

# WHAT'S

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT ALL ABOUT?

Who makes up a Local Government Council and how it works

The services Local Government Councils provide

How to get involved in Local Government business

Enrol to vote in the Local Government May 2003 elections



We have three types of Government in Australia - Local, State and Commonwealth Governments. Local Government is different to the State and Commonwealth Governments because it is at the “grass roots” and well placed to know about the views and ideas of people in the local community and to influence what sort of place the Local Government Council area will be in the future.

Local Government in South Australia is made up of 68 separate Councils covering all of the metropolitan area of Adelaide and the more densely populated country areas. About 80% of the total number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in South Australia live in one of the 68 Council areas, and have the right to access the services provided by Councils, vote in Local Government elections, and stand for nomination as a Councillor.

The more remote areas where fewer people live are not within Local Government Council boundaries, but local services are provided at those places under other arrangements with Community Councils. These remote areas include Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands, Maralinga lands, and at Yalata, Nepabunna and Gerard where Community Councils lease land through the Aboriginal Lands Trust. Five other communities live on land leased from the Aboriginal Lands Trust within Local Government Council areas as follows:

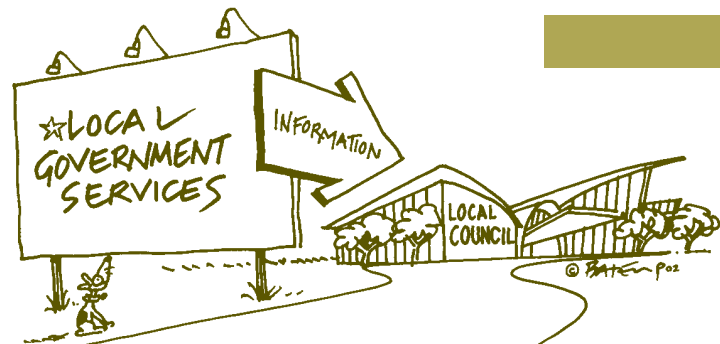
<b>Communities</b>	<b>Local Government Council</b>
Point Pearce	District Council of Yorke Peninsula
Raukkan/Point McLeay	The Coorong District Council
Koonibba	District Council of Ceduna
Davenport	City of Port Augusta
Umoona	District Council of Coober Pedy

Each Local Government Council is a different size, has a different number of people living in the area, and has different community facilities and public spaces, but no matter what size or where a Council is, its responsibilities include:

- representing everyone in the community, and making plans and decisions about what sort of place the area will be now and in the future
- providing services for the well-being of people who live and work in its community, and striking a balance between social, environmental and economic matters
- talking to people in State and Commonwealth Governments about what needs to be done locally.

A South Australian Government law - the Local Government Act 1999 - sets out the “rules” for Council business. Councils also deal with other laws, like the laws about building and development, keeping pets and animals, parking and traffic, and public health and safety.

**Councils are close to people in the community and represent and respond to local issues. Councillors are community leaders and help to plan what sort of place the area will be in the future.**



## WHO MAKES UP A LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCIL AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

Local Government Councillors are people who live in the Council area who are enrolled to vote. They are elected by local people in a similar way to how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) Regional Councillors are elected. General elections for Local Government Councillors are held every three years by voluntary postal voting. Sometimes the Council area is divided into sections called wards, and people vote for representatives for the wards rather than the whole Council area. Staff are employed at the Council office to act on Council decisions and provide services locally.

The head of the elected Council is either the Mayor if elected by all voters in the area, or Chairperson chosen by Councillors after the election. Councillors are community leaders and are very involved in community work. They are not paid wages, but they are entitled to an annual allowance or honorarium. Most expenses related to Council business are also paid by the Council.

Rules for the elections are set out in another law, called the Local Government (Elections) Act 1999. This Act also says who has the right to vote and nominate as a candidate to be elected as a Councillor. Another publication in this series, called “LOCAL GOVERNMENT BUSINESS - Elections and Voting”, explains these rules.

### Here is how a Council works.

- Elected Councillors are responsible for deciding on the plans and policies to guide what sort of place the local area will be, and what services Council will provide in the local community.
- Council staff are employed to carry out Council policies, to act on Council decisions, to provide services, and to provide advice and information about Local Government business to residents, ratepayers and visitors to the area.
- The head person employed at the Council Office might be called the Chief Executive Officer, the Town Clerk, the District Clerk, the City Manager or some other similar title.
- Councils may form committees of their elected Councillors and Council staff to deal with some tasks, such as work related to development, finance, recreation and so on.
- Councils can invite members of the community to be involved in consultation forums and share their knowledge.
- When major planning decisions or changes in the community are being considered, Councils will ask local people what they think before they make a decision.
- Anyone can go to a Council or Committee meeting to listen to what is talked about and the decisions that are made.
- Councils also write minutes of their meetings, and reports about how they do business and manage their affairs. These records are available for the public to read.

## WHAT SERVICES DO LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCILS PROVIDE?

Each Council decides what services it will provide in its local area. The services vary from one area to another, and depend on the size of the Council area, the number of people living in the area, where the area is located, the physical environment, what the priority needs of the local community are, and the resources and funding available.

Generally, Councils do not provide health services, public housing, public transport, education, water and power supplies, legal services, or social support services. State and/or Commonwealth Governments are responsible for providing these services throughout Australia.

