

MEDIA RELEASE

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SMART CITIES DOWN UNDER: MORE THAN THE RESEARCH SUGGESTS

A new report claiming to place Australia's local governments "under the smart city microscope" has been called out for its lack of rigour by the Smart Cities Council Australia New Zealand (SCCANZ).

Smart Cities Down Under: Performance of Australian Local Government Areas was published by the Queensland University of Technology's Urban Studies Lab last week. The research was supported by the Australian Government's Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications.

"We applaud any investment in smart cities academic research. But we believe the methodology behind this report lacks rigour or any grounding in the reality of smart cities outcomes being delivered around Australia," says Adam Beck, Executive Director of SCCANZ.

"For more than four years the international community has had clearly-established definitions, operating models and frameworks for smart cities, yet the researchers behind this report felt compelled to develop a new conceptual model for smart cities – and to build a league table that is based on questionable methodology and outdated data going back as far as 2016."

The research does not use consensus-based national or international smart cities indicators or metrics, Mr Beck says. It does not reference leading standards, such as the multiple British Standards Institution and International Standards Organisation documents for smart cities that have been in the public realm for many years.

"We are perplexed as to why these obvious, well-known references would not at least inform part of the research methodology," Mr Beck says.

"The table published in the report has real-life implications for local authorities that have been investing in smart cities strategies for years and delivering social and economic benefits to their citizens," Mr Beck adds.

"Many local governments have been through very tough political and community engagement processes to garner the internal support needed to advance their journeys, only to now be cut down at the knees by this questionable report.

"There has been little attempt to engage with these local governments to fact check the claims made in the report.

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“We are particularly concerned to see local authorities listed as ‘followers’ and others identified as ‘developing’ that have been rewarded for their leadership with international awards over several years, based on their rigorous smart cities policy, deployment and measurable performance.”

Another notable absence is the lack of real-world case studies that illustrate the value ‘smart’ projects are delivering to people around Australia.

“The research offers limited value to smart city decision-makers. The methodology does not factor in many of the individual challenges being addressed by local governments. For example, many local governments are seeking to enhance productivity from smart cities projects as their cost bases increase, and to do so without passing those charges onto ratepayers. This is just one example of multiple issues not considered in the report.”

Mr Beck says SCCANZ is also concerned about the report’s lack of purpose.

“Our biggest issue with the report is the idea that ranking cities as leaders or followers is in any way helpful. Many small local governments are doing extraordinary work on small budgets. Many large local governments have complex challenges that will take many years to address.

“The people leading the charge in local governments are working collaboratively around Australia, and are not engaged with the type of divisive debate this report is trying to facilitate. Unfortunately, this calls into question the report’s purpose of helping drive better policy making and action.

“We have extended an offer to the research team to participate in our annual Smart Cities Week conference, which will be held in Melbourne in August,” Mr Beck adds.

“All of the brightest minds and most experienced practitioners working to roll out smart cities initiatives in local government will be in the room. This is a perfect opportunity for the Urban Studies Lab research team to learn more about the metrics underpinning real-world case studies and talk to people working in the field,” Mr Beck concludes.

About the Smart Cities Council

Smart Cities Council Australia New Zealand is part of the Smart Cities Council, the world’s largest network of smart cities companies, practitioners and policy makers, embracing technology, data, and intelligent design to accelerate liveability, workability, and sustainability in our cities and towns.

Further information about the Smart Cities Council can be found [here](#).

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