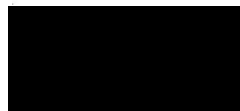
Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission.

We look forward to receiving the committee's findings and supporting the Australian Government to improve outcomes for our community and others in regional Australia.

Yours sincerely,



Stephen Swart
Chief Executive Officer (Interim)



Cr Irene Grant
Mayor