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Municipal Restructuring and Reform in Australia

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Abstract: Structural reform has been the most visible feature of the extensive changes that have taken place in Australian local government since the early 1990s. This paper, which is part of a forthcoming book on local government in Canada and Australia, explores the nature of the recent changes in Australian municipal governance.

There have been four main aspects to the Australian reform process. First, municipalities have considerably expanded the scope and diversity of their functions. Second, widespread programs of consolidation across several states have resulted in substantially fewer but larger councils. Third, at the grass roots level, local governments across the country have been active in developing new forms of regional cooperation. The fourth aspect has involved significant changes to the internal operational procedures of municipalities; new managerial practices have been introduced, and the relative roles and responsibilities of elected officials and appointed officials have been recast.

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