



Full steam ahead for 2013 referendum on local government

9 May, 2013

Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) President Felicity-ann Lewis has declared that the national campaign to convince Australians to vote 'yes' to include local government in the Constitution to secure funding for local services and infrastructure will intensify now that the Federal Government has given its commitment to a September 2013 referendum.

"The Government's decision to support holding a referendum at the time of the September federal election is the signal we have been waiting for to carry forward our fight to protect federal funding for councils," Mayor Lewis said.

"We now need bipartisan support and I call on the Opposition, and all political parties, to support the referendum proposal and referendum funding legislation, when it is debated in Parliament next week.

"We have recently advertised for a National Campaign Director to lead an integrated campaign involving every council across the country.

"As we have argued for many years, the only way to protect direct federal funding for community services and infrastructure is to have local government recognised in the Australian Constitution.

"Councils want financial certainty. They need formal recognition as legitimate recipients of direct federal funding. Without it, funding under programs such as Roads to Recovery are at risk of High Court challenge.

"Recent High Court decisions in the Pape Case and Williams Case, which both considered the power of the Commonwealth to provide direct funding to entities not included in the Constitution, only strengthen our case to formalise the Commonwealth's arrangements for funding councils directly.

"So much has been done to advance the case for constitutional recognition of local government and our efforts have received considerable support. We have been encouraged by final recommendations of both the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Local Government and the Federal Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Local Government, which supported and endorsed a 2013 financial recognition referendum.

"As I have said on numerous occasions, local government wants to win this referendum which is in the interests of every local community. We accept that getting a referendum passed will be a major challenge. But local governments across the country support the financial recognition option and are committed to working hard within their local communities to get a referendum on the question of financial recognition passed by the majority of voters in the majority of states."

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