Local Government Council business mainly involves:

- land use planning and assessing development and building works
- infrastructure such as local roads, stormwater drains and footpaths
- looking after public places like parks and reserves, public toilets, ovals and playing fields
- rubbish collection, waste management and recycling services
- public health and safety, like inspecting places where food is prepared to make sure they are clean, and ensuring fire prevention measures are in place
- dog and cat management and control
- promoting good environmental management
- helping to create employment, for example by attracting new businesses to the area.

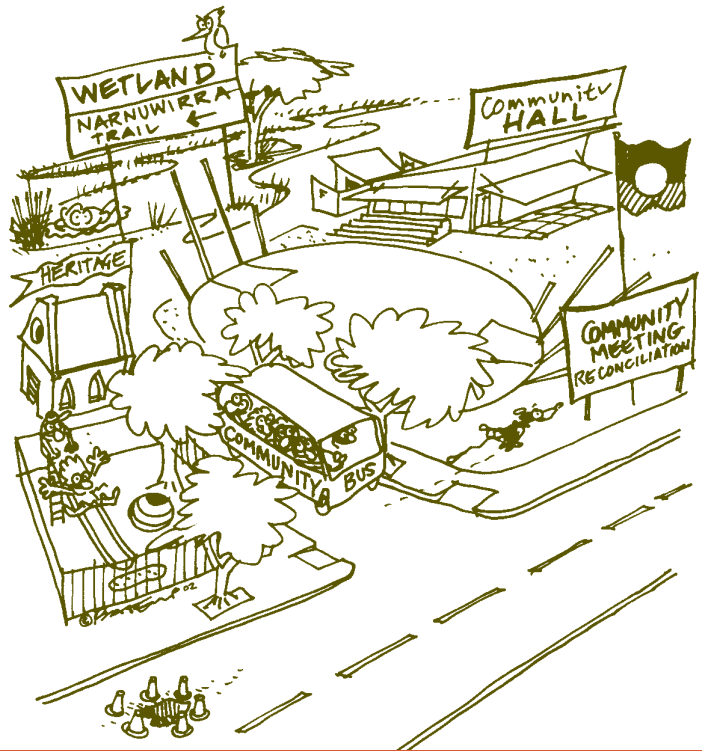
Most Councils also provide community services and facilities, such as:

- library and Information services
- community centres and halls
- community Bus service
- arts and cultural programs and events, like supporting NAIDOC Week and Reconciliation Week
- things for young people to do and places to meet
- help for people who are older or people with a disability
- supporting community groups and volunteers in the area
- working together with other community groups.

## WHERE DO THE FUNDS COME FROM TO PROVIDE THESE LOCAL SERVICES?

Local Government Council services are funded by Council rates paid by people who own property in the Council area and other fees and charges, such as building approval application fees, dog registration fees, hall hire fees, and waste management fees. Some funding also comes from State and Commonwealth Governments, for example to run Libraries.

Most Councils also work on local projects with regional, State and Commonwealth agencies. Examples include building walking trails, protecting and preserving history and heritage, building and maintaining tourist facilities, arts and cultural facilities, and reconciliation initiatives.



## HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT BUSINESS?

Getting involved in Local Government business is an opportunity for you to influence what will happen in your neighbourhood now and in the future. That is, you can influence what your Council does, how it spends its money, what services and facilities it provides, what development takes place in your neighbourhood, and what local issues are taken up by your Council.

Here are some ways you can get involved.

- **Vote in the May 2003 Local Government Elections.** Voting is voluntary and anyone over the age of 18 years who is an Australian citizen has the right to vote. All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are Australian citizens, but you must be **on the State or Council Electoral Roll by 13th February 2003, or 6th February in the City of Adelaide** Council area to be eligible to vote. You can find out more about your voting rights in another publication in this series, "LOCAL GOVERNMENT BUSINESS - Elections and Voting".
- Find out from your local Council Office what services they currently provide and what is available to you.
- Go along to a Council or Committee meeting and listen to what is talked about and what decisions are being made.
- Contact your elected Councillor and talk about what issues you think are important in the local area. Ask how you can be involved in consultation forums.

**Get involved in Local Government business - Vote in the May 2003 elections**  
**Its about your future so vote for the representatives you want!**

# MORE

## INFORMATION

**WOULD YOU LIKE MORE INFORMATION ABOUT LOCAL GOVERNMENT?**

**ARE YOU INTERESTED IN STANDING AS A CANDIDATE FOR THE MAY 2003 LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCIL ELECTIONS?**

Nominations to stand as a candidate close at 12.00 noon 27th March 2003.

Contact your local Council or visit the following web sites:

- Local Government Association of SA  
[www.lga.sa.gov.au](http://www.lga.sa.gov.au)
- SA Government - Office of Local Government  
[www.localgovt.sa.gov.au](http://www.localgovt.sa.gov.au)
- State Electoral Office  
[www.seo.sa.gov.au](http://www.seo.sa.gov.au), or telephone 08 8401 4300



### **Cover Artwork**

The cover artwork by Tamara Watson depicts pathways to places and communities, and a hand grasping the crystal ball is a symbol of taking control of the future. Tamara's family is from the Coorong in South Australia - Tangane-kald people.