Dear Mayors and Councillors

It is my absolute pleasure to congratulate Mayor Paul Thomas and Mayor Erika Vickery for being recipients of an AM and OAM respectively under the Queen's Birthday Honours. The whole family of local government is justly proud of your achievements and the community is richer for your efforts.

LGA President Mayor Lorraine Rosenberg

Rate capping

Like many of our State's regional papers, The Border Watch has taken a keen interest in the rate capping debate in recent months and the impacts this policy would have on their region.

I've particularly enjoyed reading the editorials from Graham Greenwood OAM, who has written two excellent opinion pieces on the topic.

These editorials aren't available on their website, but The Border Watch has been kind enough to let us share them with you you here and here.

There's also been strong opposition to rate capping from South East councils, and at their last meeting Wattle Range Council passed a motion to ask the SA Liberal Party to pledge it will not introduce any new taxes or levies on South Australians if elected to government next year.

The full motion passed during their meeting was as follows:

1. That Council calls on the State Opposition to publicly pledge prior to the 2018 State election:
   1. That a future Liberal Government will cap all future increases in State Government taxes, levies, fees and charges (including government business units/enterprises) in line with its capping proposal for Local Government.
   2. That any percentage increase in total revenue collected through State Liberal Government taxes, levies, fees and charges (including government business units/enterprises) not exceed the Local Government cap as proposed by the Liberal Party.
   3. That a future Liberal Government will not introduce any new taxes, levies, fees and charges on South Australians.
   4. That a future Liberal Government will not transfer responsibility of services to Local Government without adequate and mutually agreed additional funding to Local Government.
   5. That a future Liberal Government will not amend or introduce legislation that has a negative financial impact on Local Government.

I would encourage all of you to consider passing similar motions in your own councils.

It's been said that a state government would never agree to the Federal Government capping the amount of revenue they can raise and as an independent sphere of government, councils should also be free to set own their budgets in consultation with communities.

We are preparing to move into the second phase of our public awareness campaign, which is about activating our staff and community stakeholders in the campaign to prevent the introduction of rate capping and will be providing more information to your councils in the coming weeks.
State of the Regions report

Yesterday ALGA released its 2017 State of the Regions Report click here to review.

From a South Australian perspective, this year’s report reinforces that population growth is a major issue for our State and continues to constrain economic growth.

We’ve highlighted the need for a population strategy for South Australia in our 2017/18 State Budget submission and will continue to advocate for this work to be done.

I often hear from regional councils that they need population growth to drive economic development and in some cases, ensure the viability of their communities. The LGA is keen to work in partnership with councils – as well as the State and Federal Government – to address this issue and identify solutions that will benefit all South Australians.

Council staff salaries

You may have seen a story in The Advertiser last Tuesday about South Australian council staff being paid “above award rates”.

While the story noted that the local government award hasn’t been updated for almost two decades and around 80% of Australians are paid above the award, there was still the inference that ratepayer’s money is being wasted on exorbitant salaries.

We’ve responded with a statement on our website explaining that council staff are actually paid a comparable wage to what they’d earn in similar positions in the private sector, or state or federal government – and this is exactly the way it should be.

Our ratepayers rightfully expect professionalism from the thousands of men and women who work in local government and this means paying them a fair and equitable wage.

Queen’s Birthday Awards

It was fantastic to see and Copper Coast Mayor Paul Thomas and Naracoorte Lucindale Mayor Erika Vickery recognised on the Queen’s Birthday Honours list last week.

Mayor Thomas was first elected to council in 1990, and has been a board member of the Kernewek Lowender Copper Coast Cornish Festival for 33 years, as well as Chairman of the Northern Yorke Peninsula Hospital Board.

Mayor Vickery has served as an elected member, and later Mayor, for the past 17 years and also as a member of the Limestone Coast LGA, SAROC and LGA Board and Executive.

As council members we all put countless hours into serving our communities, both on council and through other avenues and it’s always great to see “some of our own” receive well-deserved recognition.

Congratulations Paul and Erika.

Premier’s State Local Government Forum

The second Premier’s State Local Government Forum for 2017 was held last week, and included productive discussions around our sector’s public awareness campaign, the code of conduct, simplifying regulation and boundary adjustment reform.

A communique from the meeting will be published on the LGA’s website in the next few days.
2017/18 State Budget

The State Government will hand down their 2017/18 Budget this Thursday 22 June.

We’ve highlighted a number of priorities for our sector in our budget submission, which you can download here.

We’ll have a summary of the State Budget up on our website by the end of Thursday and I’m scheduled to speak to Narelle Graham on ABC Statewide about what it means for councils from 4.45-5.00pm that afternoon (although this time is subject to change).

Hopefully we will see some good outcomes for councils and I look forward to providing you with more information after Thursday.

Councils and tourism

Councils play a significant role in our State’s tourism industry, through staging events and festivals, funding tourism marketing campaigns, running visitor information centres, working with local businesses, and in some cases running tourism attractions and accommodation themselves.

A new report produced by the Australian Regional Tourism Network has quantified this investment to be $29 million – or around $17 per resident.

Almost 80% of this spend is from regional councils.

This is around 8% of the total tourism spend by local government across Australia, and in line with our GDP.

Interestingly, our sector spends more on visitor servicing – through running visitor information centres – than it does on visitor attraction, when compared to the rest of the country.

If you’re interested in further information about visitation to our State’s regions there are some excellent fact sheets on the SATC’s website.

Tourism is a growth industry for our State, and provides an excellent opportunity for councils to work with local small businesses to drive economic development.