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12 February 2013

Mr Glenn Worthington
Secretary
Joint Select Committee on the Constitutional Recognition of Local Government
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Worthington

Re: Submission to the Joint Select Committee on the Constitutional Recognition of Local Government

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on behalf of Cowra Shire Council in regards to the proposal for the Constitutional Recognition of Local Government.

Cowra Shire Council has, over a number of years, been a strong supporter of the Constitutional recognition of Local Government. In its ordinary meeting of 28 March 2011 Cowra Shire Council resolved:

That Council declares its support for financial recognition of Local Government in the Australian Constitution so that the Federal Government has the power to fund local Government directly and also for inclusion of Local Government in any new Preamble to the Constitution if one is proposed, and calls on all political parties to support a referendum by 2013 to change the Constitution to achieve this recognition.

The resolution is a clear indication of the importance Cowra Shire Council places on the formal recognition of the Local Government in the Australian Constitution.

Council commends the work undertaken by the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Local Government and endorses the recommendations outlined in their January 2013 Preliminary Report, namely;

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that a referendum on financial recognition of local government be held in 2013.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the referendum propose an amendment to Section 96 of the Constitution:

...the Parliament may grant financial assistance to any State or to any local government body formed by State or Territory legislation on such terms and conditions as the Parliament thinks fit.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that a referendum on financial recognition of local government be held at the same time as the 2013 federal election.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government begin all necessary preparatory activities to ensure a successful outcome for a referendum on financial recognition in 2013.

Cowra Shire Council recognises the conservative nature of the Australian electorate with changes to the Constitution seeking financial recognition of Local Government defeated at referendums in both 1974 and 1988. With this in mind, and with the date of the next Federal election set for 14 September 2013, it is essential that the Commonwealth Government begin the necessary preparatory activities designed to ensure a positive outcome including;

- the timely release of a draft of the constitution amendment bill in order to begin the process of public consultation;
- the adequate funding of responsible agencies to implement a national civics education campaign;
- the use of a range of communication methods to educate and reach across all Australian demographics;
- preparation of guidelines for the official 'Yes/No' referendum pamphlet to ensure the factual nature and comparability of the cases in the hands of voters.

Local Government fulfils a significant role in the three tiered system of Australian Government as a provider of community services and infrastructure. Given this important position it is appropriate that Local Government should receive constitutional financial recognition reflecting its place in the Governance structure within Australia.

It is also important that the ability of the Federal Government to directly fund Local Government is recognised in the Australian Constitution.

Cowra Shire Council calls on all political parties to support the financial recognition of Local Government in the Australian Constitution and calls for support of a referendum in September 2013 to achieve this aim.

Yours faithfully,

WJ West
Mayor