

Our Democracy

Australia's Local Government



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Word watch

Look out for the 'Word watch' feature, which explains the meanings of words shown in **bold**.

Democracy in Australia

You might have heard someone say, 'Aren't we lucky to live in a democratic country?' Living in a **democracy** means we are free to speak our mind and have a say in who governs us. We can all aspire to be the leader of our country.

What is democracy?

Good question! Basically, democracy is a form of government in which the people of a country have an equal say in who governs them. American President Abraham Lincoln came up with possibly the best and simplest definition. In 1863, he said that democracy was 'Government of the people, by the people, for the people.'

Has Australia always been a democracy?

Australia has not always been a democracy. In the years following European settlement, the governor of the **colony** of New South Wales issued orders and everyone had to obey them. In fact, even when the first **federal** parliament was elected, many women were not allowed to vote. However, today, everyone over the age of 18 has the right to vote for their local, state and federal governments.

“

I have known little communities in the Australian bush, which ... realised for me much, so much, of what I desired in a democracy.

Francis Adams, English writer, 1893

”

Word watch

colony a land governed by another country
democracy the word comes from two Greek words: *demos* meaning people and *kratos* meaning power. So together they mean 'power to the people'.
federal national



▲ In Australia, during elections everyone's vote is equal, whether they are rich or poor, male or female, employed or unemployed.

Are all countries democracies?

Not all countries are democracies. There are other forms of government, such as:

- ✱ dictatorship: government by people who have seized power by force and who use force (or the fear of force) to maintain power
- ✱ monarchy: government by a single ruler (such as a king or queen), often from a particular family
- ✱ oligarchy: government by a few people (such as members of one family or a few military leaders)
- ✱ theocracy: government by religious leaders who enforce the law of God.

► Swaziland is a type of monarchy known as an absolute monarchy. The monarch, King Mswati III in 2011, also makes the major political decisions.

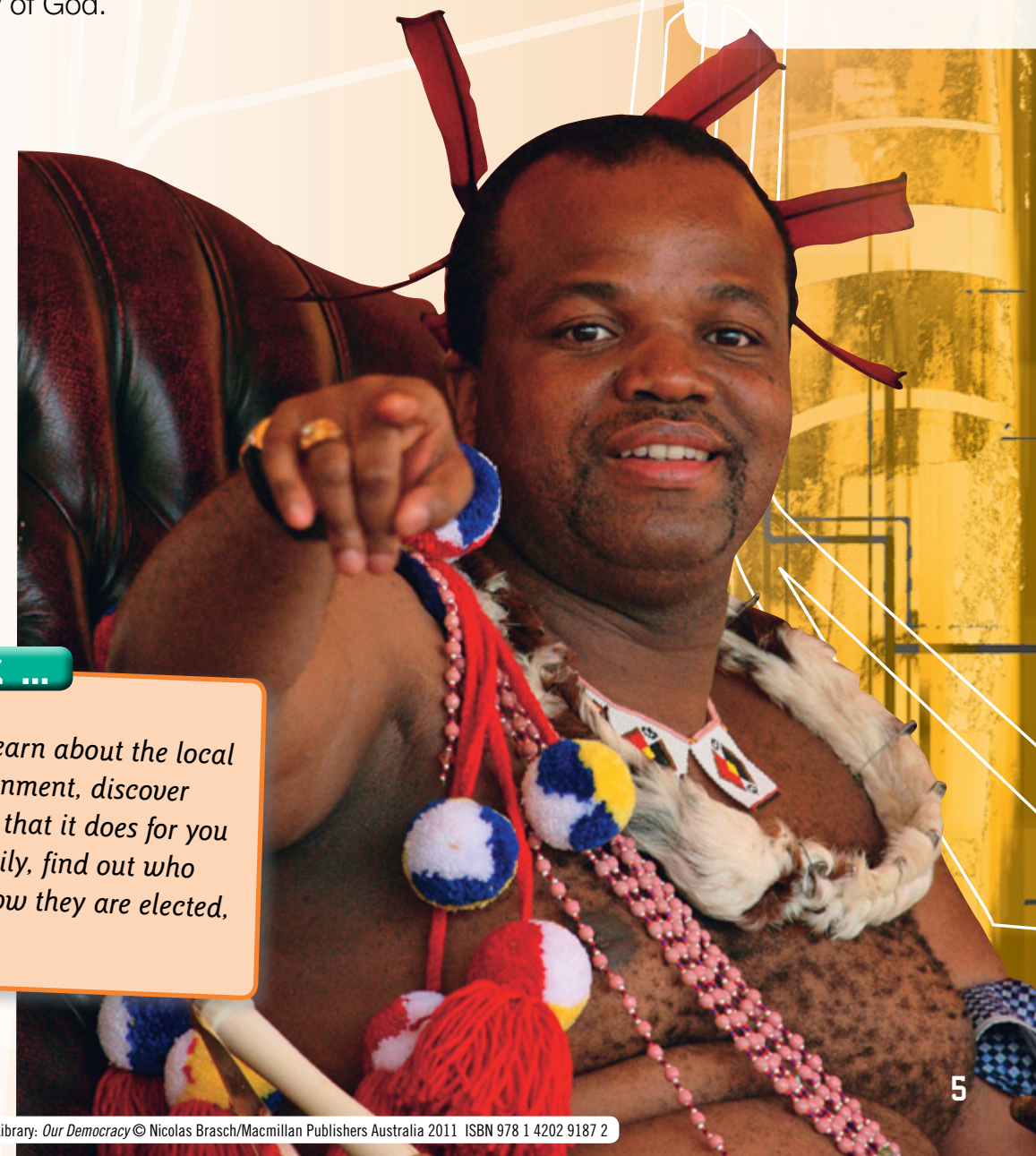
In this book ...

... you can learn about the local level of government, discover all the things that it does for you and your family, find out who runs it and how they are elected, and more.



