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26 November 2012

Mr Thomas Gregory
Committee Secretary
Joint Select Committee on the Constitutional Recognition of Local Government
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Email: jsclg@aph.gov.au

Dear Mr Gregory

RE : CONSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The City of Victor Harbor represents a community of 14,500 residents together with many non resident ratepayers and visitors to our area. The Council is democratically elected under the Local Government Act 1999 (SA) to represent and provide infrastructure and services to our community.

The Council formally resolved to support the option of financial recognition of Local Government in the Australian Constitution at a meeting of the Council held on Monday, 23rd January 2012.

This Council area relies on Federal funding for roads under the Roads to Recovery program and the Council is proud to have supported nation building under the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program. Both of these programs have delivered funding to our community efficiently and effectively through direct transfer from the Commonwealth.

Recent High Court judgments have raised considerable uncertainty regarding direct funding to Councils from the Australian Government. This uncertainty is creating a lack of confidence in the sorts of partnerships which Councils can forge with the Commonwealth.

This Council supports an amendment to Section 96 of the Constitution so that it would read: "Parliament may grant financial assistance to any State or Local Government body formed by or under a law of a State or Territory." This amendment would validate programs such as Roads to Recovery without creating any broader capacity for the Commonwealth to legislate about Local Government. Council values the relationship it has with the SA Government but is aware State funding for Councils in SA is the lowest per capita in the nation.

Council supports a referendum being held at a time most likely to achieve a successful result. The current support from all political parties and independents in the Federal Parliament is an important factor in giving a referendum the best chance of success.

Another key factor in the success of a referendum is likely to be the level of understanding in the community about the Australian Constitution, the role it plays in society today and how it can be amended. Council supports a publicly funded national education and awareness campaign to support an informed vote in the community.

Finally Council is a member of the Local Government Association of SA and supports its work and that of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) in representing Local Government on this issue.

Yours faithfully


CITY MANAGER