

## **OPENING ADDRESS**

### **WA WORKS AND PARKS CONFERENCE 2009**

**13 AUGUST 2009**

Mr Peter Murray, President, Local Government Supervisors Association, members of the Association Committee and Ms Shirley Barnes the Administration Officer of the Association.

Delegates

Ladies & gentlemen

I am very much honoured to be asked to launch your 2009 conference, one of the premier events of the local government calendar.

Since moving to LGMA I have been very much embroiled in conference organisation. We run a number every year including our State Conference and I know the hard work that goes into organising these events.

All the little parts of the machinery that need to come together so that on the surface they appear very smooth, so one part flows into another. As it all happens don't forget to tell Shirley the great job she has done.

You have a great range of sponsors so as a fellow-conference organiser can I encourage all of you at the breaks to go and talk to the sponsors – establish relationships and promise them some business so that they will support you in future years.

I note the support from delegates all around the State is fantastic. I believe we have delegates from Port Hedland, the Wheatbelt, Collie, Bunbury, Dardanup and of course the metropolitan area. It is great that you can all be here to learn from the speakers but also to network with your peers.

May I congratulate your committee on the program they have put together from your keynote speaker Glenn Capelli through the technical sessions to the closing key note panel discussing structural reform – all very relevant and topical.

“structural reform” !!!!!

Did someone mention that term.

I guess it would be remiss of me to address a Local Government conference and not mention the matter which is so much the centre of attention in Local Government at the moment.

I suspect the 3 people on the panel tomorrow afternoon will be re-writing their comments, their views after what has happened in the past week.

In that week we have had the Premier, the Minister for Local Government and the Leader of the National Party who also happens to be the Minister for Regional Development make very definitive statements about structural reform.

The Premier said that Local Governments of less than 1000 people are not viable in the long term and he wanted substantially less than 100 Local Governments in WA in 5 years time.

The Minister for Local Government said that VROC's and ROC's are effectively not in the reform equation any longer and that mergers are the only solution.

Minister Grylls said the Royalty for Regions funds will be directed to Local Governments that are embracing mergers.

Many in Local Government have asked why those rules weren't set 6 months ago.

The Government has said these were always the rules; we are just spelling them out in more detail.

Whatever the story many in Local Government are saying they have just wasted 6 months of discussion and negotiation over options that are no longer available.

I believe they have a right to be angry.

Whatever the history and whatever your personal view it now seems significant mergers of Local Governments are inevitable in WA over the next 5 years.

We in LGMA and your Association will need to work to convince the Government that the amalgamation process needs to be done right and it needs to be done with compassion so that all employees in Local Government know where they stand and what is their immediate future.

Picture the scenario of 4 Local Governments into 1.

There are 4 CEO's but the new body only needs 1.

The new body may choose one of the 4 or it may choose none of them. We then have 3 or 4 senior people not knowing where they stand; what is their future.

They are protected in short term by contract but if the new body decides they are not wanted then the maximum payout is a year's salary.

A pessimist might say that we could lose a great deal of knowledge and experience from the industry but I, as an optimist, hasten to point out that experience from the other states when they have been through mergers is that employment in Local Government tends to grow when mergers occur. The Local Governments take on more services and simply do more things because they have greater capacity.

I also need to point out to you that if you are not employed under contract then you are guaranteed two years employment with the new Local Government. In that time roles, relationships, responsibilities etc tend to get sorted out

On another positive note I suspect it will be probably be at least two years before too many mergers occur especially if there is resistance as appears likely in many areas.

So, do we have reason for confidence and optimism in Local Government. Should you stay with your Local Government?

Yes, undoubtedly.

Local Government is a very resilient beast which provides services and facilities to the people and these will always be needed.

Some might say structures will come, will become old fashioned and be re-fashioned or re-cycled or re-invented.

Whatever the term what we must remember is what holds up those structures in whatever form are the people who provide the services and the facilities.

You will always be the core of Local Government.

I wish you well in your conference.

## **Stephen Cole**

CEO LGMA

Stephen has held this position for the past 3 years. He believes it be a fantastic area to work and associations like LGMA and the Supervisors Association have great potential to assist all in Local Government.

Prior to LGMA he worked in the Department of Local Government for close to 30 years – yes, two murder terms and he still claims he is innocent.

In the department Stephen undertook a variety of roles including Executive officer of the Grants Commission and a director in various roles including investigations and capacity building.

Stephen's other passions are golf (and he is very sorry he couldn't be here yesterday for your event), gardening & family.