Features of a democracy:

- the right to vote
- every vote is of equal value
- the fate of the government is in the hands of the people
- a constitution that outlines how the country is to be governed
- freedom of thought
- freedom of religion.



A timeline of local governments in Australia

This timeline provides a snapshot of the major events in the history of Australia's local governments.

► Use the page references to find more information about that event on the timeline.

Date	Event	Date	Event	Date	Event
1790	Before 1788 Indigenous Australians live by rules, cultural practices and standards of behaviour that protect their communities, similar to the role that local councils play today. ► page 8	1858	Perth Town Trust changes its name to the Perth City Council. ► pages 9, 21	1930	
1800		1859	Brisbane City Council is formed. ► pages 9, 13	1940	1938 Lilian Fowler becomes Australia's first female mayor, serving as Mayor of Newtown (in Sydney) from 1938 to 1939.
1810	1788 – early 1800s The British-style government in the early years of New South Wales has more in common with today's local government than with the state or federal systems.	1860		1947	The Australian Local Government Association is formed.
1820		1870	1874 Palmerston District Council is established, becoming the first local council in the Northern Territory.	1950	
1830	1830s Discontent builds as European settlers living in Australia desire more control over their lives, rather than being ruled by a British government on the other side of the world. ► page 8	1880		1960	1957 The Darwin City Council is re-established. ► page 25
	1838 The Perth Town Trust is formed, the first official body responsible for providing services to a local community. ► pages 9, 21	1890			1967 The New South Wales Government disbands local councils, redraws electoral boundaries and calls for fresh council elections.
1840	1840 The Corporation of Adelaide (later Adelaide City Council) is established, becoming the first official council in Australia. ► pages 9, 11	1900	1915 The Darwin Town Council is established, although it only lasts until 1937. ► page 25	1970	
	1842 The Melbourne and Sydney city councils are established. ► pages 9, 19, 23	1910		1980	1983 Wendy Chapman becomes the first female Lord Mayor of an Australian capital city (Adelaide City Council).
1850	1852 The Hobart City Council is formed. ► pages 9, 15	1920	1919 Grace Benny is elected to the Brighton Council in South Australia, becoming the first woman elected to local government in Australia.	1990	1994–95 The Victorian State Government disbands local councils throughout the state and reforms them under newer, larger boundaries.
			1925 Queensland Parliament passes the <i>City of Brisbane Act</i> to set up a single local government in Brisbane, replacing the 20 local councils and boards that had previously governed the area.	2000	2001 The Australian Capital Territory Government joins the Australian Local Government Association.
			1927 The Sydney City Council is sacked by the New South Wales government and not re-established until 1930.	2010	2006 Federal, state and local governments sign an agreement to give local governments more control over their funding arrangements.



◀ Rob Valentine, Lord Mayor of Hobart, 2011

Record-breaking mayors

1921–48

Jack Burton serves a 27-year term and is the longest-serving mayor of Darwin.

1961–75

Clem Jones serves a 14-year term and is the longest-serving mayor of Brisbane.

1991–2003

Frank Sartor serves a 12-year term and is the longest-serving mayor of Sydney.

1995–2007

Peter Nattrass serves a 12-year term and is the longest-serving mayor of Perth.

1999–2011

Rob Valentine serves a 12-year term and is the longest-serving mayor of Hobart.

2001–08

John So serves a seven-year term and is the longest-serving mayor of Melbourne.

2003–10

Michael Harbison serves a seven-year term and is the longest-serving mayor of Adelaide.

CEO vs councillors

In 2010, the former CEO of the City of Albany in Western Australia **sued** the City, claiming that he had left because he had been bullied by two **councillors**. The CEO's legal action was unsuccessful.

Word watch

councillors people elected to serve on a local council

reforms improves by making changes

sued took legal action against

A history of local governments

When Australians think about democracy and government, their first thoughts are usually about the federal system, followed by the state system. However, local governments in Australia were established 60 years before **Federation** and at least 15 years before the first state governments, then known as colonial governments.

Before European settlement

It can be argued that local government in various forms has been around for thousands of years in Australia. Indigenous Australians had and still do have rules, cultural practices and standards of behaviour that protect the members of the community and the environment in which they live. This is similar to the role that local councils play today.

Tweet of the week

@Iluvlocal: I wonder if we would have a closer sense of community if we only had local governments and no other governments.

Towards governing locally

After the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788, power lay in the hands of the governor of New South Wales, whose orders came from the British Government. However, by the 1830s, many people living in Australia began to feel they should have more control over their lives, and not be ruled by a government on the other side of the world. At the same time, the British Government wanted to reduce the amount of money being spent on their new colonies and decided to pass some of the costs on to the people living there.

Before local governments, during the 1830s, the British Government passed the cost of building roads in New South Wales on to the people living there.

State government lends a hand

From the mid-1800s, local councils were established throughout Australia to deliver services to their local communities. These services included roads, sewerage and water supply. However, the cost of supplying these services in country areas was so high that the colonial governments agreed to help. Today, local councils are still under the control of the state governments. The first council formed in Australia was the Adelaide City Council in 1840. A body called the Perth Town Trust was formed two years earlier to supervise the building of roads, but it did not officially become a council until 1858.

The Adelaide Town Hall was officially opened in 1866 to house the Adelaide City Council. This is how it looked in 1880.

Capital city councils

When the capital city councils were formed:

Adelaide City Council
1840

Sydney City Council
1842

Melbourne City Council
1842

Hobart City Council
1852

Perth City Council
1858

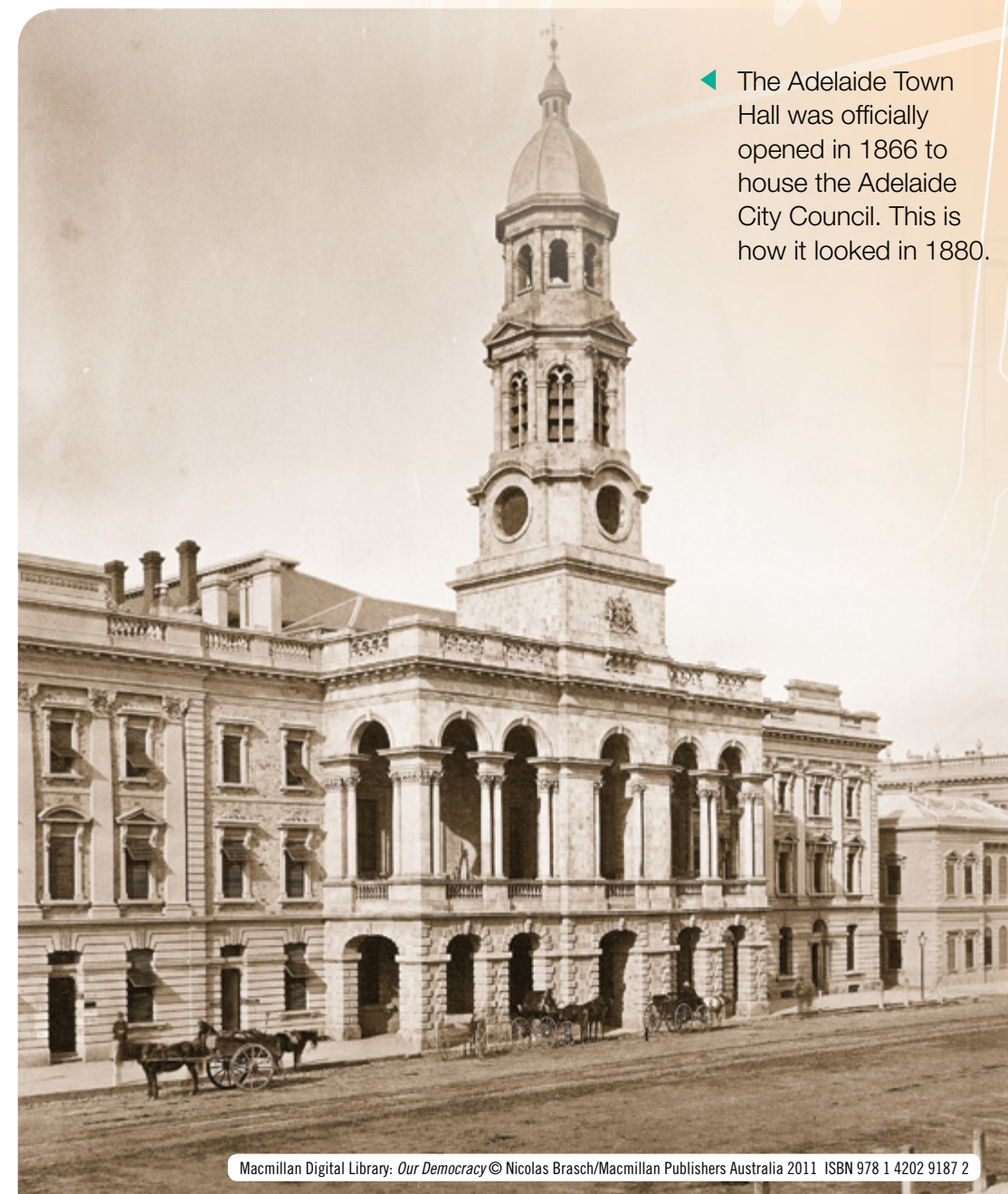
Brisbane City Council
1859

Sacking local governments

Among the powers that the state governments have over local governments is the power to sack an elected local government if the state government believes the local government is not doing a good job.

Word watch

Federation the joining together of different states under a central government



What are the powers of local government?

Local governments come under the control of the state governments or the Northern Territory Government. The Australian Capital Territory has no local government – services there are usually provided by the Australian Capital Territory Government.

How did Federation affect local councils?

Before **Federation**, the state governments (known as colonial governments) already had a large number of responsibilities. They provided some help to the local councils but this was not a high priority. When the new federal government was established, it took over many state government responsibilities. The states now had more time to supervise local government. In the early 1900s, laws were passed that made the state governments legally responsible for local governments. This is still the case today.

Local government Acts

Local government powers are outlined in each state or territory's local government Act. An Act is a document containing a series of laws passed by a government. Topics covered under a Local Government Act include:

- * rules surrounding council meetings
- * the role of the mayor
- * how council land should be managed
- * the payments that can be made to councillors
- * the number of **councillors** a council can have
- * what happens if a councillor misbehaves
- * how much money councils can raise in **rates**.
- * how councillors are elected



Watching democracy in action

Council meetings are usually open to the public, so that people can see local government democracy in action.

Word watch

councillors people elected to serve on a local council

Federation the joining together of different states under a central government

rates money collected by councils to pay for their services (similar to taxes)

State vs. local: exercising power

The state governments are not afraid to act when they believe local governments are not behaving responsibly or in the interests of the residents. Sometimes residents have demanded that their state government sack their council.

BYRON DWELLERS WANT LOCAL COUNCIL SACKED OVER COASTAL POLICY

Residents and business groups in Byron Bay are calling for the New South Wales Government to sack the Byron Shire Council ...

'We want a council that's focused on the three R's – rates, roads and rubbish – rather than waste money in legal proceedings and getting

together a coastal management plan that the state government has already said it won't accept,' said Ed Ahern [Chairman of Business group Byron United].

'How long will it be before the state government can step in and stop the waste?'

The Australian, 3 February 2010

Capital council snapshot

ADELAIDE CITY COUNCIL

Year founded
1840

First mayor
James Fisher

Mayor in 2011
Michael Harbison

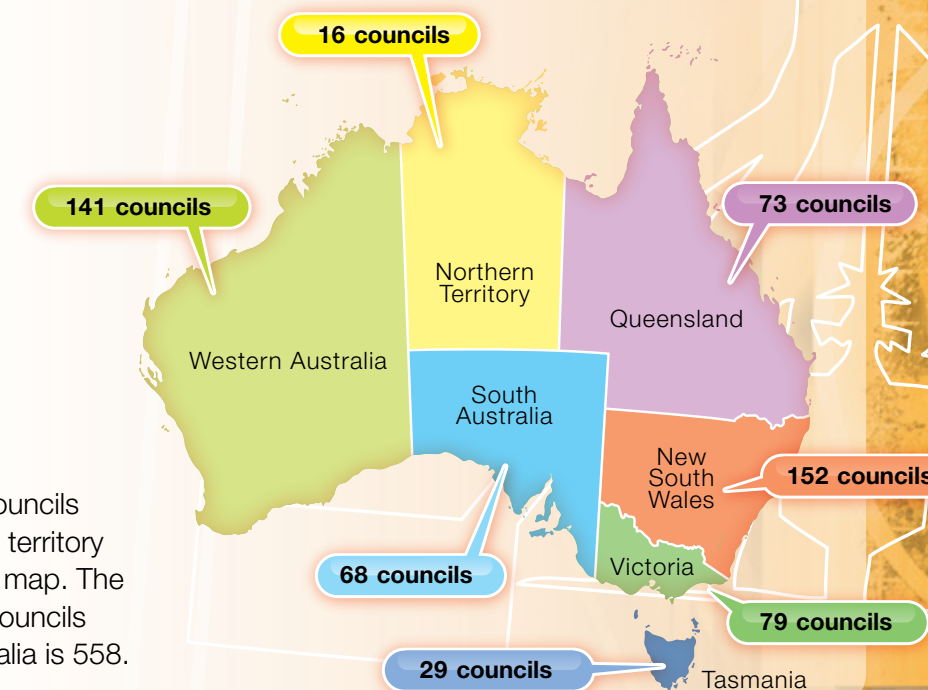
Area (square kilometres) 15.57

Number of residents
approximately 19 800

Annual revenue
approximately \$140 million

Local government Acts outline how councils, such as Sydney City Council, should conduct their meetings.

The number of councils in each state and territory are shown in this map. The total number of councils throughout Australia is 558.



What is the role of local government?

Local governments are responsible for providing services to local communities. In Australia's major cities, local governments cover just a few suburbs. In the country they may represent a few towns spread over great distances.

Main roles and services

Local governments' three main roles are:

- ✱ to manage their **locality** on a day-to-day basis
- ✱ to plan for the future of their locality
- ✱ to ensure that their locality is a secure and safe environment.

Local government provides important services in areas such as:

- ✱ building and planning
- ✱ the environment
- ✱ health
- ✱ parking and transport
- ✱ parks and gardens
- ✱ waste management.

Building and planning

Local governments must approve the construction of all new buildings or the renovation of existing buildings. They are also responsible for building and maintaining council buildings.

Environment

Local governments make sure that residents and local businesses do not pollute or harm the environment. They promote recycling, the use of clean energy, and conservation projects.

Health

Local governments make sure that food handling and hygiene standards at food outlets meet government health regulations. They provide a range of community health services, particularly for babies and young children, and control pests that are a risk to the public. Local governments also support community health projects run by local groups.

Parking and transport

Local governments make sure shopping centres and office blocks have enough parking spaces for shoppers and workers. They issue parking permits for residents and people with disabilities, and work with state government departments to set parking restrictions.

Parks and gardens

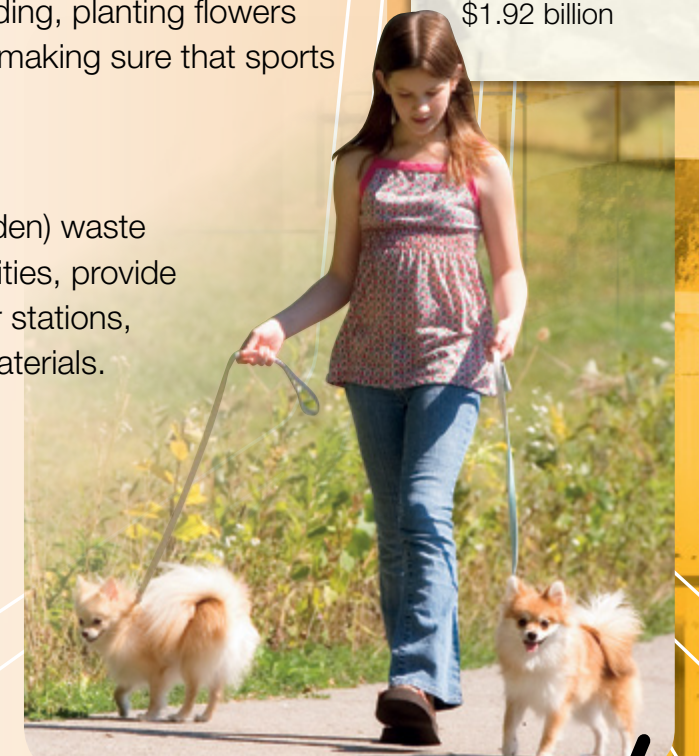
Local governments are responsible for maintaining their parks and gardens. This includes mowing and watering the grass, weeding, planting flowers and trees, maintaining playground equipment, and making sure that sports grounds are suitable for training and matches.

Waste management

Local governments collect garbage and green (garden) waste from homes and businesses, provide recycling facilities, provide garbage bins in public places, and manage transfer stations, which are locations that accept garbage and old materials.



- ▲ Local governments are responsible for library services.



- ▲ Dogs must be **registered** with your local council. If your dog is lost, your local council can inform you if it has been found.

Capital council snapshot

BRISBANE CITY COUNCIL

Year founded
1859

First mayor
John Petrie

Mayor in 2011
Campbell Newman

Area (square kilometres) 379.8

Number of residents
approximately 1.03 million

Annual revenue
approximately \$1.92 billion

Word watch

locality place or area

Word watch

registered recorded formally

How does local government raise money?

Providing services to local communities costs a lot of money. The money to fund these services is raised by the local government from local residents and businesses through the payment of **rates**, fines and charges, as well as from grants.

Tweet of the week

@renter: I rent a house so I don't have to pay rates directly. But I suspect they are somehow included in my rent.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

What is our local council up to? I recently received my annual rates notice and could not believe that it was \$500 higher than last year. I have made no improvements to my house in the past year, so I don't know how the council calculated that I should pay an extra \$500. And I certainly

haven't noticed any increase in the services that council is providing. In fact, the service seems to be getting worse. More of my garbage seems to end up in the road than in the garbage truck when it is collected. I urge other residents to refuse to pay any rate increases that they receive.

Yours,

Brian Hall, Ashfield

Rates

Council rates are charges that relate to the value of a property, such as houses, apartment blocks, shops, office buildings, farms and empty blocks of land. The rate amount is calculated on the value of the property. Every property and block of land is re-valued regularly (usually every two years) and if the value of the property has increased, the amount of rates that the property owner has to pay also increases.

- Property owners are sent rates notices each year, showing how much they have to pay the council.

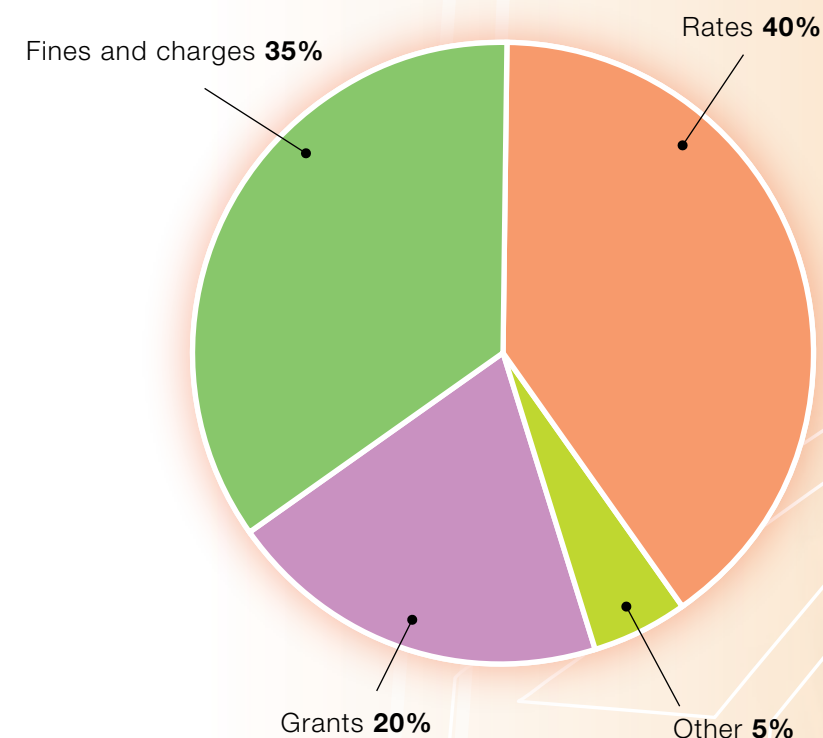
Fines and charges

Councils impose a range of fines and charges, for things such as:

- animal registration
- entry to council facilities, such as swimming pools
- planning applications, such as an application to build a new house
- hire of council-owned grounds, such as by a sporting club
- library fines
- parking fines
- payments for services such as **meals on wheels**.

Grants

Grants are amounts of money provided to the council by the state government, and occasionally by the federal government. Grants can be provided for a specific purpose or used how the council chooses.



- This pie chart shows the different ways in which local governments raise money.

Capital council snapshot

HOBART CITY COUNCIL

Year formed
1852

First mayor
William Carter

Mayor in 2011
Rob Valentine
(his great-great-grandfather was mayor in 1925–26)

Area (square kilometres) 78

Number of residents
approximately 48 000

Annual revenue
approximately \$104 million

Word watch

rates money collected by councils to pay for their services (similar to taxes)

Word watch

meals on wheels
a service that delivers meals to elderly people

Your say: what does local government do?



Most news about democracy, government and politics is about the federal and state governments. But local governments provide essential services on a daily basis. We asked six students what they knew about local governments.

Question: You have all been to Canberra and seen how federal government runs, but what do you know about local government?

Kelly: I know they're the people who are in charge of public parks, collecting all the rubbish and stuff like that.

Genki: I think they're the people that you have to ask for permission to cut down a tree or build your house or build a fence.

Felix: I know that the leader is called the mayor.

Q: What do you think is the big difference between local governments and state or federal governments?

Kelly: The local government usually focuses on the small things that affect people in their area.

Monique: The local government really focuses on what you do as a family in your area, but the federal and state governments focus on things all over the place.

Q: That's right. If your school had a government, it would be like a local government. If you were in charge of that government, what issues would you deal with first?

Kelly: Rubbish in the playground.

Q: And how would you fix it?

Kelly: You could select five or six people to pick up the rubbish and pay them a dollar or two to do it.

Toby: But if people got paid to pick it up, they would just purposely litter.

Q: If paying people to pick up litter worked, how would you raise the money to pay them?

Genki: School taxes and fines.

Q: So if every kid paid \$1 a week, that money could be used for paying people. Is that right?

Rachael: But maybe not kids in kindergarten.

Jasmine: And some kids don't get an allowance so they wouldn't be able to pay.

Q: That's something that all governments have to deal with – working out how much people can afford to pay in taxes and charges.



▲ Students from Belrose Primary School settle down to discuss local government issues.

Thanks to ...

Gus, Toby, Rachael, Jasmine, Genki, Monique, Kelly and Felix, Grade 6 students from Belrose Primary School, New South Wales.

Word watch

taxes fees charged by a government on a product, income or activity

What does the mayor do?

Tweet of the week

@wordfreak: Just found out that the word *mayor* comes from the old French word *maire*, which comes from the Latin word *maior*.

