



AUSTRALIAN LOCAL
GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

MEDIA RELEASE

LOCAL GOVERNMENT WELCOMES PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS OF PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 24 January 2013

The national representative body for local government, the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), has welcomed the recommendations of a preliminary report released today by the Joint Select Committee established by parliament to investigate the likelihood of Australians voting 'yes' at a 2013 referendum to recognise local government in the Constitution.

For more than five years, ALGA has been campaigning for constitutional recognition of local government to ensure local government bodies are recognised as legitimate recipients of direct federal funding. ALGA called for a Joint Standing Committee on Constitutional Recognition to be established because it saw it as an essential step on the path to a financial recognition referendum following a report released by an Expert Panel in 2011.

"ALGA welcomes the preliminary report's recognition of the constitutional vulnerability of direct payments to local government through programs such as Roads to Recovery, which are essential for all local communities," ALGA President, Felicity-ann Lewis said.

"We welcome the Committee's acknowledgment that the suggested words for a change to Section 96 of the Constitution to resolve financial uncertainty will not have implications for the state governments and their relationship with local government."

"It's important to note that the dissenting report offered by the Committee's Coalition members shares ALGA's concerns about the time available to complete the steps identified in the Expert Panel report to ensure the best chances of a winnable referendum.

"We welcome the Committee's recommendation that the Commonwealth begin all necessary preparatory activities to ensure a successful outcome for a referendum on financial recognition in 2013.

"The Government will now respond to the preliminary report; a response we are keenly awaiting. In the meantime, I have written to Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Opposition Leader Tony Abbott asking them to make a joint statement about the need for constitutional change proposed by the Expert Panel and supported by the Committee.

"I have also written to Local Government Minister Simon Crean to ask what the Government intends to do with regard to meeting the preconditions identified in the Expert Panel report and referred to in the Committee's preliminary report, particularly the need to engage the states on the proposed change to secure their support.

"The Expert Panel was of the view that the position of the states was critical and without an indication of their position, the success of the referendum would be in doubt.

"ALGA has been strongly supportive of the need for constitutional change as soon as possible to secure the continuation of direct federal funding to local government. This can only be achieved through a successful referendum.

"Our concern is that delays in obtaining strong commitment from across the political spectrum at both the state and federal level, to a change to Section 96, have hampered efforts to finalise the requirements necessary for a successful referendum in 2013."

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