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Secretary ~ Joint Parliamentary Committee into
Constitutional Recognition of Local Government
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Attention: Ms Michelle Rowland, MP
Chair of the Joint Select Committee

Dear Committee members,

Subject: Constitutional Recognition of Local Government – Submission

I make this submission on behalf the Greater Taree City Council to outline our support for Constitutional Recognition of Local Government.

Greater Taree City Council has welcomed the decision to establish a Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Local Government and the holds the view that this parliamentary committee is the most effective way of engaging with all sides of politics, obtaining bipartisan support, and making considered recommendations on the proposed change to the Constitution, including the timing of the referendum and a public awareness campaign, which can inform the public on the issue.

Councils play an important governance role as well as facilitating and providing a range of services to sustain local communities. It has long been the desire of local councils throughout Australia, as expressed at recent National General Assembly's' of Local Government, that local government be recognised within the founding Commonwealth political and legal document. This position has also been supported by political leaders and in policy by a number of political parties, including Labor, Liberal, National and Greens.

Greater Taree City Council considered this issue at the Ordinary Meeting of Council held 20 April 2011 and resolved that it strongly support constitutional recognition of local government. Below is the resolution from Council minutes.

That Council:

1. declares its support for recognition of Local Government in the Australian Constitution, particularly having regard to power for the Federal Government to directly fund Local Government;
2. declares its support for the inclusion of Local Government in any new preamble to the Constitution if one is proposed;
3. authorises the Mayor to write to the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition and Federal Member for Lyne requesting their support for a referendum by 2013 to change the Constitution to allow financial recognition of Local Government and its formal existence;
4. make available on the Greater Taree City Council website background Facts and information from the Australian Local Government Association [ALGA] on the case for Constitutional Recognition of Local Government.

Council at its most recent meeting held 12 December 2012 affirmed this position and resolved to make a further submission on this matter to the Joint Parliamentary Committee into Constitutional Recognition of Local Government supporting:

- financial recognition of local government
- the Commonwealth Government having the power to be able to provide direct funding to local councils, where this is in the national interest.
- certainty of funding to Councils to ensure programs such as Roads to Recovery continue to meet local needs.
- amending Section 96 of the Constitution to read "Parliament may grant financial assistance to any state **or local government body formed by or under a law of a state or territory**".
- bi-partisan support as an essential pre-condition to being successful, and
- a publicly funded campaign is required to educate and create awareness about the Constitution and how to change it.

It is the view of Council that democratic and financial recognition of local government in the Australian Constitution would result in enshrining local citizens' rights to democratic representation at a local level through electing a local council as well as providing financial certainty for local communities via councils accessing direct funding from the Commonwealth Government.

Constitutional recognition will enhance participation and service outcomes for local communities, as well improving integrated planning between all spheres of government.

I thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

Yours faithfully

Gerard José
General Manager