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Level 2, 19-21 Argyle Place South
CARLTON 3053

Wednesday, 24 December 2003

The Hon. David Hawker, MP
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Hawker,

On behalf of the Gippsland Local Government Network, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to discuss a range of regional issues with you in late November.

GLGN welcomed the release of the cost-shifting report, which provides a basis for us to continue to call for appropriate funding of local government, as well as improved funding mechanisms. In this regard, GLGN commends you and your colleagues on the preparation of the "Rates and Taxes" report.

While we noted with satisfaction the recommendation for local government to be recognised as an integral level of governance in Australia, GLGN believes that the proposed inter-governmental agreement should include a provision that any legislation, State or Federal, which will impact on local government, must include a "Local Government Impact Statement".

In addition, agreements for local government to deliver State and Federal Government programs and services should be for a defined period, after which a new agreement and appropriate payments would need to be negotiated.

While in Canberra we were pleased also to note a high level of in-principle support for the continuation of the Roads to Recovery program, however as you know, GLGN believes the level of R2R funding in rural areas needs to be at least doubled to arrest the decline in existing road and bridge infrastructure.

When GLGN reconvenes in 2004, we will be finalising our campaign for the upcoming Federal election. We have already identified a number of areas on which we will be active, and these currently include:

- The health of the Gippsland Lakes;
- Regional services, including aged and child care;
- Freight services;
- Levels of funding and funding direct from the Commonwealth to local government;
- The higher cost of service provision in remote areas; and
- A national population policy: population distribution and services to support regional growth.

We look forward to any policy initiatives aimed at strengthening the Gippsland region in 2004. In the meantime, our Secretariat Coordinator, Ms Nicole French, can be contacted on (03) 9349 1099 if there is anything else we can provide to assist you.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D Lewis', written over a faint rectangular stamp.

Cr David Lewis
Chair, Gippsland Local Government Network, and
Mayor, South Gippsland Shire Council