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GREATER  
SHEPPARTON

23 January 2013

The Secretary  
Joint Select Committee on  
Constitutional Recognition of  
Local Government  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
**CANBERRA ACT 2601**

Dear Secretary

### **CONSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Council have continued to monitor, with expectation, the progress in relation to the outcomes of the report by the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Local Government.

Greater Shepparton is a vibrant, diverse community located approximately two hours north of Melbourne, in the heart of the Goulburn Valley. It has a population of about 63,000 residents and covers an area of 2,421 square kilometres. It is the fourth largest provincial centre in Victoria and one of the fastest growing regions in the state. The City's economy is based primarily on irrigated agriculture, food processing, retail and road transport and its population is almost evenly split between urban areas (53 per cent) and small towns and rural areas (47 per cent). The City has Victoria's largest aboriginal population outside of metropolitan Melbourne and approximately 11 per cent of its residents were born overseas.

Greater Shepparton City Council is constituted of seven councillors elected to an unsubdivided municipality. Council is a strong advocate for Constitutional Recognition, a position which is supported by the wider community in discussions between councillors and community members. Council resolved its support at its Ordinary Meeting held on 15 March 2011.

Having considered the outcomes of the final report from the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Local Government, Council continues to fully support the position articulated by the Municipal Association of Victoria and the Australian Local Government Association, which advocate for changes to Section 96 of the Constitution so that it would read:

*"Parliament may grant financial assistance to any State or to any local government body formed by State or Territory Legislation on such terms and conditions as the Parliament thinks fit."*

Council continues to be concerned in relation to the current Constitutional uncertainty surrounding the ability of the Commonwealth to directly fund local governments, through extremely important programs eg: Roads to Recovery (R2R) Program. R2R has resulted in a significant improvement in the condition and safety of regional and rural roads across the nation.

From a local government perspective, funding opportunities such as R2R have been enormously successful and the capacity of the Commonwealth to fund similar programs, direct to Councils in the future, needs to be put beyond doubt.

Certainty of funding is one of the biggest (and in many cases clearly the biggest) challenges faced by municipalities across the nation and the ability for the Commonwealth to directly fund local government is a critical factor in addressing this issue.

Council supports the conduct of a referendum with the support of all political parties to enable the support of the community to be heard and demonstrated in relation to this very important change to the Australian Constitution.

In order for the Australian community to fully consider this very important change to our Constitution it would be imperative that a publically funded national education and awareness campaign was conducted. Through this process the community could be informed about the Constitution, how to change it and about the change that is being put before them. It is equally important that a referendum be held at a time when circumstances would allow the most opportunity for success.

Thank you for the opportunity to be involved in providing a submission to the Joint Select Committee deliberations on this very important matter and Council look forward to endorsement of the conduct of a referendum to consider public support for Constitutional Recognition for Local Government.

Yours sincerely

**Cr Jenny Houlihan**  
**MAYOR**

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