



PRIME MINISTER

13 May 1974

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON. E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C. M.P.
HANDBOOK ON AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT
PROJECTS - 13 MAY 1974

The Australian Government is determined to ensure that local government plays a full role in our three-tier, federal system of government, and as part of this we will see that it is given adequate access to the nation's finances.

As a major step in enabling local government to obtain the financial help to which it is entitled, the Department of Urban and Regional Development has prepared a handbook for local government and community groups. Entitled Australian Government Assistance to Local Government Projects the booklet is a guide to sources of funds and explains how to apply for them.

Local Government in the past has had to battle with a Cinderella-like existence, starved of funds and with its significance largely ignored. As if this were not difficult enough, it has also found itself cut off from assistance, simply through lack of information about its entitlements.

It is not good enough just to institute programs to assist the community. Information on these programs must be easily accessible.

My Government recognises the importance of communication, and we see the publication of this handbook as a positive contribution to the kind of open government and citizen participation to which we are committed.

The handbook, which is being circulated to councillors, local government officials and to community groups throughout Australia, describes the wide range of activities which are eligible for finance and the forms of assistance available for each one. A brief description is also incorporated of the existing financial arrangements between the Australian, State and Local Government.

It is just one of a series of actions and programs through which my Government has shown its determination to upgrade the role of local government. Other initiatives include ensuring that local government was represented at the

Constitutional Convention, restructuring the Grants Commission to allow local government to apply for assistance and holding a referendum to give voters the opportunity to allow the Commonwealth to grant financial assistance directly to local government bodies which request it.

I asked the Minister for Urban and Regional Development, Mr. Uren, to prepare the booklet following a meeting with the Lord Mayors of the capital cities last December.

During our discussions it emerged that there was considerable misunderstanding outside Canberra about just what kinds of Australian Government assistance were available to local government and local projects.

We have aimed to gather together all the major sources of this assistance in one easy reference document. Councils or local groups wanting help will now be able to refer to the booklet when they want to discover what funds are available and from whom and how to set about applying for them.

Such a booklet may appear to some a rather dry listing of Government programs. But its very existence will help to bring into being many of these programs, in areas like health, Aboriginal welfare, housing and employment. And these projects when implemented make a vital difference to the lives of the people they affect.

Some examples of projects for which assistance is available include housing of Aboriginal employees, bridging finance for the development of essential amenities in new estates, assistance to local governing bodies in providing a variety of welfare services and grants for new education projects.

With reliable data on just what assistance is available from the Australian Government for particular projects, local government and community groups will be able to make more informed decisions on ways to improve the lives of their communities.

To a certain extent, many of the programs described rely for their success on active community involvement. We hope the existence of booklets like this will stimulate community and local government groups to take new initiatives.

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