

## Business Regulation Benchmarking: Role of Local Government-Submission on Draft Report from Australian Land Management Group

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**Scope:** This submission is concerned only with the environmental role of Local Government (LG).

**Draft report:** In making this submission we note from the PC draft report that:

- LG combines the individual character of 563 autonomous entities (p39)
- There is considerable variation between States in the relative importance of various sources of LG revenue (p53)
- The Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government (DORA) has responsibility for delivering Commonwealth Government commitments in relation to LG (p63)
- The Commonwealth, and each state and territory, has a range of environmental legislation and regulatory requirements—much of which requires consideration or monitoring of environmental outcomes at a local level (p385)
- Environmental regulation is an area in which cost-shifting from state to local government has occurred over the past decade, for example, in relation to recycling and native vegetation management (p 385)
- With the exception of landscape specific issues, such as coastal, wetland and desert management, most facets of the environment are of relevance, to a varying extent, in all LG areas (p 386)
- Local governments set many strategic, long term environmental policies, especially in the realm of land use planning. They also take small decisions and actions each day that cumulatively can amount to shifts in regional environment policies (p 388)
- The Commonwealth's main avenue for engaging LGs in environmental regulation is via national agreements whereby the states undertake to engage LGs in delivering agreed national outcomes (p388)[as outlined on p 389]---including agreement that reform was needed in relation to, inter alia, compliance with state environmental and planning legislation and better delivery of national environmental programs.
- Environmental expenditure accounts for more than one quarter of LG's total annual expenditure---and historically LG environmental expenditure has represented more than half of total environmental expenditure across Australia's three layers of government—and much of LG environmental expenditure relates to environmental maintenance of LG land and to environmental business related regulation (p394-5).

- The primary foci of LG environmental effort relates to water management, coastal management and sea level rises, vegetation and weed control, waste management and air quality and noise (p various).

**Our work:** The Australian Land Management Group (ALMG) is a not-for-profit company devoted to improving environmental outcomes in ways that provide recognition and reward for land managers. To do this we have designed and support Certified Land Management (CLM).

CLM is a landscape-linked, whole-of-property, externally audited environmental management system that complies with the internationally recognized ISO14001 environmental standard. CLM is being adopted by landholders across four states.

**Our submission:** There is considerable scope for improving environmental outcomes through better integration of the requirements of all levels of government and of regional natural resource /catchment organisations. As outlined in the draft report this can be facilitated through having improved information banks on what is required and through the sharing of specialized skills and other resources. Additionally, we submit, substantial gains in effectiveness and efficiency could be gained through linking these requirements with the business and other aspirations of landholders through the use of CLM and any similar tools.

Landholders using CLM access a custom-built 'myEMS' web-based software tool that enables an integrated consideration of Commonwealth and state environmental legislation, regional/catchment NRM agency requirements and a risk analysis/prioritizing activity focused on the needs of the land manager. It would be a relatively simple step to include any additional LG requirements and those of national environmental programs. In short CLM enables all regulatory, market and other drivers to act in concert hence improving the effectiveness and efficiency of private and public environmental expenditures. To that end there is scope for DORA to take a lead position to trial and refine application of best practice tools to support use of improved information resources and the sharing of specialized skills and other capabilities. Additional information could be provided if required.