



13 February 2013

Mr Glenn Worthington
Secretary
Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Local Government
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Mr Worthington

Subject: Lake Macquarie City Council's support for Constitutional Recognition of Local Government

Lake Macquarie City Council welcomes the establishment of the Joint Select Committee to consider the likelihood of Australians voting 'yes' at a 2013 referendum to recognise local government in the Constitution.

Although Council strongly supports the need for constitutional change as soon as possible to secure the continuation of direct funding to local government, we recognise that this can only be achieved through a successful referendum.

Council therefore supports the preconditions set by the Expert Panel that the Commonwealth take steps to ensure positive community engagement on the issue of constitutional recognition, through a publicly-funded national education and awareness campaign.

In addition, Council believes that appropriate timing and bi-partisan support will be essential to success at a referendum.

Lake Macquarie City Council is a long-term supporter of financial recognition under the Australian Constitution, with the following resolution adopted in August 2008:

"Council strongly supports the principle of Local Government receiving constitutional recognition under the Australian Constitution; and believes that inherent within this recognition should be appropriate financial funding to provide for the sustainability and growth of local communities through Local Government."

More recently, on 17 October 2011 Council passed a resolution confirming its support for financial recognition via a change to Section 96 of the Australian Constitution. Such a change would have the following advantages for Council and its residents:

- Financial recognition of local government would allow the Commonwealth to provide direct funding to councils and help improve their financial sustainability and deal with the growing needs of their communities;

- It would also allow the Commonwealth to fund the states to achieve financial recognition of local government;
- The Commonwealth already directly funds local government for the Roads to Recovery program and the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Fund. Amending the Constitution removes any doubt about the constitutional validity of such funding and its continuation. Doing so will meet Council's need for certainty regarding ongoing funding.

Research has shown it is likely the public would support financial recognition, as it would assist in ensuring the future of the third tier of government, which is responsible for services directly affecting the daily lives of residents.

There is overwhelming support for the financial recognition from more than 400 local councils from across Australia. The Australian Local Government Association has supported and shown preference for the financial recognition of local government.

Yours sincerely

Brian Bell
General Manager

CC: Felicity-Ann Lewis, President, ALGA