The mayor is the official head of a local government. This means that the mayor is similar to the Prime Minister in the federal government, and the Premier or Chief Minister in the state and territory governments.

Chairing local council meetings

One of the main jobs for a mayor is to **chair** the meetings of **councillors**. Councillors usually meet once a week to discuss important council issues. The mayor is also a councillor and can speak and vote on issues.

Most council meetings are open to the public, and visitors to the meeting are allowed to have a say as well. When a controversial issue is discussed, meetings can become very noisy and the mayor must keep the meeting under control.



Word watch

chair lead or manage a meeting
councillors people elected to serve on a local council

▲ In local council meetings, a mayor's vote is equal to a councillor's vote.

Ceremonial duties

The mayor has to attend a lot of functions and **ceremonies**, such as those on Australia Day and Anzac Day, the opening of new buildings, and the **swearing-in** of new Australian **citizens**. On these occasions, the mayor often gives a speech to welcome important guests. It is also an opportunity to promote the council that the mayor represents.

Mayoral robes and chains

While Prime Ministers, Premiers and Chief Ministers dress normally at important events, mayors have special clothes to wear, known as mayoral robes. They also wear a decorative chain around their neck. This British tradition dates back about 600 years, when the heads of local districts wore expensive, decorative robes and chains to show they were important. Each council has its own rules for when the mayoral robe and chain should be worn, but many require it at council meetings, as well as at important events.

- Mayors of local councils wear their robes and chains at important events. The wearing of mayoral regalia is a British tradition that dates back to around the 1300s.



Capital council snapshot

MELBOURNE CITY COUNCIL

Year founded
1842

First mayor
Henry Condell

Mayor in 2011
Robert Doyle

Area (square kilometres) 37.6

Number of residents
approximately 90 000

Annual revenue
approximately \$250 million (in 2006)

Word watch

ceremonies important, formal events, often attended by the public
citizens people who have full rights within a country
swearing-in installing or introducing

What do councillors do?

Tweet of the week

@tiredcouncillor:
People don't realise how much work councillors do. One resident texts me every time their garbage is not picked up on time.

Councillors are elected to represent the residents in their local area. They are the local government equivalent of members of parliament. However, unlike state and federal politicians who are paid full-time wages, councillors work part-time in their roles and receive **allowances**.

'We, the elected Council of the Municipality of Strathfield, are honoured to serve the community of the Municipality of Strathfield and promise to fulfil our duties to the best of our ability. We are committed to open and accountable government and will act, at all times, in the interests of the community, without favour, and in accordance and with the respect of the law.'

Councillors' oath of office, Strathfield Council, New South Wales



▲ Before they can serve their local council, councillors must first be **sworn in**.

Word watch

allowances payments for the time spent doing a specific job
councillors people elected to serve on a local council
sworn in installed or introduced

Meetings and voting on motions

Before each council meeting, the **agenda** is given out to the councillors so they are prepared for what is to be discussed. After each issue is discussed, a motion is put to the councillors. A motion is a statement such as: 'That this council support the building of a new library.' The councillors then vote on the motion, which passes or fails depending on the support it receives.



▲ Local councils make decisions based on the votes of their councillors.

Helping local residents

Councillors represent far fewer people than state or federal politicians do, and almost always live among their **constituents**. Councillors are expected to be readily available to members of the community. Local residents can phone a councillor at home and complain about relatively minor issues, such as their garbage not being collected on time. Councillors regularly meet with local businesses and community groups to make sure that their concerns are heard and raised at council meetings.

Word watch

agenda list of issues to be discussed at a meeting
constituents people who live within the area represented by a councillor

Capital council snapshot

PERTH CITY COUNCIL

Year formed
1858

First mayor
George Shenton

Mayor in 2011
Lisa Scaffidi

Area (square kilometres) 8.1

Number of residents
approximately 15 000

Annual revenue
approximately \$140 million

What does the CEO do?

The chief executive officer (CEO) is employed to manage the council. **Councillors** are the elected heads of local government and their decisions are carried out by paid council officials – the CEO and senior managers.

A day in the life of a CEO

The CEO is in charge of the day-to-day running of the council. At some local councils, this person may be called the general manager, rather than the CEO. Here is a sample of a CEO's working day:

- 8.00 a.m.** Arrive at work and respond to emails.
- 8.30 a.m.** Meet with the council's manager of **assets** to discuss issues involving the council's properties and land.
- 9.00 a.m.** Check that the agenda for the next council meeting is accurate before it is passed on to the councillors.
- 9.30 a.m.** Meet with mayor to discuss the progress of the most critical issues facing council.
- 10.00 a.m.** Visit local library with manager of assets to examine severe damage caused by recent storm. The council must decide whether to replace parts of the roof or the whole roof.
- 11.00 a.m.** Meet with the council's manager of community services to discuss the progress of a new program for the area's youth.

- 11.30 a.m.** Meet with the council's communications manager to discuss the contents of the next council newsletter.
- Noon** Meet with council's lawyer to discuss a case involving a woman who is blaming the council after she tripped while walking along the footpath.
- 1.00 p.m.** Attend lunch for local council CEOs to hear about latest issues facing councils.
- 2.30 p.m.** Prepare for meeting later in the week with state government officials to update them on important council issues.
- 3.30 p.m.** Meet with the council's manager of environment to discuss the progress of a crackdown on unhygienic food standards in local food outlets.
- 4.00 p.m.** Attend meeting of council's IT committee to discuss whether or not the council needs to upgrade its IT systems.
- 4.30 p.m.** Meet with finance manager to get an update on the council's financial position.
- 5.00 p.m.** Attend farewell for a staff member.
- 5.30 p.m.** Attend to emails.
- 6.00 p.m.** Meet with councillors to update them on the council's finances.
- 7.30 p.m.** Attend this week's council meeting.
- 10.30 p.m.** Leave for home.

