

## Council of Australian Governments' Meeting 2 July 2009

### **COAG Communiqué - Preamble**

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) held its 27th meeting in Darwin today. The Prime Minister, Premiers, Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association were again joined by a number of Treasurers for the meeting.

Australia faces ongoing economic and social challenges which Australian Governments are determined to address. COAG had a broad ranging discussion on further measures to overcome Indigenous disadvantage and the importance against the background of the global economic and financial crises of bolstering education, training and re-training efforts and securing further microeconomic and regulatory reform to enhance the economy's future productive potential.

In the former regard, COAG agreed on a compact for retrenched workers and endorsed a wide-ranging package of reforms for early childhood. In the latter regard, it committed, in particular, to an ambitious agenda of transport regulatory reform in addition to a range of other deregulatory measures.

COAG also adopted a comprehensive 10-year strategy to accelerate energy efficiency improvements as a key component of the overall approach to combat climate change. It also received briefings from the Deputy National Security Adviser on the swine influenza pandemic and the Coordinator-General regarding the implementation of the Nation Building and Jobs Plan. As well, COAG asked for an international student strategy to be developed for its consideration before the end of 2009.

## **Early Childhood Development**

COAG agreed to a wide-ranging package of reforms for early childhood, building on initial investment in universal access to early childhood education. The national strategy *Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy* will guide consideration of investment in future reforms to support around two million children aged under eight and their families.

As an immediate action under the national strategy, implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework will begin in July 2009 to provide guidance to parents and early childhood educators to support early learning.

COAG has also agreed to commence a formal consultation process on quality reforms to early childhood education and care, representing a major step towards a genuinely national system. COAG has agreed to a jointly governed unified national system to replace current licensing and quality assurance processes. Under the proposed approach, individual services will need to deal with only one organisation for quality assessment, reducing the regulatory burden on over 10,000 services.

A single set of improved national quality standards that integrate education and care will promote good developmental outcomes for more than one million children attending child care and preschool. The Regulation Impact Statement for Early Childhood Education and Care Quality Reforms, prepared for public consultation, proposes lower staff to child ratios and higher staff qualification requirements. The proposed new ratings will provide better information about service quality to help parents to choose a service and promote quality improvements amongst services. COAG will seek views through the consultation process on how quality reforms could be implemented in the most efficient and sustainable manner, having regard to other early childhood priorities and the current economic environment.