



Council for the Australian
Federation

CAF Report Card

October 2008

The Council for the Australian Federation was formed in October 2006. One of its key objectives is to support and promote federalism in Australia and to promote constructive dialogue between states, territories and the Commonwealth to advance the interests of Australians.

CAF – role and purpose

The Council for the Australian Federation (CAF) works to support and enhance our federal system. Over the past 18 months, CAF has adopted both a strategic and practical focus. States and territories have led the development of much progressive policy work over the past decade, including the National Reform Agenda, modernisation of the states' economies, such as establishing new industries like biotechnology, innovation in environmental management, improving prosperity and skills development, and new forms of community engagement in government policies and decision making.

Listed below are some of the achievements of CAF since its inception in late 2006.

CAF – catalyst for action

During 2006-07, CAF demonstrated leadership on a range of issues critical to Australia's future that required collaborative and innovative solutions. Issues were identified and work was undertaken on new models and principles to guide the Australian Health Care Agreements, the economic impacts of urban congestion, water reform and education. CAF also undertook substantial work on climate change.

Climate change

The February 2007 *Council for the Australian Federation Declaration on Climate Change* led the way in setting the national agenda for responding to climate change. In the declaration, state and territory governments accepted scientific evidence of the impact of human activity on global climate and recognised that climate change is one of the most significant economic issues facing Australia, requiring prompt action.

States and territories committed to a national emissions trading scheme by 2010, with or without Commonwealth agreement. Substantial work was undertaken by state and territory officials of the National Emissions Trading Taskforce. The leadership of CAF forced the then Howard Government to announce that it would develop a national emissions trading scheme.

The Commonwealth Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong, congratulated the taskforce for their valuable contribution to the emerging consensus around the desirability of an emissions trading scheme as the central emissions reduction tool in Australia.

In April 2007, CAF engaged Professor Ross Garnaut to undertake a review of the impacts of climate change on the Australian economy and make recommendations on medium to long-term policies and policy frameworks to improve the prospects for sustainable prosperity. The review's final report was delivered on 30 September 2008. Professor Garnaut hosted a number of forums around Australia to engage the public in various issues relating to the review. The new Commonwealth Government has joined the review and its findings are expected to contribute to the, yet to be released, Commonwealth emissions trading scheme for Australia.



CAF – policy innovation

CAF is committed to new and innovative policy responses to support the national interest and, in 2007, commissioned work to explore a cooperative approach to schooling in the 21st century and the future of federalism.

The Future of Schooling in Australia report was published by CAF in September 2007 as part of its *Federalist Paper* series. The report outlined the importance of high quality schooling in delivering equality of opportunity and in supporting our economic prosperity. The action plan, endorsed by all states and territories, has eight areas of work including:

- working towards national curricula
- testing to improve student achievement
- reporting on performance
- supporting workforce reform
- harmonising teacher registration and reducing red tape
- convening a biennial national forum to share innovative educational reforms
- forwarding the report to the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs to develop a new declaration on the *Future of Schooling in Australia*.

Australia's Federal Future is another critical publication by CAF. In the lead up to the 2007 federal election, the release of the paper stimulated debate on the existing benefits of federalism with some concrete suggestions for restoring balance between the Commonwealth and the states. Arguably, the debate triggered by this publication and other efforts in this area have influenced the new Commonwealth Government's cooperative federalism model of engagement with the states and territories.

CAF – practical outcomes

One of the main objectives for CAF is to undertake a range of practical reforms to benefit all Australians. Each year many Australians move interstate in search of different job opportunities and lifestyles. CAF is seeking to minimise unnecessary anomalies that individual citizens and families face when moving between states and territories.

The reduction of red tape and the harmonisation of regulation across borders is a critical part of CAF's work plan. CAF has been instrumental in progressing several initiatives that have now been taken up by the COAG Business Regulation and Competition Working Group. CAF's achievements in these areas include:

- an agreement for a uniform approach to product safety by cutting red tape from 1 July 2008
- the signing of a declaration to remove impediments to the movement of skilled workers within Australia, allowing electricians, plumbers, carpenters, joiners and bricklayers, refrigeration and air-conditioning mechanics, and motor mechanics to operate across all jurisdictions
- an intergovernmental agreement, committing to the harmonisation of key areas of workers compensation and occupational health and safety schemes at the October 2006 meeting.

Variations in workers compensation agreements posed challenges for businesses working across borders. The development of common guidance material was identified as an initiative that could be beneficial to both industry and government. Employers now have a single point of reference to access simplified and streamlined information on the legislative requirements of workers compensation acts, as well as a range of fact sheets on premium processes, certificates of currency, return to work, claim lodgement and weekly benefits.

CAF has also agreed to harmonise daylight savings from April 2008 in Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory.

During September 2008, First Ministers agreed to take steps to harmonise arrangements for the provision of the ANZAC Day public holiday. ANZAC day is a much revered and solemn day for all Australians. As a mark of respect, First Ministers agreed there will be a substitute public holiday on Monday 26 April in 2010 as ANZAC day falls on Sunday 25 April, and a substitute public holiday on Tuesday 26 April 2011 when ANZAC day falls on Easter Monday in 2011.

Conclusion

CAF is a young organisation that has achieved a lot over the past 18 months. States and territories bring extensive experience to the table, resulting in innovative solutions to improve outcomes for Australians. CAF is focused on practical outcomes to support a modern Australia and will continue to push policy innovation and structural reform to build our nation in the 21st century.