Capital council snapshot

SYDNEY CITY COUNCIL

Year formed
1842

First mayor

Charles Windeyer
(nominated mayor),
Alderman John
Hosking (elected
mayor)

Mayor in 2011

Clover Moore

**Area (square
kilometres)** 26.15

**Current number
of residents**
approximately 175 000

Annual revenue
approximately
\$470 million

CEOs exchange ideas

LGPro is a Victorian organisation that represents local government senior management. It arranges for CEOs from business to meet and share ideas with local government CEOs. The aim is to expose local government CEOs to different management practices.

Tweet of the week

@localgovtceo:

I doubt the Prime Minister works as hard as I do!

Word watch

agenda list of issues to be discussed at a meeting
assets things of value
councillors people elected to serve on a local council

What do council employees do?

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) cannot run the council alone. The CEO is supported by senior managers and general staff who keep the council functioning.

Senior managers

The senior managers report directly to the CEO. Each senior manager has a specific field of responsibility, and employees to supervise. They also attend regular management meetings to keep up to date on what is happening in all areas of the council. Areas that senior managers look after include:

- * **assets** – the maintenance, construction and planning of properties and land owned by the council
- * community services – delivering services to the community, such as home help for the elderly or people with disabilities, childcare centres, maternal and baby health centres and youth support programs
- * culture and leisure – providing leisure and art-related services to the public
- * environment – ensuring that all council services meet federal and state environmental standards, and that businesses and residents obey local environmental laws
- * public services – delivering all the services that affect the public, such as street sweeping, waste management, maintenance of parks and gardens
- * finance – ensuring the council is spending and receiving money as outlined in the **budget**
- * legal counsel – ensuring that the council meets all legal requirements.

Providing employment

Around Australia, local governments directly employ about 180 000 people.



▲ The collection of rubbish by council employees is one of the most visible examples of a local council service.

The public face of local government

Hundreds of council employees carry out the decisions made by the **councillors**, CEO and senior managers. Their roles, responsibilities and skills differ greatly, but they share the same goal of providing services to the local community in a timely and efficient manner. These people include:

- * accountants
 - * childcare workers
 - * community bus drivers
 - * customer service officers
 - * dog catchers
 - * engineers
 - * environmental officers
 - * gardeners
 - * health inspectors
 - * IT specialists
 - * librarians
 - * maternal and child health nurses
 - * road workers
 - * youth workers
- ... and the list goes on and on.



▲ The employees of Pine River Shire Council, Queensland, serve their local community in distinctive red shirts.

Capital council snapshot

DARWIN CITY COUNCIL

Year formed
1915 (**abolished** in 1937, re-established in 1955)

First mayor
Ella Stack

Mayor in 2011
Graeme Sawyer

Area (square kilometres) 140

Number of residents
approximately 76 000

Annual revenue
approximately \$78 million

Word watch

assets things of value
budget a financial plan that organisations are required to produce

Word watch

abolished got rid of
councillors people elected to serve on a local council

How are local governments elected?

Ward, not electorate

The geographical area that an elected councillor represents is called a ward – not an electorate.

By-election

Some local councillors use local government as a stepping stone to state or federal government. If they are elected to state or federal government while still in local government, a new election for their place in local government is held (this is known as a by-election).

Word watch

- candidates** people standing for election
- compulsory** required, whether a person wants to or not
- councillors** people elected to serve on a local council
- electorate** the geographical area represented by one member of parliament
- opposition** the political party (or a combination of parties) that has the second most seats in parliament
- voluntary** not required unless a person wants to

Elections for local governments are held every one, two, three or four years, depending on the state or territory. The system of voting and how the votes are counted differs from council to council and state to state. In some councils, the mayor is elected by the voters, but in most cases the mayor is chosen by the elected **councillors**.

Local election snapshot

State	Frequency of elections	System of voting	Compulsory or voluntary
New South Wales	Every 4 years	Preferential voting when 1 or 2 candidates , proportional representation when 3 or more candidates	Compulsory
Northern Territory	Every 4 years	Preferential voting	Compulsory
Queensland	Every 4 years	Preferential voting in some councils, first-past-the-post voting in other councils	Compulsory
South Australia	Every 4 years	Proportional representation	Voluntary
Tasmania	Every 2 years (for half the councillors)	Hare-Clark	Voluntary
Victoria	Every 4 years	Preferential voting	Compulsory for residents, non-compulsory for enrolled non-residents (property owners)
Western Australia	Every 2 years (for half the councillors)	First-past-the-post	Voluntary

On the same side

Unlike in federal, state and territory parliaments, there is no **opposition** in a local council. All councillors are members of the local government, even if they hold different political views. In fact, political parties do not play an important role in most local councils.

BALLOT PAPER — TASMANIA
HOBART CITY COUNCIL
ELECTION OF 6 COUNCILLORS (ALDERMEN)
Number the boxes from 1 to 13 in order of your choice

☐ BROWNSCOMBE Peter

☐ SEXTON Peter

☐ FOLEY Leo

☐ ZUCCO Mari

☐ THOMAS Damon

☐ ROWALLAN Toby

☐ FREEMAN John

☐ BURNET Helen

☐ HAIGH Darlene A

☐ VALENTINE Rob

☐ PETERSON Corey

☐ ALEXOPOULOS Dina

☐ HEATLEY Wendy

Number at least 6 boxes to make your vote count

BALLOT PAPER — TASMANIA
HOBART CITY COUNCIL
ELECTION OF LORD MAYOR
Number the boxes 1 and 2 in order of your choice

☐ ZUCCO Mari

☐ VALENTINE Rob

Number at least 1 box to make your vote count

BALLOT PAPER — TASMANIA
HOBART CITY COUNCIL
ELECTION OF DEPUTY LORD MAYOR
Number the boxes from 1 to 3 in order of your choice

☐ BURNET Helen

☐ HAIGH Darlene A

☐ SEXTON Peter

Number at least 1 box to make your vote count

◀ A **ballot paper** for the election of Hobart City Council

Postal voting

At some local elections, voters do not vote at a **polling booth**. They are allowed to return their ballot paper by post.

