

19 October 2020

Ms Lyn Beverley
Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Via email: FADT.SEN@aph.gov.au

Dear Ms Beverley

Inquiry into Australia's Foreign Relations (State and Territory Arrangements) Bill 2020

I refer to your email of 14 October 2020 following my appearance as a witness at the public hearing related to the above inquiry on 12 October. Your email invited any response I might have regarding corrections to the transcript of my evidence and question taken on notice. My responses are set out below.

Questions on Notice

Page 6 "How the ALGA thinks the state government departments for local government might play a part in this legislation" (Senator Kitching).

Answer

The issue of how State Government Departments of Local Government (Offices of Local Government) could assist councils was raised by ALGA at a meeting on 12 October 2020 of Commonwealth and State and Territory Senior Officials responsible for Local Government. There was no indication from those officers that they saw a role for their agencies on this matter. A subsequent discussion with the officers of one state jurisdiction indicated that they saw this as an issue for their Premiers Department. On that basis ALGA is of the view that contact between state and territory First Ministers Departments and the relevant State and Territory Local Government Association would be the appropriate pathway in the first instance.

Page 7: Do you wish to comment on Section 3 of Professor Hamilton's Submission concerning Sister Cities?

Answer

I have had the chance to read Section 3 of Professor Hamilton's submission. I have no knowledge of, and no comments to make on, the individual cases that Professor Hamilton references. I note that Professor Hamilton does make the observation that subnational governments are not equipped to do proper due diligence on Chinese entities and that he expects that Commonwealth expertise and resources will be devoted to assisting entities lacking the skills or resources to evaluate foreign partners.

Pages 7-8: What processes and resources are required to assess Sister City Relationships?

Answer

ALGA believes that the Australian Government is well-placed to provide councils with advice regarding existing and future Sister City relationships. ALGA notes the suggestion by Professor Hamilton in his evidence to the Inquiry that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) or the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet could be tasked with working with Local Government to inform Mayors and Councillors of the kinds of issues arising from engaging with foreign governments. ALGA notes that DFAT has been provided with \$25m over the next two years to carry out work with subnational governments and universities and we also note Professor Hamilton's suggestion that up to four or five million dollars could be earmarked to cover the cost of engaging with and supporting Local Government on this issue.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this response to the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Beresford-Wylie
Chief Executive Officer