



ALGA welcomes Expert Panel support for Constitutional Recognition of Local Government

22 December 2011

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) has welcomed today's release of the report of the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Local Government, which concludes that financial recognition of local government in the Australian Constitution is the preferred option.

The Expert Panel, established by the Government in June 2011, was asked to identify options for the constitutional recognition of local government and to gauge the level of support for such recognition.

ALGA President Mayor Genia McCaffery and President of the Local Government Association of Queensland, Cr Paul Bell AM, represented the interests of the local government sector on the Panel.

After a process of consultation and independent polling, the Panel has concluded that the financial recognition of local government, which would formalise the power of the Commonwealth to directly fund local government, is the option most likely to gain the support of the general community and from all sides of politics. ALGA has argued in favour of financial recognition through a simple and pragmatic change to Section 96 of the Constitution, to remove doubt about the Commonwealth's capacity to fund local government.

Mayor McCaffery said: "Ensuring that the Commonwealth Government can continue to directly fund local government is critical to the ongoing financial sustainability of the sector and its ability to provide the services that communities expect and deserve."

"Programs such as the Roads to Recovery program and the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program are crucial to the financial sustainability of local government and the wellbeing of communities across Australia."

Mayor McCaffery described statements of support from political leaders at the national level as encouraging. The Government, Opposition and the Greens have indicated that they are prepared to support financial recognition. More than 85 per cent of councils across the nation have pledged their support for the financial recognition option. Nevertheless, Mayor McCaffery noted the challenge ahead.

"Experience in the 44 referenda in Australia's history shows that Australians are conservative when it comes to changing the Constitution. Only eight of those referenda have been successful."

“The need for an extensive process of community engagement if a referendum is to succeed has been recognised by the Panel.”

“The Panel has recommended that the Commonwealth adopt the steps suggested by ALGA in its submission to the Panel and allocate substantial resources to a major public awareness campaign,” Mayor McCaffery said.

The Government has said that it will respond more formally to the Expert Panel’s report early in 2012.

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