The different voting systems

The voting system used to elect local government could be the preferential voting system, proportional representation, first-past-the-post or the Hare Clark system, depending on the state or territory.

Preferential voting

In the preferential voting system, voters select the candidates on their ballot paper in order of **preference**. If no candidate receives more than 50 per cent of the number '1' votes, the preferences of the least popular candidates are given out until one candidate receives more than 50 per cent of the vote.

First-past-the-post

In the first-past-the-post voting system, voters put the number '1' next to their preferred candidate, and the candidate who receives the most number '1's is declared the winner.

Proportional representation

Proportional representation is a system of voting used when several people on the same ballot paper are being elected at the same time. All candidates who receive a certain share of the total votes are elected.

Hare-Clark

The Hare-Clark system is similar to proportional representation but the **quota** for election to parliament is decided after the first preference votes have been counted.

Word watch

- ballot paper** a ticket or paper used in voting
- polling booth** the place where people vote
- preference** choice
- quota** amount that must be reached

Other political players: lobbyists and the media

Political parties, members of parliament and political **candidates** are not the only players in the world of politics. Two other very important groups are lobbyists and the media. The lobbyists want to influence governments, while governments want to influence the media.

Tweet of the week

@lobbyist101: It's hard work being a lobbyist: taking politicians out for breakfasts ... and lunches ... and dinners.

What does a lobbyist do?

Lobbyists try to convince governments to make decisions that will benefit the organisations and the people they work for. Lobbyists try to influence local governments by:

- ✱ meeting with **councillors** and presenting their point of view
- ✱ gaining local media coverage that supports their point of view
- ✱ organising public meetings and demonstrations that pressure the councillors to make a decision in their favour.

Local government decisions that lobbyists try to influence are often to do with:

- ✱ the construction of new buildings
- ✱ the construction of new roads
- ✱ the sale of council-owned **assets**.

▼ Supporters of a pro-park lobby group protest against a car race being held in a public park.

▲ The Newcastle Show goes ahead after lobbying from groups opposing and supporting the event.

CASE STUDY

Lobbying case study: Show Day

The Newcastle City Council applied to the New South Wales Government to have a Show Day holiday during the Newcastle Show. The Newcastle Show Committee lobbied the council by saying that the Show would not survive if people did not have a day off work and school to attend the Show. However, local business owners opposed having a day off because it was 'costly and inconvenient for employers'. The New South Wales Government agreed to the request for a Show Day holiday, but the motion still had to be presented at council and voted on by councillors. After hearing from individuals and groups on both sides of the issue, a **majority** of councillors voted in favour of the Show Day holiday.

The media and the political system

The media plays a major role in all levels of government, including local government. Councillors use the media, such as the local newspapers and radio stations, to become better known and therefore increase their chances of being elected. Lobbyists also use the media to pressure councillors into making decisions that will benefit the organisations the lobbyists represent.

Word watch

assets things of value
candidates people standing for election
councillors people elected to serve on a local council

Word watch

majority more than half

Interview with two mayors

▼ Councillor
Lilliane Brady



Cobar Shire Council
Area (square kilometres)
45 609

Population
approximately 5100

Interesting facts
Almost the same size as Tasmania. Main industries are mining (copper, lead, silver, zinc, gold) and agriculture.

Website
www.cobar.nsw.gov.au

Word watch

councillor person elected to serve on a local council
principles beliefs
Treasurer the government minister responsible for the nation's finances

Councillor Lilliane Brady is the Mayor of Cobar in western New South Wales. She has served in local government for more than 25 years. Councillor Tania Mihailuk is the Mayor of Bankstown in Sydney. She has been in local government since 2004.

Q. What attracted you to local government in the first place?

Clr Brady: I was involved in some local issues to do with the mines and I met the New South Wales **Treasurer** Jack Renshaw. He told me I should get into local politics because he admired my **principles**.

Clr Mihailuk: I saw it as an opportunity to be more involved in my community and in shaping its future.

Q. Have you ever considered standing for state or federal parliaments?

Clr Brady: At one federal election I was going to stand for the Labor Party for the federal seat of Broken Hill. However, the last weekend before I had to officially register, I realised I was too strong willed to be able to exist within a major political party.

Clr Mihailuk: I am passionate about Bankstown so if I can help further the 'Bankstown cause' in any way, I would, even in state or federal parliament.

Q. What are the best things about local government?

Clr Brady: Working hard to improve things for the local community. In my area we need to provide facilities for people working in the local mines, and their families.

Clr Mihailuk: Being given the opportunity to work directly with the community in the areas of the environment, health, planning and community safety.

Q. Do you think Australia should have three levels of government?

Clr Brady: No. There should not be a state government. Federal governments should deal directly with local governments. I've been saying that for years. What do the state governments do other than fight?

Clr Mihailuk: Whatever happens in the future, I believe local government has an important role to play in our country's democracy.

Q. What advice would you give to someone thinking of standing for local government?

Clr Brady: It is very frustrating when you know what your people need but you can't afford to give it to them. Also, people always stop and tell me their complaints, even when I'm out having dinner.

Clr Mihailuk: Complete your education and be comfortable in your career before becoming involved in local government.

Q. Finally, which projects or areas have given you the most pleasure?

Clr Brady: Forming a committee and raising money to build a nursing home so that the elderly have somewhere close to live. The nursing home is now known as Lilliane Brady Village. People said there would never be enough residents for it but we have had to extend it three times.

Clr Mihailuk: Quite a few, including highlighting environmental issues, the establishment of the Bankstown Business Advisory Service (BBAS) and the Bankstown Visitor Information Centre.

“



▲ Councillor
Tania Mihailuk

”

Bankstown City Council
Area (square kilometres)
77

Population
approximately 170 000

Interesting facts
Council empties 11 300 domestic garbage bins a day. There are 15 099 dogs registered in Bankstown.

Website
www.bankstown.nsw.gov.au

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