

Where I Live

Teacher Notes

Overview

The *Where I Live* program is designed for Year 4 students. The program is an introduction to the need and the role of Local Government in the community.

Activities include:

- Discussing voting in Australia and voting for Local Government
- Local Government jobs and services guessing activity
- Local Government Memory Fishing Game
- Writing a letter to their Local Government

Objectives

Students will:

- Examine local council and the services it provides
- Match local services with its applicable job
- Identify local services that they enjoy and local services needing improvement

Western Australian Curriculum links

Curriculum Code	Knowledge & Understandings
Year 4 Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS)	
ACHASSK091	<u>Government and Society</u> The purpose of government and some familiar services provided by local government (e.g. libraries, health, arts, parks, environment and waste, pools and sporting facilities, pet management).
Year 4 English (Literacy)	
ACELY1694	<u>Creating texts</u> Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts containing key information and supporting details for a widening range of audiences, demonstrating increasing control over text structures and language features

Curriculum links are taken from:

<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/>

<http://k10outline.scsa.wa.edu.au/home/p-10-curriculum/curriculum-browser/humanities-and-social-sciences>

Background information for teachers

Overview

Local Government, the third tier of government in Australia, is viewed as the level of government closest to the Australian people. It is the level of government that in people's day to day living they come into contact the most. It provides many local services and also makes decisions on issues affecting the local neighbourhood. Today, in Australia there are over 500 local councils with 136 of these found in WA.

History

The first council to be established in Australia was the Adelaide City Council in 1840. It was the first time that a government of any kind had been elected by the community. Community groups were formed to establish much needed services such as roads and street lights. Indeed many local governments in WA had their origins in Road Boards.

Each of the six Australian states plus the Northern Territory all have local government authorities within their borders. Interestingly, the ACT has its territory and local government combined. Notably, local governments are not described in the Australian Constitution although presently there is a push for this to happen via a possible constitutional referendum on the matter. Currently, the roles and powers of local government are derived from state and territory legislation. In WA, the *Local Government Act 1995*, governs local government administration. The WA State Government has a minister responsible for local government with the Honourable AJ Simpson MLA currently in charge of the portfolio (March 2013).

Names

There are many different names for Local Government Area's throughout Australia. In WA there are three different names of local councils usually given.

1. Shires: Rural area with its own elected council. Smaller populations but larger land areas.
2. Towns: Suburban/regional area with its own elected council. Usually larger populations than Shires.
3. Cities: Metropolitan area and major regional centres, with its own elected council. Have the highest populations.

Representation

Any Australian citizen over 18 years of age can stand and be elected to a local council. Local government districts are usually subdivided into areas called wards with councillors elected to represent these areas. In WA the number of councillors elected can vary between 5 and 15, depending on the size and population of the council area. In a city or town, a mayor is also elected while in a shire it is a shire president that is elected as the leader of the local government. It is worth noting that under the *Local Government Act 1995* the mayor or shire president can be either elected by the local community or by the councillors themselves.

In WA, councillors have terms of 4 years with elections being held every 2 years, always on the third Saturday in October, for half of the council. In contrast to state and federal elections, the voting system used for local government is "first past the post" (not preferential). Another point of difference to state and federal elections is that voting in WA is voluntary for local elections. (In NSW, QLD, NT and enrolled residents in VIC, voting is compulsory).

Role of councillors and the mayor/shire president

The building where the local council meets to conduct its business is usually called the Council Chambers. The council meets regularly, usually once a month; to make decisions about how to run the local area and these meetings are open to the public. Although councillors are not paid wages, they do receive an annual allowance to pay for expenses of being a councillor.

It is the role of the councillors and the mayor/shire president to provide leadership and guidance to the population of the local area and to represent the interests of the residents. Additionally the mayor/shire president may need to carry out civic and ceremonial duties at special functions such as at Australian citizenship ceremonies. They also need to preside at the monthly council meetings.

Most local governments have the power to make by-laws or local laws relating to the area under their jurisdiction, such as street parking by laws and building restrictions.

Responsibilities of local council

Local governments perform a variety of statutory (legal) duties such as building inspections and dog control, whilst other duties and responsibilities are discretionary whereby the council chooses to provide or perform them, for example the provision of recycling services.

Some of the responsibilities, programs and services of local council include:

- Libraries
- Local museums
- Swimming pools and recreational centres
- Community halls
- Programs and services for children (e.g. immunization services)
- Programs and services for youth (e.g. skate parks and music festivals)
- Programs and services for seniors (e.g. art workshops)
- Citizenship ceremonies
- Community events (e.g. fireworks display on New Year's Eve and art and book festivals)
- Maintenance and development of parks
- Maintenance of footpaths
- Rubbish collection
- Recycling services
- Road and traffic management
- Animal control
- Pet registrations
- Town planning
- Building surveying and inspection

Consequently, local governments employ many people to work in the different areas of local government. In fact the number of employees for local council in Australia is approximately 145,000. There is a paid (non-elected) chief executive officer (CEO) who is appointed to administer the day-to-day operations and activities of the local council. He or she will also work very closely with the local councillors and the Mayor/Shire President to ensure the smooth running of the local council activities and services.

Other jobs may include librarians, gardeners, rangers, truck drivers, office workers, town planners and health care workers plus many others to ensure local councils can meet the service requirements of the local community.

Cost

Of course to provide all these many and varied services require a great deal of money. Each local council receives grants and subsidies from the federal and state/territory governments. However they will also endeavour to raise their own revenue, most notably from rates on properties, which account for about 38% of total revenue. In addition local councils raise money from user charges such as building permits and pet registrations.

Sources

Government in Australia How Our Democracy Works, Melissa Kennedy, 2010

SOCOM Educational Resources, Systems and Structures 15, John Walsh

Local Government fact book (handout), WAEC

<http://www.waec.wa.gov.au>

<http://alga.asn.au>

Useful teacher resources for Local Government

Website	Summary	Material type
Western Australian Local Government Association	WALGA's key focus is working for Local Government in Western Australia. http://www.walga.asn.au/Home.aspx	 
Mindarie Regional Council	The Mindarie Regional Council is one of Western Australia's largest waste management authorities, assisting its member councils deal with their waste. https://www.mrc.wa.gov.au/	  
Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council	The EMRC Waste Education website contains information on the programs that are run, local council information, resources, education programs and practical hints on how to manage your waste more effectively. https://www.rgang.org.au/	 