



## **2018 YEAR IN REVIEW**

### **Overview**

The VLGA is a progressive, independent not for profit peak body supporting councils and councillors. We support, facilitate and provide opportunities for councillor networking, professional development and information exchange and we actively engage with key policymakers and broader stakeholders to inform, influence and lead the conversations that determine the priorities for the local government sector in Victoria.

All councillors and staff at a VLGA Member Council are able to access the organisation's programs and services.

### **Advocacy, Stakeholder Engagement & Policy**

As a peak body for local government, the VLGA gives member councils a voice through regular meetings with key government departments, the Minister for Local Government, portfolio ministers and their advisors.

The VLGA meets regularly with the Shadow Minister for Local Government, the Chief Municipal Inspector, the CEO of IBAC, the Victorian Auditor General and numerous stakeholders (including the MAV, LGPro and IPAA Vic) policy makers and regulators whose work impacts upon the local government sector.

### **External Committees**

As a peak body for local government, the VLGA represents and advocates on behalf of its membership on a number of policy and stakeholder working groups including:

- The Ministerial Council on Women's Equality
- The Local Government Performance Reporting Framework (LGPRF) Steering Committee Meeting
- Stakeholder Reference Group – Officers for the Protection of the Local Environment
- The Local Government Gender Equity Working Group
- Rural and Regional Councils Sustainability Steering Group
- The Alliance for Gambling Reform
- The Ministerial Women's Roundtable for Local Government
- Essential Services Commission Engagement & Performance Technical Working Groups (Rate Capping)
- Victorian Councils' January 26 Network

### **Submissions to Parliamentary Inquiries and Reviews**

As a peak body for local government, over the past twelve months the VLGA has represented and advocated on behalf of its membership by providing evidence and submissions to a number of state and federal inquiries into matters impacting the local government sector.

<https://vlga.symphony3.com/news/2018-submissions-and-whitepapers>

- The Victorian Municipal Associations Act (1907) Review
- Inquiry into the Sustainability and Operational Challenges of Victoria's Rural and Regional Councils
- Federal Inquiry into Regional Development and Decentralisation
- Inquiry into Rate Capping Policy
- Discussion Paper – Reforming the Victoria Planning Provisions, October 2017
- Environment and Planning Committee Inquiry into Rate Capping
- Inquiry into Civics and Electoral Participation

### **Local Government Bill 2018**

The VLGA took an active role in preparing a series of briefing notes and facilitating numerous Councillor and staff consultation sessions across Victoria on the Local Government Bill (2018) in collaboration with Local Government Victoria (LGV). Feedback from these forums was used to inform VLGA's submission to the Bill.

Details of our work may be found at <https://vlga.symphony3.com/news/whitepaperssubmissions>

In addition, the VLGA provided briefings on our submission to the Bill to the Minister for Local Government, the Shadow Minister for Local Government, the Leader of the Victorian Greens and the Leader of the Victorian Reason Party and engaged regularly with member councils and LGV throughout the consultation period.

### **Additional Member Benefits, Services and Information Forums**

- Bringing together high-profile leaders, councillors and community members to discuss a range of issues facing local government. A highlight for 2017 was the [Leading the Agenda Panel hosted by Barrie Cassidy](#).
- Providing extensive training and support to councillors and staff, including the [2018 Mayor and Deputy Mayor Connect Weekend](#) – which will be hosted again in 2019.
- [Women in Local Government](#): Providing support to increase the number of women in local government. In recognition of our work as sector leaders in this area, the VLGA has been the key provider of state funded projects supporting women's participation in the local government sector and our success in achieving targets is recognized nationally.
- 2017, the VLGA was engaged by WILD (Women in Local Democracy) (Geelong) to provide pre-candidate information sessions for women interested in standing for the City of Geelong Council election. In 2018, the VLGA is working with the Yarra Ranges Shire and Voices of Women (VoW) to facilitate information sessions with women in the community leading into the 2020 elections.
- Libraries After Dark funded through the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation's (VRGF) Prevention Partnership Program aimed at providing alternative social and recreational activities in the evening for at-risk populations who may vulnerable to experiencing harm from gambling.
- Training and information sessions for candidates wanting to become councillors. In 2017 the VLGA was engaged by City of Geelong to provide pre-candidate training for individuals considering standing for the Geelong Council election.

## **Preventing Harm from Gambling**

The VLGA has been awarded concurrent funding from the VRGF for several years to raise awareness about gambling harm and supporting councils and communities to participate in the planning and licensing assessment for poker machines. VLGA's work in this space has been a significant contributor to great outcomes in several municipalities.

For example, in the City of Whittlesea, the VLGA assisted over one hundred community members and organisations to put in a statement of grounds to VCAT in support of Whittlesea Council's rejection of a planning permit and opposition to the granting of a pokies license. After a marathon 11-day hearing, VCAT refused the pokies license on the 22 December 2017.

## **Local Government Working Group on Gambling (LGWOG)**

Bi-monthly LGWOG meetings continue to be dynamic and engaging with increasing participation from council officers and councillors.

Presenters have included John Rantino and Kate Lyle from Maddocks on developments in legal cases at the VCGLR and VCAT, the Alliance for Gambling Reform on campaigning for reform, the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation on new initiatives and research, Cate Carr, Executive Director Office of Gaming, Racing and Liquor on developments in gaming regulation and Associate Professor Samantha Thomas and Amy Bestman, Deakin University on recent research on gambling exposure and children. Strong and growing attendance is testament to the high regard of the local government sector for this forum.

## **Training, Professional Development & Information Forums**

In 2018, VLGA members have continued to benefit from discounted or free training and initiatives such as the following:

- Professional development for Council staff and Councillors in a peer supported learning environment offered both regionally and in metropolitan Melbourne (Governance & Integrity Masterclass Series) "Managing Conflicts of Interest" Working Lunch with IBAC and the Municipal Inspector "Advocacy – 2018 State Election & Beyond" Working Lunch
- The VLGA's State Election Series "Sally Warhaft in Conversation with the Minister for Local Government, the Minister for Regional Development, the Minister for the Energy, Environment, Climate Change and Suburban Development, the Shadow Minister for Local Government and Finance, the Shadow Minister for Public Transport, Planning and Equality, and the Greens Spokesperson for Local Government.
- The VLGA co-hosted a "Women on Sports Boards Panel" with the Office of Women in Sport which was attended by over 100 people, including councillors, council staff, community organisations and other stakeholders.
- Networking events in both regional and metro Victoria with the chance to hear from industry experts on a range of issues. This includes Leading the Agenda and Boardroom Series for Mayors and Deputy Mayors.
- VLGA publications, resources and expert advice on topical issues.
- Additional resources to support diverse community members to participate in local government and to stand for election in 2020.
- The campaign for the State Government's Gender Equality Strategy target of 50/50 by 2025.
- Free and confidential telephone and email support for member councillors.

## **Media Engagement**

As a peak body for local government, the VLGA is regularly contacted by the media to provide statements on matters impacting the sector. Appendix A provides a comprehensive list of the VLGA's media engagement over the past twelve months.

In recognition of the role the VLGA plays in the Victorian local government sector, we led a Victorian local government showcase in The Australian newspaper, advocating for the importance of the sector --- <https://specialreports.theaustralian.com.au/1014278/>.

## **Partnerships**

As a collaborative organisation, the VLGA work is complimentary to the work of other peak bodies, including the MAV and LGPro. In addition, the VLGA provides "in kind" (for no fee) support to the work of the Alliance for Gambling Reform and the Australian Local Government Women's Association Vic (ALGWA Vic) who work out of the VLGA's offices.

## **Hart Awards**

The HART Awards, which are now in their fifth year, are an initiative of the VLGA in partnership with Reconciliation Victoria to promote reconciliation initiatives across Victoria and encourage and inspire councils and their community groups to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Each year has seen an exciting number of quality nominations. Nominations are submitted by Victorian local councils and community groups with initiatives that demonstrate Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people working together, and have contributed to reconciliation through relationships, respect and understanding.

The HART Awards is an action item of the [Victorian Aboriginal Local Government Action Plan 2016](#) (VALGAP), developed by Local Government Victoria. The VALGAP is a resource for councils to develop and strengthen best practice in engagement, partnership and employment opportunities with their Aboriginal communities.

## **Conclusion**

Council Member subscriptions to the VLGA support the organisation to provide the services outlined above. Membership of the VLGA also provides each Councillor at a Member Council the opportunity to participate in the governance of the organisation.

The VLGA acknowledges the support of our Member Councils and stakeholders and looks forward to continuing our work in 2019.

