Council of Australian Governments

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) was established in December 1992. It comprises the Prime Minister, the State Premiers, the Chief Ministers of the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory, as well as the President of Australian Local Government Association. Meetings are chaired by the Prime Minister. The COAG Secretariat, which advises the Prime Minister on these matters, is based in the Commonwealth Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. COAG meets on an as-needed basis and has met every year since its inception, four times in 2008 and 2009, and twice in 2007, 2006, 2005, 2002 and 1994.

Officially, COAG was established to “initiate, develop and monitor the implementation of policy reforms that are of national significance and which require cooperative action by Australian governments.” Politically, it signalled a move towards collaborative federalism in Australia and a recognition that there is unnecessary overlap and administrative duplication between the Commonwealth-State jurisdictions. Moreover, it was realised that an increasing number of policy issues crossed borders, for example, water resource management. Hence, it was also established as a forum for discussion and negotiation of national regulatory frameworks, ministerial council deliberations, and international treaties that impinge upon the sub-levels of government.

Over the years, COAG has been the focal point for intergovernmental deliberation over:

- environmental regulation, including the National Competition Policy;
- mental health, notably the formulation of a five-year National Mental Health Plan;
- counter-terrorism, including a National Emergency Protocol, and the strengthening Australia’s counter-terrorism legislation;
- the use of human embryos in medical research,
- the regulation of the availability of handguns,
- water resource management, through the formulation of the National Water Initiative; and the COAG Reform Agenda.

Further Reading:

